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**Aesthetics of Yoruba Culture and Religion: An Examination of the Cultural and
Religious Conflicts in the Plays of Wole Soyinka**

By

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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.

Dedication

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

Acknowledgement

My heartfelt gratitude goes to God who moulded me wonderfully and bequeathed on 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 a great favour in a strange city.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|------|
| Declaration..... | i |
| Dedication..... | ii |
| Acknowledgement..... | iii |
| Table of Contents..... | v |
| Abstract..... | viii |
| Chapter One..... | 1 |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.0 Background..... | 1 |
| 1.1 Research Problem..... | 8 |
| 1.2 Research Questions..... | 8 |
| 1.3 Research Aim and Objective..... | 8 |
| 1.4 Significance of Study..... | 9 |
| 1.5 Biography of Wole Soyinka..... | 9 |
| Chapter Two..... | 12 |
| Literature Review..... | 12 |
| 2.0 Introduction..... | 12 |
| 2.1 History of Nigerian Literature: A Cultural Perspective..... | 14 |
| 2.2 Yoruba Traditional Culture..... | 18 |
| 2.3 Yoruba Traditional Religion..... | 20 |
| 2.4 Theoretical Framework..... | 22 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 2.5 Post-colonialism: Theory and Reflection..... | 23 |
| 2.6 Colonisation, Culture and Religion in Africa..... | 29 |
| Chapter Three..... | 35 |
| MODERN AFRICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY | 35 |
| 3.1 Culture and Religion in African Literature | 35 |
| 3.2 Aspects of Yoruba Culture and Religion in Wole Soyinka’s Drama..... | 40 |
| 3.3 Soyinka’s Defense of Yoruba Culture | 43 |
| 3.4 Cultural and Religious Value in Modern African literature..... | 46 |
| Chapter Four | 52 |
| <i>The Lion and the Jewel: The Aesthetics of Culture and Religion.</i> | 52 |
| Introduction | 52 |
| 4.0 Background and Context..... | 52 |
| 4.1 Significance of Yoruba Cultural and Religious Practices | 56 |
| 4.1.1 Moral Obligation of Women | 57 |
| 4.1.2 Procreation..... | 59 |
| 4.1.3 Songs and Dance | 61 |
| 4.1.4 Belief in deities | 63 |
| 4.1.5 Drumming..... | 66 |
| 4.1.6 Bride Price | 67 |
| 4.1.7 Polygamy..... | 70 |
| 4.1.8 Family life..... | 72 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 4.2 Conflict between the Yoruba cultural beliefs and Western ideas | 73 |
| 4.3 Possibility of coexistence of the best Yoruba culture and western culture..... | 79 |
| Yoruba Culture and Religion in <i>Death and the King's Horseman</i> | 82 |
| 5.0 Background: The Legacy of Human Sacrifice in Yoruba culture..... | 82 |
| 5.1 Synopsis of Soyinka's <i>Death and the King's Horseman</i> | 85 |
| 5.2 Significance of Yoruba Cultural and Religious Practices in <i>Death and the King's Horseman</i> | 90 |
| 5.2.1 Clothing as Necessity and Cultural Symbol in <i>Death and the King's Horseman</i> ... | 90 |
| 5.2.2 Drumming as a Symbol of Yoruba Culture in <i>Death and the King's Horseman</i> | 96 |
| 5.2.3 Belief in the Existence of the gods in <i>Death and the King's Horseman</i> | 98 |
| 5.2.3 Conception of Death as a Religious rite in <i>Death and the King's Horseman</i> | 102 |
| 5.3 Symbolic Representation of Conflicts between the Yoruba culture and Western culture in <i>Death and the King's Horseman</i> : A Contemporary Context..... | 104 |
| 5.4 The Possibility of Coexistence the Two Cultures | 118 |
| Conclusion | 127 |
| References..... | 129 |

Abstract

Culture and religion are two main fibres sustaining the continued existence of a community. However, issues of cultural intersection, which is inevitable, results into diverse forms of conflicts. In the African setting, there remains, to date, a continuous conflict with the European way of life and value system. These conflicts, which are visible in differences in generational lifestyle coupled with the confusion and imbalance seen in the younger generation, are a result of the effect of colonialism on the indigenous culture, tradition, legacies and value system.

In an attempt to resuscitate the best of the culture of the Yoruba people and redeem their vanishing value systems in an era of globalization, this study, viewed from the perspective of postcolonial theory, firstly looked into the beauty and significance of the Yoruba culture in Wole Soyinka's *the Lion and the Jewel* and *Death and the King's horseman*. It also examined the historical and contemporary impact of colonisation on Yoruba culture and religion. In addition, the study explores the possibility of co-existence of the best of old order and new order and how the playwright sheds light on human understanding of cultural and religious relations. The study concluded that an acknowledgement and respect for other people's culture and ways of life will reduce conflicts and, therefore, promote co-existence of different cultures. The study emphasizes the need for the contemporary Yoruba society to re- embrace the best Yoruba cultural heritage, modernize the old values and imbibe the best of Western culture to make the society a better place. The propagation of the best of Yoruba cultures and value in a modern world through various means at various levels should be given maximum priority.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Background

The role of culture and religion in every society cannot be underestimated. Culture is a defining trait of an individual's distinctiveness. Any writer, be it of prose fiction, drama or poetry, inevitably writes from the perspective of his/her culture and tradition: "Culture is the sum total of the ways of life of a people, which is transmitted from one generation to another" (Biggs and Moore, 1993, p. 23; Random House, 1987, p. 220). Religion, on the other hand, is an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, practice and worship that centres on one supreme God or the value of the deity that provides groups of men with a solution to the question of ultimate meaning (Bhatt, 2012). It is the strongest element in traditional African culture which exerts great influence upon the conduct of the African people. Religion is closely bound up with the traditional way of African life, hence religion shapes the lives of Africans; at the same time, life shapes religion as well (Omobola, 2014). It is, therefore, difficult to separate the word religion from culture since religion is defined as a collection of cultural systems. As noted by Malinowski, (1991, p. 7), culture is a significant part of human existence. In his words:

Culture is partly human, partly spiritual and partly materialistic. In the humanistic aspect, culture consists of ideas, values, knowledge, philosophy, laws, and morals and so on. In its spiritual aspects, it consists of system of beliefs and religious practices. In its materialistic aspect, it consists of artefacts and consumer goods made by man as opposed to things found in nature. Culture is a distinguishing factor between man and man.

The above definition of culture by Malinowski details the role of culture and religion in every society. Religion is a set of beliefs, feelings and practices that define relations between human beings and divinities. Every community, cultural group or ethnic group has its own values, beliefs and ways of living. Religion and culture are fundamental parts of an African's life which is not only cherished but also protected dearly. However, it has been observed that "culture is not static"; it develops and changes as the belief system and ways of life of different groups adjust under the pressure of other cultures as a result of colonisation and mass media to create new identities. According to Singh, (2013, p. 2), the post-colonial experience of most Asian, African and Southern American countries plays an important role in understanding the history, culture and religious practices of these countries. These histories, cultures, religious practices and intercepting influences are expressed and predicted in literatures. Literature mirrors the society such that it reflects the various aspects of human life (social, political, economic, religion, culture and history) in literary form. Literature also exposes and gives more insight to many cultural systems in societies around the world than any other form of writing because the experiences of life which constitute culture are presented in literary works in a distinctive way. Adejumo (2010) citing Ogunsina (2006), submits that literature plays an important part in shaping or crystallizing the views held by members of the society: views about the world, about man, and about society; it is in light of views such as these that the social order is both maintained and changed." Drama, which is one of the three genres of literature (poetry and prose being the others), is the tool used for this study.

Drama has been described as one of the oldest literary forms. Drama, according to the *Encyclopaedia Americana*, is:

A form of literature intended for performance by actors.

In general, 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 Oghenejetro (2012), drama depicts actions and things that happen in true life situations. Walking down memory lane 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. Akporobaro (2010) submits that the differences are due largely to differences in historical and cultural experiences. 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 (Dasylyva, 2007). The indigenous African society is largely animist, and the masquerade symbolizes the ancestral spirit. Masquerading, according to Ogundeji (2000, p.12), is the most common of ritual festivals in Africa. He explains further:

During the ancestral festivals, masks of the dead fathers are brought out using theatrical effects as a means of ritual celebration. Masquerading is, in addition used for purposes other than sacred or cultic function. It is for example, used for

political, judicial and entertainment purposes. These other functions, however, are generally considered secondary.

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

Another traditional festival in Yoruba culture is the “rite of passage”. Rites of passage among the Yoruba people are royally marked with the participation of the extended family as well as the larger community. These rites of passage include wedding, naming, burial, chieftaincy titles and house warming and so on. Festivals among the Yoruba are used to appease the deity. They serve as “communion between divinities and the worshippers”. The annual festival is often a time of regeneration of the relationship between the people and the divinities. The worshippers make sacrifices to the ancestors, and this help to create unity and

peace in the society. It also prevents war and societal disorder. Over the years, the performance has become pertinent in such a way that the public is almost unconscious of the original religious intention and significance of the festivals. The pleasure derived from such entertaining enactments is responsible for this attitude. Some of these traditional roles like dancing, drumming, singing, chanting and masquerading, which are significant constituents of traditional rites and religious worship, have since been employed in secular festivals and at social functions for entertainment. For example, in many African countries, the services of national or state cultural troupes are often engaged whenever representatives or dignitaries such as heads of state are on brief state visits. The cultural troupes are seen entertaining the state guest with ritual dances, masquerading, and so on, without attachment to any religious rite. It is generally believed that the secularization of these specialized constituents of traditional rituals gave rise to dramatic cultures like *Etiye 'ri*, (Ear-fit the head) and *Efe* (comedy) folkloric tradition in some Yoruba communities, and the more professionalized *Alarinjo* (walking and dancing) drama groups.

It is obvious that dramatic literature existed in all cultures and societies. Dramatic literature, as it is today, took its cue from the Greek Classical period in Greece when play texts or scripts emerged (Dasyuva, 2004). Western drama, which has generally influenced modern drama, was generally defined by the influences of Greek drama and theatre (Dasyuva, 2004). The classification of drama into tragedy and comedy was done by the Greek Philosopher – critic, Aristotle. Drama represents life in a more distinctive way because it educates, entertains, orientates and satirizes. It can either be conventional or non-conventional. It also has a set of generic subsets that include ritual, history, tragedy, comedy and so on, each allowing further subdivisions and variants in forms and theatrical representation of human experience. Modern African drama is essentially concerned with African plays written by Africans on particularly colonial and post-colonial African experiences. It experienced a

rapid growth after the independence of most African states. According to Dasyilva (2004), modern African drama can be classified under four broad headings: Culture plays, Nationalist plays, Rationalist plays and Neo-rational plays. When an African drama shows concern about dislocated social values or cultural decadence, its central pre-occupation is culture. Similarly, when an African play is concerned with political struggle of any ideological persuasion, the basic and informing vision is nationalism. In either culture play or nationalist play, there is a possibility of an overlap, or admixture of both cultural and nationalist topicality. Rational plays represent plays that fuse together both cultural and nationalist objectives. For example, rites-of-passage which are integral to African culture essentially foreground Soyinka's national search for political salvation in both *The Strong Breed* and *The Death and the King's Horseman*. In the same way, Soyinka ventures into what might be the future of the young independent African state, Nigeria in *A Dance of the Forests*. Prominent deities in the Yoruba pantheon are actively involved in the dramatic discourse. Neo-rational plays are made up of plays that draw their materials from African loric tradition to pursue nationalist objectives. It does not follow the usual conventions associated with Soyinka or John Pepper Clark Bekederemo's dramaturgy. The playwright embarks on a programmatic replacement of the orthodox myths, legends, tales and the supernatural forces that occupied the existing world, with a new order of reality and new myths that are capable of serving mankind. The cultural icons constitute, largely, the raw materials for neo-rational plays, and they are deliberately ruptured and made to perform new functions. Culture no longer functions at the level of waning values but is put at the service of the nationalistic quest for political salvation. Femi Osofisan represents this group of playwrights. The present study delves into the beauty of African culture with a view to exploring Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* and *Death and the King's Horseman*.

1.1 Research Problem

In a postcolonial society like Nigeria where Western culture has had considerable influence, there is predictably a constant conflict between African culture and Western values. The numerous issues of cultural intersection, the effect of colonialism on the indigenous native culture, tradition, legacies and values, internal and external conflict between the African culture and Western values, the imbalances of the newly acquired European values with the old African culture bring about the constant conflict. All the above are examined in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. Soyinka's drama "reveals a confrontation between two ways of life" throughout the plot and structure. This study investigates Soyinka's assertion of the beauty of Yoruba culture by examining the conflict between the old and new culture in his plays.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions of this study include:

1. Do the cultural and religious practices of the Yoruba people have any significance?
2. What are the historical and contemporary conflicts that have arisen as a result of cultural intersection between the Yoruba culture and Western values?
3. What are the possibilities of co-existence and adoption of the best of each of the two cultures without resulting into conflict?

1.3 Research Aim and Objective

This study examines the aesthetic of Yoruba culture and explores the conflict resulting from the intersection between the culture of the colonized and the colonizer as dramatized in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and *the Lion and the Jewel*.

The specific objectives are:

1. To identify the cultural and religious practices of the Yoruba people and their significance.
2. To examine the historical and contemporary conflict that arose as a result of cultural intersection between the Yoruba culture and Western values.
3. To examine the possibility of co-existence and adoption of the better of each of the two cultures without resulting into conflict.

1.4 Significance of Study

This study is significant because it purposely establishes the importance of the culture of the colonized Yoruba people in an attempt to express the beauty of their culture. It also brings to light issues that are re-occurring and are integral to the society as it re-emphasizes the recognition of the right values, the socially acceptable, positive and healthy African values which can be well explored in the two texts. Furthermore, this study identifies and explores, as vividly as possible, the possibility of the co-existence of the best of the two cultures under study to bring about a sense of balance which is very much important in contemporary society. It also serves as a corrective reference point challenging the unethical and uncritical imitation of the colonizers' culture. This study will add useful literary contribution to the existing body of knowledge in post-colonial literature and cultural study.

1.5 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 studied at the University College in Ibadan (1952-1954) and University of Leeds, UK (1954-1957). He was a professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Ife, Nigeria, now Obafemi Awolowo University. His notable plays include, *The Road* (seen at Theatre Royal, Stratford in 1965), *The Lion and the Jewel* (staged at London's Royal Court in 1966), *Camwood on the Leaves*, "*Kongi's Harvest, Madmen and Specialists*, and the *Jero plays*". Another outstanding artistic product of his is his version of "*The Bacchae of Euripides*" that was commissioned and performed by the National Theatre, London in 1973. He received an Arts Council "John Whiting Award for 1966/7" and was an Overseas Fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge, in 1973/4 where he wrote the play under analyses, "*Death and the King's Horseman*." His "Fantasia on an Armenian theme", *A Play of Giants*, was first published and staged in 1984. He is also considered a distinguished poet, critic, novelist poet and theatre director, whose autobiography, *Ake, The Years of Childhood* was published in 1989.

"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, 2003). "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). Wilson also claims that Soyinka sees the African artistic or cultural essence either as absent from or dependent upon Western ideas, which has been forced into silence, but never denied its own being. According to George (2003), Soyinka intends to show that African people have rich cultural traditions and systems of thoughts that can be considered an alternative to Euro- American traditions.

It is pertinent to note that the Nigerian playwright, Soyinka, is one of the artists whose lifestyle and work has contributed immensely to the field of literature. 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 is a creative playwright and versatile genius of the African continent. His works are based on Yoruba society, culture, tradition and politics of Africa. The dramatic environment that Soyinka creates has been enriched with variegated realistic scenes portraying African life very exactly and fashions and characters holding a mirror up to nature and presenting life as it is (Kumar, 2012). He added that his play, *Death and the King's Horseman* treats the metaphysical issues of death and transition. Death, which occurs by ritual sacrifice, is considered as a rejuvenating power or life to the living. Such sacrifice is intruded by a British officer, Pilkings and his retinue. The protagonist's procrastination and love for the physical world leads him to face the tragedy”.

Soyinka's plays have been noted for proficiency in the “combination of African dramatic traditions with Western structural elements. In his plays under study, *the Lion and the Jewel* and *Death and the King's Horseman*, 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 the African culture.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

Culture is considered to be a term that has various meanings to different people. According to Tylor (1958), culture is a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habit acquired by man as a member of society. “Culture is the characteristics of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts, (Zimmermann, 2012)”. Soyinka views culture as more than simply adding up all the ways people act and think and assessing the sum of their possession. According to Lasisi (1989), culture is seen as the visible configuration of human interactions in the form of socio-political institutions, thoughts and ideas as well as artefacts emanating from them. The social scientists define culture of the society as the way of life of its members; the collections of ideas and way of life which they learn, share and pass from one generation to another”. Leddy and Pepper (1993) opined that every culture is a systematic-integrated-whole closely connected and comprehensible in practicing values and beliefs. They conclude by defining culture as a way of life owned by a chosen group of individuals.

Culture is universal; there is no society without its own culture. “Culture may be dynamic, but only in the sense of being adaptable and a continuing record of a society’s achievements and being an important element in sustaining resistance to foreign domination” (Moore, 1997). The spread of western culture across the globe has suppressed many of the unique traditional cultures. Adewoye (1984) concurs by expressing his opinion on the conflicts between westernization and traditionalism as “a clash faced by individuals or societies”. The subtle and forceful empowerment of the “white-man’s” culture in the African society was

met with resistance because Africans, being able to read the writing on the wall, foresaw the imminent extinction of their culture, and this conflict most often resulted in war and bloodshed. This is expressed by Soyinka in *Death and the King's Horseman*. The intersection of the traditional and western culture has brought Africans to a state of indecision. Ashcroft et al. (2003) citing Achebe (1975), notes that “we lived at the crossroads of cultures, we still do today, but when I was a boy, one could see and sense the peculiar quality and atmosphere of it more clearly, but still, the crossroads do have certain dangerous potency; dangerous because a man might perish there wrestling with multiple headed spirits; but also he might be lucky and return to his people with the boon of prophetic vision.” Similarly, Kenyatta (2015, p. 54) opines to the effect of cultural contact between the western and traditional culture of the blacks that:

“A culture has no meaning apart from the social organization of life on which it is built. When the European comes to Gikuyu country and robs the people of their land, he is taking away, not only livelihood, but also the material symbol that holds families together”.

Nigerian “literature is the repository of the cultural life of the people and is a major source of education for the young generation and the urban people who have lost their roots”. Nigerian literature is socialized; it does not focus on the individual. It has a communal spirit which informs the characterization and social analysis (Ojaide, 1992).

Playwrights such as Ola Rotimi, Soyinka, Sonny Oti, Femi Osofisan, Tess Onwueme, Esiaba Irobi, Ahmed Yerimah, among others, have reacted to the cultural, sociological, political and economic situations in the Nigerian society. Nigerian playwrights 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, Ojaide (1992) notes that Soyinka’s *Death and the King's Horseman* suggests 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. The colonial officer's intervention resulted in a greater tragedy for the society in the waste of two lives instead of one.

2.1 History of Nigerian Literature: A Cultural Perspective

African playwrights produce works "which are peculiarly African and yet set in the modern world" (Mbiti, 1969). Globally, Nigerian literature is recognized through the works of playwrights like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe among others. Nigerian literature is written in English language as well as indigenous Nigerian languages (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo). The Nigerian writers are anti-colonial writers, and their works are characterized by liberating force from the ethnic and foreign cultures. They assume the role of watchdogs to the society, telling the society and the readers of the high cultural standard that must be embraced. The playwrights address the societal, political, cultural and economic problems of the society with the aim of creating a positive change.

The literature of modern Nigeria from the 1940s shows the process which developed as a result of creative integration of literary styles from two distinct cultures (Isaiah, 2006). Isaiah also noted that Nigerian literature shifted from fantasy to realism in the late 1930s. There was also the challenge of presenting an art with an indigenous character for the writers of this period, while using a medium previously foreign to their culture. As noted by Gikandi (2003), Fagunwa, using the form of the novel, created a literary idiom which answered the challenge. Fagunwa's prose in his Yoruba novels contains the elements of syncretism which dramatists later acknowledge.

In Fagunwa's work, there is a strong background of folk tradition and the *Ifa* cosmology; he himself was converted from Yoruba traditional religion to Christianity. His use of multiplicity of plots within a major theme of a heroic quest reflects his *Ifa* heritage and also follows the model of the pilgrim hero. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim Progress* is also part of

Fagunwa's influence, and the morality of the pilgrim hero in Fagunwa's characters has similarities with John Bunyan's hero. The pilgrim hero occurs frequently in Yoruba folktales and Bunyan's story. Widely read in Nigerian schools, it must have influenced Fagunwa, alongside the indigenous examples of this pilgrim model. This type of active heroism, in turn, served as a model for the heroes who appear in modern Nigerian drama. Fagunwa's fusion of literary traditions proves to be progressive, rather than inhibiting. In his study, *The Novels of D.O. Fagunwa* (1974), Ayo Bamgbose writes that:

The tradition of expanding Yoruba folktale into an extended study which Fagunwa pioneered has had a profound influence to the development of the novel in Yoruba. Until comparatively recently, almost all Yoruba novels followed Fagunwa's pattern of the story of the wandering hero (generally a hunter) and his experiences in a forest or some other local people by supernatural beings.

Fagunwa is one of the earliest exponents of the cultural fusion which dominates modern Nigerian literature. The playwrights who have appeared since Fagunwa have all adopted the values. The predominance of the tragic themes which the modern dramatists have developed from myth, history and religion makes it possible in the drama to project an African cosmology which incorporates Aristotelian and Nietzschean principles of the tragic hero. Ola Rotimi's plays *The Gods are not to Blame*, *Kurumi*, and Duro Ladipo's *Oba Ko So* are explicitly Aristotelian within their African framework. *The Gods are not to Blame* is an adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, and Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripedes* is an extreme example of the use by Nigerian playwright of a classical literary model, which nevertheless advances elements taken from Yoruba mythology (Dasylva, 2004).

Dasylva (2004) maintains that Yoruba history and myth present tragic heroes who are adaptable to Aristotle's ideal of tragic heroism. The life of this typical hero consists of a rise

to a position of achievement and eminence, from which he falls, as a consequence of his own flaws. Yoruba mythical and historical heroes, encountered in the Nigerian plays, exist within the Aristotelian principle. He added that in the Yoruba traditional religion, the individual can either redeem himself by an act of ritual observance, or he can be blinded by his own pursuits through which he falters; he may only then realize the consequences of his flaws when they overwhelm or destroy him. Yoruba tragedy contains elements which show the fall of the hero through his flaw. This is the correspondence with the Aristotelian ideal. While the gods are present, the tragic hero fails only through his weaknesses. In his *Poetics*, cited in Dasyuva, (2004) Aristotle argues that:

A perfect tragedy should, as we have seen, be arranged not on the simple but on the complex plan. It follows plainly, in the first place, that the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us, nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity, nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. There remains, then, the character between these two extremes, that of a man who is not eminently good, and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous, a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families.

The characters of Odewale in Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame* and Sango in Ladipo's *Oba Ko So* exemplify this Aristotelian tragic heroism.

In early postcolonial literature, Nigerian playwrights express the new national consciousness, rejecting the acceptable art form handed down by the colonial lords. The Nigerian playwrights took a trip into the past with the aim of unveiling the rich culture, philosophy, folktales, poetry and other art forms which the colonialists had tried to bury under the guise

of colonisation. Playwrights such as Soyinka, Bode Sowande, Clark Bekederemo, Ola Rotimi, Ogunde and a host of others were able to capture the “confusion in values which resulted from a drastic historical change in the political, economic and cultural ethos and the effect of such confusion on both society and the individual psyche (Utoh, 2002). They portray the need to retain the people’s culture and reconstruct from it a new set of living values”. This cultural, social and traditional renaissance gave rise to plays such as Clark Bekederemo’s *Ozidi*, *The Masquerade* and *Song of a Goat*, Soyinka’s “*The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel*” (Ojaide, 1992).

Nigerian “literature is the repository of the cultural life of the people and is a major source of education for the young generation and the urban people who have lost their roots” (Ojaide, 1992). Nigerian literature is socialized; it does not focus on the individual, instead, it has a communal spirit which informs the characterization and social analysis (Ojaide, 1992). In Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*, the community is the hero struggling against Western impostor to maintain its cultural practices in the post-independence period which began in the mid- 1960s. Jeyifo (1981, p. 420) declares:

The post-civil war Nigerian society is a society of sharpening class cleavages and the grains of sand are running out quickly in its social and historical hour- glass – popular drama in Nigeria at the present time cannot but emerge from a conscious, critical and creative class.

In condemning “Western intervention as disruptive of the growth and development of Nigerian culture through colonialism Ojaide (1992), notes that Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* suggests that the practice of the king’s horseman accompanying him to the spirit world by ritual suicide was already failing and needed no colonial intervention to stop it. The

colonial officer's intrusion resulted in a greater calamity for the people in the waste of two lives instead of one.

Nigerian playwrights write to defend and affirm their native culture against alien infringement. They serve as "cultural bearers of their people; they use literature to affirm cultural independence. In Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988), there is a naming ceremony of Ikem and Elewa's daughter as a symbolic hope for the future. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the pre-colonial Igbo society is celebrated. Moreover, the supernatural plays an important part in Nigerian literature. There is belief in the ancestors, spirits and gods influencing the affairs of the living. Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) portrays a beautiful girl who is dedicated to the gods, and the man who marries her incurs a fatal curse on himself. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1980) portray the supremacy of Ani, the Earth goddess of the Igbo people. Furthermore, Soyinka exploits the Yoruba pantheon in his plays, poems and novels. "Idanre," the title of the poem *Idanre and other poems*, is centered on *Ogun*, "god of Iron and metallurgy, explorer, artisan, hunter, god of war, and guardian of the road" (Soyinka, 1976). The mystical worldview that informs Nigerian literature is highly visible in the way gods and priests affect the course of events in the society (Ojaide, 1992).

Nigerian literature derives its root from the indigenous culture. The culture provides the literature with images, symbols, aesthetic direction, moral instruction and ethical imperatives. The ethically rich culture has enhanced the works of Nigerian playwrights who see themselves as having the social role of cleansing the society. Nigerian literature, though written in European language, draws on the beliefs, worldviews and folkloric heritage of the indigenous people.

2.2 Yoruba Traditional Culture

The word *Yoruba* refers to the people from the south western part of Nigeria. The "Yoruba culture was originally an oral tradition, and the majority of Yoruba people are native speakers

of the Yoruba language. Yoruba culture consists of cultural philosophy, religion and folktales. Yoruba cultural thought is a witness of two eras (Encyclopaedia, 2013); the first era is an era making history in mythology and cosmology. This is also a period making history in the oral culture during the time which Oduwa was the head and a pre-eminent diviner. The second era is the era of metaphysical discourse. Yoruba thought is mainly narrative in form, explicating and pointing to the knowledge of things, thus affecting the corporeal and the spiritual universe and its wellness. Yoruba people have hundreds of aphorisms, folktales and lore, and they believe that any lore that widens people's horizons and presents food for thought is the beginning of a philosophy" (Kola, 2006). Nigerian writers deal with a lot of characters and situations from their oral literature and folklores.

Ojaide (1992) asserts that Yoruba tradition gives Soyinka an African identity, and also, the use of Yoruba materials provides a nostalgic act which encourages readers with an African perspective to empathize with the play more.

In many Yoruba folktales, there is often an innocent maiden who is charmed by a handsome stranger who later changes to a monster; Ojaide noted that these kinds of stories were told to sentimental young girls to warn them of the danger that would happen to them should they be deceived by attractive young men whom they knew nothing about. Thus, "Don't let handsome strangers lead you into the woods" became one of the most explicit morals that could be drawn from these kinds of tales (Lindfors, 1974).

According to Euba (1998), Yoruba traditional worldview is based on a cyclic universe that consisted of "the worlds of the living, the dead, the unborn", and worlds that are linked to one another through the transitional passage that is full of mysteries and knowledge. In addition, *Ogun* mythology, *Egungun* ritual, masquerades and *Agemo* beliefs are parts of Yoruba rites and beliefs. *Ogun* is called the god of the roads - the explorer. Gikandi (2003) claims that Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* describes several different rites that illustrate the

role of the artist as someone who can see properly, idealistically and can see between things to connect them with each other. African writers have used masks and rituals to turn society and culture away from imperial and colonial effects to traditional and cultural values, hence, a post-colonial act that emphasizes the continuation of traditional and indigenous rituals and religious rites in spite of the influence of European evangelists (Gilbert, Helen et al., 1996).

In Soyinka's plays, Yoruba mythology, theology and Yoruba customs, traditions are obvious features because he believes that if African and Yoruba writers do not write about their traditions and rituals, who will? Soyinka also believes that African people and scholars should write about their own myths, legends and customs like Shakespeare did in the Elizabethan age (Appiah, 2006). Similarly, according to Lindfors (1974, p. 89), "bearers of a culture are better equipped to interpret that culture than aliens who have experienced its realities only vicariously, and believe that those who share a writer's background can understand his purpose better and easier". Yoruba culture and tradition has become globally significant, hence, Soyinka uses this paradigm in his works to remind the African community of its beauty.

2.3 Yoruba Traditional Religion

The Yoruba traditional society is known to be communal and religious society, where traditional culture and religion are held in high esteem. The Yoruba traditional religion is the "indigenous faith of the Yoruba people which is passed down from one generation to the other through oral traditions, art, crafts, liturgies, pithy sayings, proverbs, folklores, stories, songs and wise sayings to this contemporary age" (Ogunade, 2010). Yoruba people practiced this traditional religion before the introduction of Christianity by the colonialist.

The sub-sections of Yoruba community are numerous, and this shows in the existence of different cultures and religions within the Yoruba setting. Thus, each segment of Yoruba community worshipped individual deities according to its community, individual and

devotional needs. Their religious “practice take the form of ceremonies and rites, which include silent meditation, praying, invoking and hailing the spirits of the objects of worship, dancing, clapping, making offerings and sacrifices, sounding the bell or gong, drumming and singing, as required by the situation” (Ogunade, 2010). This can be personal or collective in a suitable position. The important thing is that must be done in worship to attain the essential goal.

The Yoruba, like other African societies, have five essential beliefs which Idowu (1973) has described as the structure of African traditional religion; these include: belief in God, belief in divinities, belief in spirits, belief in ancestors, and belief in mysterious powers”.

In Yoruba religion, 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 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.

These beliefs 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 and conduct their activities and affairs with one another and the environs in 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.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Post-colonial theory was used because it is relevant to African subjectivity and response to colonial discourse. It is similar to cultural studies as it looks at issues of culture, religion, economics and politics and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony. The Post-colonial term covers all cultures affected by imperial processes from the moment of colonisation to the present day. It is the most appropriate term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted (Ashcroft et al., 2002). Post-colonial theory focuses particularly on the way in which literature, by colonizing culture, distorts experience and realities, and inscribes the inferiority of the colonized people". Soyinka, as a post-colonial writer, details Yoruba customs, traditions, ritual and value system in his works and thus gives them a taste of originality, and some of the customs like singing, dancing, rites of passage and ritual come alive. Rather than glorifying the exploratory nature of European colonist and their influence on the mind of the people, Soyinka's works amplify the beauty and integrity of African

traditions as well as the destructive events that led to the enslavement of Africans and points out the negative effect and shifting ideas of identity and culture caused by the imposition of Western values on Africans during colonial rule. “Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* and *Death and the King’s Horseman* are post-colonial plays which depict social conflict and capture the confusion in values as a result of historical change in the political, economic and cultural philosophy and the effect of the confusion on society and the individual’s mind. The playwright emphasizes the need to retain the old culture and re-creates from it a new set of living values. Post-colonial theory is best in the analysis of Soyinka’s texts as the African playwright focuses on African experiences, culture and religious problems in Nigeria.

Post-colonial literature comes up 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. Post-colonial writers recount their experiences in their writing on how their rich native cultures were destroyed under the power of imperialism (Palmer, 2013). Post-colonial writers re-assign 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. Most colonized individuals do not know whether to follow their own culture or the culture of the colonizer. Because of this, some find themselves combining some of the elements of the two different cultures. Some stick to the old culture, while others imbibe, wrongly, elements of the new culture, thereby disregarding the old culture. This makes them move back and forth in between their present and past lives, hence their confused sense of belonging.

2.5 Post-colonialism: Theory and Reflection

“Colonialism, as defined by Oxford English Dictionary (2013), is the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers and exploiting it economically. Post-colonialism, on the other hand, can be referred to as “after

colonialism” or “after- independence” (Ashcroft et al., 2003). It describes the wide range of social, cultural and political events that arose after the decline and fall of European colonialism (McEwan, 2009). 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 encroachments. The early founding text of post-colonialism is Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), which in its anti-colonial quest, advocates for de-colonisation through violence and voicing what might be called ‘cultural resistance’ to France's African empire.

Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is another major book which can be said to inaugurate post-colonial criticism. From the late 1970s, post-colonialism has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonisation (Ashcroft et al., 2008). This field of study has become popular with the publication of Ashcroft et al.'s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990), and Said's *Culture and Imperialism*” (1993).

Post-colonial 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 post-colonialism, from the point of view of literary studies, could be identified as both “a subject matter and a theoretical framework. In the light of the subject matter, any analysis of a post-colonial literary work, regardless of the theoretical framework used, might be called post-colonial criticism.”

According to Bassey (2012), post-colonialism, 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 colonized 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 on 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 colonized. 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 post-colonial analysis, such analysis would emphasize the text as either colonialist or anti-colonialist or a combination of the two (Tyson, 1999). According to Adejumo (2010), postcolonial theory “deals with the effects of colonisation on the cultures and societies of the formerly colonized countries of the world. Although the term took its root after the Second World War to designate the post-independence period, literary critics have extended its frontiers to the various cultural effects of colonisation. In the view of Gail (1999), post-colonial theory refers to a way of reading, theorizing, interpreting and investigating colonial oppression and its legacy that is informed by an opposing ethical agenda.

As noted by Ashcroft et al. (2007), the post-colonial theory is used to re-examine and re-evaluate the colonial legacies in pre- and post-independence nations and communities.

Ogu (1986) identifies the transition inherent in all post-colonial 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, post-colonial theory is a response to Western domination and an attempt to undermine the notion of Western superiority over the third world inferiority. “Emerging from multi-disciplinary studies, the central task of post-colonial theory is to advocate a process of artistic and literary de-colonisation that involves dismantling of European cultural assumptions. There are three models of this theory: the Nativism, Metropolitan and Eclecticist models. The first, Nativism, rejects cultural imperialisms and advocates a rebirth of indigenous culture through the use of indigenous languages and literature (Adeyemi, 2008 as cited by Adejumo, 2010). The 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”. They, therefore, have to use English, the language of the ‘master’ to utter confrontational words against the “master”. To Adeyemi (2010), 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 marriage of traditional and European cultural and artistic features to reassert the periphery’s pride of place. He added that his model cannot work for local masses whose language is indigenous. To him, the crusade of enlightenment about the struggle for cultural, intellectual, political and economic identity is better done in indigenous languages for a better effect on the local masses, hence our choice of indigenous language play-text in this study. 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.

Although all the definitions given above are vivid pictures of post-colonial theory and its engagement, this study tilts toward an inward search of myriads of post-colonial dysfunction, tracing it to postcolonial African leaders and not the colonial masters.

The varying definitions pinpoint the fact that post-colonial critics interpret post-colonial 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 pre-colonial past and self-definition of a political future also forms a critical yardstick” (Gail, 1999).

Ashcroft et al. (1997) rightly tread this path by affirming that post-colonialism, as a term, encompasses the totality of practices which characterizes post-colonial 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 a 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 post-colonial 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) perspective:

Post-colonial literatures are as a result of this interaction between imperial culture and the complex of indigenous cultural practices. As

a consequence, post-colonial 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 contest, but eventually vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience, post-colonial theory came into being.

This implies that post-colonialism has been reacting against imperialism before its conscious formulation as a theoretical field of study. The ancestry of post-colonial criticism can be traced to 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 colonized people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past. Since for centuries, the European colonizing power would have devalued the nation's past, seeing its pre-colonial era as a pre-civilized limbo, or even as a historical void, Barry strongly asserts that if the first step towards a post-colonial 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 post-colonial 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.

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 post-colonial 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 post-colonialism 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”.

Post-colonial literature comes up 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. Post-colonial writers recount their experiences in their writing on “how their rich native cultures were destroyed under the power of imperialism (Palmer, 2013). According to Kenalemang (2013), “post-colonial 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 colonized 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”.

2.6 Colonisation, Culture and Religion in Africa

It is a known fact that majority of the African countries (except for Ethiopia) were once controlled by imperialist/ colonialist coming from different parts of the world. It is, thus, safe to say that the traditional culture and religion of these countries must have been in a way affected by colonialism. These impacts have been seen affecting culture and religion of different sections of a country in different ways. The effect of colonisation on Africa’s traditional religion is seen in the views of colonialists that African traditional religious practices are fetish, barbaric, ritualistic and demonic. The mode of worship, time of worship,

and non-recognition of the supreme beings are seen as some ways in which colonisation had influenced African traditional religious practices.

In the Sierra Leone, “Limba religion is the indigenous religion of the Limba people, and it is one of the African traditional religions affected by imperialist western religion. The Limba people are the third largest ethnic group in Sierra Leone. They are indigenous to Sierra Leone and speak various dialects of a language largely unrelated to other tribal languages in Sierra Leone. They are primarily found in the Northern Province, mostly in Bombali, Kionadugu and Kambia districts. During the colonial period, thousands of Limbas migrated to the capital, Freetown and its Western area. As a result of this migration, many Limbas can be found in Freetown and its surrounding areas”. They believe in the spirits called Krifi. Islam and Christianity have had a profound impact on the Limba with respect to their traditional religious beliefs (Taylor, 2014).

Although the Limba religion thrives as it was able to withstand western influences, it was affected by Christianity which, nevertheless, limited its scope thus making it go through many changes, and this affected Limba traditional beliefs (Mbiti, 1989). “Modernization in Africa has come upon religious societies, thus affecting their religious attitudes and life (Mbiti, 1997). Though it cannot be denied that changes in thought and perhaps attitude to life are taking place, the past is not dead; it has very strong changing influences on the emotions of the people”. Downes (1971) cited by Awolalu (1979) describes the intrusion of Christianity and western imperialism as militating factors against traditional rites. The settlements of other ethnic groups within the western area have brought changes to the religious worldview of the Limba community, like in many African countries. The people of Limba are aware that their traditional ideas are being abandoned and modified by changing western situation. Limba religion, like all religions, has had to accommodate itself to the process of social change and the effects of modernisation (Opoku, 1993).

When the Christian missionary introduced Christian religion to Limba homeland, it exerted influence on the society. Alie (1990) posits that the missionaries successfully influenced the government to pass a law that anyone found trading on the Sabbath should be brutally dealt with. This marks the inception of the struggle between the Limba cultural religion and Christianity in Limba country. Conteh (2007) summarizes the effect of colonisation and the introduction of Christianity on Limba traditional religion and culture. Some of these are: Limba traditional religions are no longer practised publicly, and this removed the sense of belonging from Limba culture to a borrowed one. Some of the Limba people have changed their traditional names to Christian names they are made to believe that as long as they carry their un-Christian traditional names, life will always be difficult for them. Cultural heritage of consulting with ancestors is frowned upon, and many aspects of their language which have to do with Limba culture are dying out because the church views them as evil influences. Homes have been divided because the older people stick to their past while younger people embrace Christianity as their newfound way of life. The negative impact on the Limba traditional values are seen to be destroying the foundation of the culture and the young Limba are being deprived of their cultural heritage.

The effect of western religion lingers on although some people still practise the old traditional religion. Conteh (2007) added that “the notion of Christianity, as a white man’s religion, had a disruptive force, which is the condemnation of and demand for the abandonment of African religious cultural practices”. These factors are still very much responsible for the conflicts between the church and Sierra Leonean traditionalist religion, both in hinterland and the western area. Conteh (2007) opines that Western “missionaries to the Limba attacked African culture and required a complete abandonment of African culture and religious practices. For example, the Assemblies of God missionaries required monogamy and abstention from alcohol, smoking, secret society membership (which was considered non-Christian and non-

allegiance to God) and Sunday marketing”. He added that “the Assemblies of God missionaries enforced ‘a complete break with the past through the burning of medicine and charms, a symbol of complete rejection of the old way and of complete dependence upon God through Christ and the Holy Spirit, and members were prohibited from using charms or making sacrifices”.

In the contemporary Zimbabwe society, Vera Nehanda, a Zimbabwean writer in his novel *Nehanda* (1994) depicts the influence of western religion on the indigenous beliefs of the people. She exemplifies the effort of the western missionary in creating dominance over the traditional beliefs of the people. The novel is set at the first Chimurenga war in the late nineteenth century. Vera shows the ineptness of traditional religion and the new Christian religion all through the novel. She narrates the story of a female soldier who is attached to the ancestral spirits. These spirits influence her life and the villagers to rebel against colonial oppression. However, they did not succeed because the white missionaries capture their leaders, Nehanda and Kaguvi. The ancestral spirits revolve and significantly influence the life of the people, which is why Nahanda relays messages from the spirits to the people. “They believe that the dead are not dead. They are always around us, protecting us. There is no living person who is stronger than the departed. When the whole village prays together, they pray to the ancestral *mudzimu* of their clan. When we pray to *mhondoro* for rain, we are praying to the guardian that unites the whole clan, and this is one of the strongest spirits of the land” (Vera, Nehanda) Vera portrays the strength of traditional religion in the mind of the Zimbabwean through their communion with the ancestral spirit for direction and wisdom for daily living. As the people continue in their struggle against western religion, the missionaries also continue to penetrate into the traditional lives of the people. We see the effort of a priest in converting the Kaguvi to Christianity. Kaguvi’s confusion increases as the new religion differs strongly from his indigenous belief. The priest emphasizes the

superiority of western religion "Your god is an evil god. I am here to save you from the eternal flames" (Nehanda, 24). Kaguvi eventually changes to western religion as he learns that his villages are set on fire, and their struggle against colonial power failed. The story of Nehanda seems to mark the beginning of a religious transition in Zimbabwe. There is now a shift from traditional religion to Western religion. The dominance of Western religion in post-colonial countries brought about loss and lack of recognition for traditional religion.

Sawyer (1996) remarks that "Africans do worship their ancestors as they do their divinities" and this worship, he continues, "consists of prayers, sacrifices, and divination on communal occasions or prayers and divinations on private occasions." In Sawyer's understanding, the rituals and practices offered to the ancestors, both in public and in private, constitute legitimate worship and are of the same nature as those offered to God.

In the Igbo community, the systems of taboos and rituals for ordination that controlled the lives of the Igbos, as noted by Onyeidu (1999), which comprise swearing of oath, making of blood pacts, trials by ordeal, oracles, vows, secret societies and the meticulous observation of customs and traditions, are no longer strictly observed because of the influences of Christian doctrines. This also explains why there are so many crimes in the traditional communities today. People now take oath according to their religious inclination and no longer on the basis of their original rich cultural heritage. "This, undoubtedly, has provided room for moral decadence and other evils in our society" (Ugwu, 1999).

Yoruba religion is, however, affected by the influence of colonialist religion. An overview of the missionary impact on the Yoruba society, as a whole, is summarized in Oyeniyi's (2012) statement that: "missionary activity was a disruptive force, rocking traditional society to its very foundation. No one can argue against the fact that the Christian missions broke into tribal solidarity with their denominational varieties and rivalries, when a missionary converted individuals in a community he removed units from an organic whole and thereby

undermined the monolithic structure of the community. The converts not only imbibed a new set of religious beliefs, but began to nurse alien ideas, economic ambitions and political aspirations of their own, detrimental to the welfare and solidarity of the community.”

“In the early twentieth century, the traditional religions of the Yoruba altered significantly as a result of European rule. Where the modes of worship conflicted with Western mores, the ruling colonial powers placed restrictions on religious practices. Night gatherings, so vital to the worship of *Ogun* and the practice of *Ifa*, were severely restricted. The marriage customs of the Yoruba permitted polygamy and incestuous marriages, as well as the practice of marrying a dead male relative’s widow and adopting his children. Europeans also insisted upon burying the dead in communal graveyards rather than the traditional Yoruba practice of burying them in the house, thus interfering with communion between the Yoruba and their dead relatives” (Oyeniya, 2012).

Chapter Three

MODERN AFRICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

3.1 Culture and Religion in African Literature

Various African literary writers have made considerable efforts to portray their various cultures and religious heritage and identity to the World. Examples are: “Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Micere Mugo’s *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1977), Kobina Sekyi’s *The Blinkards* (1974), Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and Wole Soyinka’s *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1973).

Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Micere Mugo’s *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* presents an attempt to deconstructing the existing mutilated history of the liberation struggle of the Kenyan people against imperialism in the pre-independence Kenya setting. The court scene at the opening of the play is followed by the brief flashbacks on the history of the Black Man. This is a necessary exposition of the apprehensions and horrors of colonialism and imperialism in the first three phases. Kimathi is the central character in the play; he believes that the world can be changed and the crisis of his people can be triumph over through resolute determination and armed confrontation against imperialism and colonialism. This is with a view to building a strong and egalitarian society, a society meant for all and of equal opportunity. Kimathi could not fight in the war; rather, he developed his brilliant revolutionary tactics and his gigantic organizing capability for the struggle against imperialist. He equips his disciples with a strong, ever-optimistic form of a victorious end. He sends fear down the spines of the enemy of the people, the British imperialist. They are prepared to destroy the physical Kimathi as we are made to observe in the court and prison trials. What his enemy fails to

recognise is the fact that should Kimathi be physically destroyed by them, his spirit shall keep marching on to victory in those that keep on the liberation struggles.

In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, the playwrights consciously reconstruct distorted and mutilated history, and this serves to give direction to the vision of the oppressed Kenyan people. The playwrights understand the problem of this human, and that the problems facing him can be solved by getting at the root, the human psyche, which must undergo a thorough liberation if he must be free from the problem.

Kobina Sekyi in *The Blinkards* expresses his disappointment at the pettiness of the English native culture which he was privileged to observe on his visit to England. He also shows serious concern on the growing evil influence of the English social class whose culture was being uncritically imitated by the Africa. The setting of the play is the former Gold Coast, now Ghana, and the natives are Fanti, and the subject matter and thematic concern cut across all the colonial African states. The playwright satirizes the character of Mrs Brofusem by virtue of her stay in England wherein she takes delight in showing off her newly acquired English culture by expressing it in both actions and utterances and her preference for English gestures over her native custom. This gets to a climax when she insists on giving Miss Tsiba an English education. As a result of this, Mr Okadu who also has a half-baked education, shows habitual display of the professed English mannerisms and of rather superficial love advances to Miss Tsiba. Mrs. Brofusem arranges to make their English-style engagement a reality. However, there are oppositions leading to a clash of principles between representatives of the half-baked English culture - Mrs Brofusem and her group and the African traditionalists, including the father of Miss Tsiba, Nnasumpa. Mr Tsiba's wife reacts against the procedure but dies of heart failure. Already, Miss Tsiba is pregnant even before marriage, contrary to native custom, and yet has a church wedding. At the wedding reception, however, Nana Katawarwa, Mrs Tsiba who is Nnasumpa's grand-mother, makes a direct

attack on, and cautions against the evil and dangerous influence of alien culture now threatening the existence of indigenous African culture. She takes away her granddaughter. Lawyer Onyi takes up the case of bigamy and wins, in favour of the Tsiba family, much of the delight of everyone, including Mrs Brofusem.

The Blinkards is set against the almost faultless indigenous African ways and customs on the one hand, and sensible unpretentious characters with a proper education, Mr Brofusem and Lawyer Onyi, on the other hand. The naivety of Mrs Brofusem is exposed through the cigar ashes she insists on spreading on the carpet because she heard, while she was in England, that it was good for killing moths in carpets. At her first appearance as the playwright introduces her, she is a ridiculous sight for not knowing the proper use of lorgnette. In addition, her hypocrisy in speaking perfect Fanti at home but never in the public where she pretends not to understand is shown. However, she is caught speaking Fanti by Miss Tsiba (*The Blinkards*, 34). She cannot speak good English despite her pretentious act. She wishes to be called Duckky, a name which was mistaken for a pet-name but which is a derogatory remark on someone's wife's obesity and duck-walk. On the other hand, Lawyer Onyi prefers to speak in Fanti even though well educated, while Mr. Okado, with his half-baked education insists on speaking in badly expressed English.

The play is a good satire of the contemporary African society indicating a high sense of humour- blushing (*The Blinkards*, 33) and the romance scene (*The Blinkards*, 49). The playwright has a moralist vision; he recognizes the right values and this is identified in the character of Lawyer Onyi, for example, who consciously asserts the right value - the African value (*The Blinkards*, 125) the simple morality, the joy of native dress. The concluding statement of Mrs Brofusem is very important as it addresses the inadequacies of those who imitate wrongly the western ways of life: "It (the English custom) is not for us (*The Blinkards*, 132). This we also see in the Father's statement:

Lord what fools these mortals be?

The fooleries of those whom I have fashioned after me

Distress and weary me. (*The Blinkards*, 117)

Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1973) is also a satiric comedy in which the playwright deals with the problems of the moral atrophy of religious institutions and social life. Like *The Blinkards*, which is set in Ghana but which has a theme applicable to all colonial African states, *The Trials of Brother Jero* is set in Nigeria, but the theme is applicable to post-independence African states. The playwright satirises the deliberate commercialization of religion by custodians of the sacred institution. The commercialization of religion is motivated by the newly acquired western culture. The worshippers and the spiritual leaders are fascinated about getting rich quickly through illegal means. The desperation for wealth acquisition among other selfish motives of worshippers makes it possible for the spiritual leaders to exploit them. The victims include market women represented by Amope, Chume, the office messenger, and also people with pathetic cases like the penitent woman who desires for a child and the politicians who are seeking power. Brother Jero is a self-confessed religious impostor who reveals his mind to the reader, he is seen as a shopkeeper waiting for customers, not as a true shepherd of God. Regardless of the pathetic case of the penitent woman, he callously treats her as a customer, a client rather than offer genuine advice that could help the woman. His victims are also deceitful, for instance, Chume, an officer messenger, rather than do the job he is employed and paid to do, takes sick leave from some faceless medical doctor, at a fee, to engage in church activities with the hope of an elevation without any justification for the desired elevation. Similarly, the politician, rather than occupy himself with the problems of the people he intends to serve and work on possible solutions, seeks spiritual means to succeed at the polls. The Sanitary Inspector, referred to Amope is a cheat. Brother Jero employs all manner of pranks to exploit

the gullibility of the society; his worshippers and non-members like Amope are under his control mentally and physically.

The playwright points out, through the unfolding actions in the play, the rate of corruption and spiritual decadence in the society. He exposes the moral decadence of the society whose secular life is morally ruined; those who care to seek refuge in religion fall prey to religious vultures.

“Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is also a post-colonial text that discloses the cultural and religious practices of Igbo society. It is a response to the hurtful effect of western colonialism on the traditional values and religious institution of the Igbo people. The playwright captures the method adopted by the white man to forcefully introduce foreign form of education and religion, thereby ensuring that the Igbo people embrace western culture and condemn their own culture and religion”.

The coming of western missionaries brings about conflict and division among the Umuofia people. While some members of the community choose to follow the white man’s teachings and ideas, the others stick to their traditional religious beliefs. Alimi (2012, p.6) buttresses this point as, “*Thing Fall Apart* is about the collapse, breaking into pieces, chaos and confusion of traditional Igbo cultural beliefs.”

The white missionaries seek to change the elements of traditional Igbo culture that are different from Christian religion, for instance, in Igbo culture, it is legal for a man to marry two or more wives. The women of the clan understand this cultural practice, and sometimes, the first wife can tell her husband to marry a younger wife. The younger wife honours the first wife. Each of them has defined household duties, and they live together in peace. Kenalemang (2013) also noted that the arrival of the white missionaries made the Igbo people lose most of their cherished values that have bound them together for decades. For example, social harmony between the individual and society was lost, together with their traditional

values and ways of life. He added that the white man believed his culture to be morally superior to Igbo culture, and this caused conflict between the two cultures. Although these problems seem resolved in the present time, they still very much exist and are causing a clash between the two cultures.

Okonkwo is the leader of the people of Umuofia and leads the struggle against colonial power. The religious beliefs of the people kept them unified before the arrival of missionaries, and this is seen in Okonkwo's conversation with Obierika whereby he asks him if the white man understands the Igbo custom hence: "how can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peacefully with his religion. We were at his foolishness and allowed him to stay, now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (Achebe, 176)"

3.2 Aspects of Yoruba Culture and Religion in Wole Soyinka's Drama

Soyinka is a universalist. He derives inspiration from Yoruba religion and culture as well as the cultural and socio-political conflicts and events of his time. Adedeji summarizes what constitutes Soyinka's drama in his statement:

Soyinka's drama presents a background of unique cultural experiences and artistic forms; his theatre is therefore illuminated by a tripodal aesthetic of folklorism, structuralism and theatricalism. Yoruba folklore feeds Soyinka's spiritual needs and artistic vision. On structuralism, Soyinka borrows from the traditional theatre in a number of ways, his plays resembles the traditional festival theatre, his theatricalism includes his use of the time-space stage presentational and

representational styles in plot, character and locale as well as his attempts at ritualism (Adedeji, 1987).

Yoruba culture and religion beautifies Soyinka's plays which makes his readers, especially those of African background to identify more with his works. He believes that if African and Yoruba writers do not write about their traditions and rituals, who will do it? (Appiah, 2006). He added that those who share a writer's background can understand his purpose better and easier. Sara (2012) also noted that some African writers have gone beyond the lines of writing about Africa generally to draw on African raw materials and information, and furthermore, they have used information from their own specific ethnic group to illustrate cultural ethos. For example, Soyinka uses and writes about Yoruba rituals and beliefs to reveal his roots, likewise Chinua Achebe writes about the Igbo because he is a member of Igbo cultural group.

Soyinka's plays are "influenced by a combination of factors which directly or indirectly sharpened his dramatic vision. These include his perception about the Yoruba god of iron (*Ogun*), early contact with western and Christian education; communal rites, rituals and festivals; romance and fraternity with the Yoruba travelling theatre troupes; individual disposition to life; socio-political, religious, moral and economic problems and western theatrical modes (Rasheed, 2006). In Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *Jero's Metamorphosis* (1966), he reveals how pastor Jeroboam, a deceitful man of God, turns religion into a lucrative business. The playwright emphasizes that religion is an act of worship which demands impersonality to succeed.

In *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (1981), Soyinka narrates how his life is an indistinguishable blend of tribal religious beliefs and Christianity, considering the fact that he was raised by Christian parents and by a grandfather who introduced him to Yoruba religious traditions. He narrates the influence of Christian religion and western education on his life.

Some of Soyinka's dramas are identified with festivals. Festivals are centred on rituals which are the annual celebrations of the community such as harvest of yam festivals. This is portrayed in his *Kongi Harvest* (1971). Festivals also take the form of celebration of cult groups or societies and the celebrations of ancestors' cults and the rites of passage. The features of festivals are singing, dancing, drumming, feasting and sacrifices. Ogunba (1970) explained that Yoruba festivals are characterized in Soyinka's plays:

But by far, the most significant traditional elements in these plays is the overall design of a festival. This is particularly true of the plays, *The Strong Breed*, *Kongi's Harvest*, *A Dance of the Forests* and to some extent *The Road*. In each of these plays, the prevailing mood is that of a preparation for or celebration of a great event which produces such excitement or tension of nothing except the great event. Soyinka, in these plays, very often catches the essence of the festival mood with the drumming, bustle and other manifestations of a festival.

The festival celebrations are part of cultural revival which holds the community in unity. Rasheed (2006) notes that Soyinka knew very well "the secret behind the *Osogbo* and *Oro* cults and *Agemo*, *Obatala*, *Eyo*, *Sango*, *Osun*, *Egungun*, and other communal-based theatricalities which bring out his Yorubanness and that which shapes his drama through the incorporation of traditional African idiom of puppetry, masquerading, invocation, pantomime, music, dance, mime, evocation and many more". Soyinka's *Isara: A Voyage Around* Essay (1989), also portray traditional a Yoruba festival; Gibbs (1980) notes that:

There is no religion orthodoxy in Yorubaland and in going to *Isara*, Soyinka was visiting an area which regarded *Agemo* as deity. The annual *Agemo* festivals for which the deity wears a mask topped with a carving of a chameleon (*alagemo*) involve acrobatics dances, the performance of rituals at a specific places,

processions and spectacular transformation wrought by means of cunningly designed costumes.

Soyinka uses his “African notion to introduce a series of misunderstandings about Africa based in colonial history and the European imagination, a reaction Soyinka suggests is a part of Europe’s fictions of Africa that we need to forget” (Appiah, 2006)

3.3 Soyinka’s Defense of Yoruba Culture

Wole Soyinka was born into the rich and unique cultural heritage of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. He upholds his belief in Yoruba culture, which is why he writes to defend it against Western intrusion and partialities. During the colonial period in Nigeria, he experienced influences from both his Yoruba and Western culture. He uses his knowledge of African culture and language to fight against colonial preconceptions as expressed in his works. Soyinka derives his dramatic theory from Yoruba dramatic traditions, rituals, and festival dramaturgy. “He draws on Yoruba ritual drama and mythology to assert his cultural identity and inform the world about his culture. He also identifies himself as a representative of African culture. In Soyinka’s *Myth, Literature and the African world* (1976), he explores African worldviews and rituals and how these can help writers to express their culture as he is grounded in his interpretation of his Yoruba culture. The world view that dominates his plays is the recognition of the reality of the invisible world: gods, spirits, the unborn and the dead whose forces interfere with the lives of humans (Amadou, 1996). Soyinka’s characters portray this religious worldview; some earthly values exist in his plays, though he believes that if only because of its collective status, dramatic performance necessarily has something ritual about it (Soyinka, 1976). In his dramatic texts, ritual scenes, ideologies and morality are evident. Ritual ceremony is a way of regaining the original oneness; it is re-enactments of the gods’ dramas in their first attempts to reunite with humans (Soyinka, 1976). Soyinka is trying to recover and bring together the past, present and future in his plays *Death and the King’s*

Horseman (1975) and *A Dance of the Forest*" (1983). In the Yoruba worldview, the past, present and the future are mutually dependent realities that gives fullness, meaning and unity to life. According to Soyinka, the present life contains within it manifestation of the ancestral, the living and the future of the unborn (Soyinka, 1976). His concern for the past, present and future shows his true sense of African ideology and his commitment to cultural continuity. He is convinced that extraordinary creativity in the present can only be achieved by returning to cultural roots lying deep in the past.

Soyinka's dramas serve as the fountain of the cultural life of the people. In his play, *The Lion and the Jewel* (1973), he demonstrates the general conflicts of value systems and portrays the stronger values of traditional views, as opposed to the idea of the Western. He believes that the role of the playwright is to serve as the conscience of a nation; he notes that:

Where the writer, in his own society, can no longer function as a conscience, he must recognize that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of a chronicler and post-mortem surgeon. The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of mores and experiences of his society and as a voice of vision in his own time. It is time for him to respond to this essence of himself. (Soyinka, 1976)

Soyinka assumes the role of cultural bearer by reminding the society of the high cultural standard that must be maintained. He does this by satirizing the negative social practices in order to bring about social ethics and morality in the society.

Soyinka derives his dramatic theory from Yoruba dramatic traditions, ritual and festival dramaturgy. His use of music in his plays constitutes cultural affluence, and the function of music in his plays such as *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), *A Dance of the Forest* (1963), *The Road* (1965), *Kongi's Harvest* (1967) is such that bring out its uniqueness which

is centred around folklore and deity worship. Soyinka uses different types of music for kings, gods and ritual ceremonies in the plays. Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963) owes a lot of its liveliness and popularity to the music and drama of the new Africanized churches and the theatre traditions of Hubert Ogunde, who mixed a variety of songs, dance and mime with European and African music (Gikandi, 2003). Chanting and dancing, which are associated with oral literature in Africa, are exhibited by the characters of Sidi, Sadiku and the villagers. According to Gikandi, Soyinka suggests that the western concept of music cannot explain the type of music that African people have, and they may not fully understand its relationship with ritual and drama. Among the Yoruba people, the nature of Yoruba music and language are the same. In the same vein, Feuser (1988) asserts that the centre of Soyinka's literary art is on African art forms, thus, since the publication of *The Lion and the Jewel*, drumming, singing, music and dancing have become pillars of modern African drama.

Another aspect of the Yoruba culture Soyinka uses in his plays is the mask. Masks, as some of the Yoruba traditions are central to Yoruba life and worship. Masks are used to prevent the extent to which the people see the faces of gods and ancestors. The mask performer, like an actor, represents his actual existence in an actual society which he is part of, as well as another reality world which he impersonates. This is what Soyinka reflected in *A Dance of the Forests* (1963), with Demoke who becomes a representative of humanity. It serves as affirmation of social loyalties, entertainment and amusement.

Storytelling is an important aspect of Yoruba culture which is used by the elders to teach the young generation ethics, morality and the culture of the community. It is a form of entertainment. Adisa et al. (2014) citing Oyetade (1983) declare that the traditional Yoruba, like many other Africans, enjoy storytelling and the use of occasion to entertain, sermonize, teach morals and sing. This is demonstrated by Soyinka in his play *The Road* (1965), wherein the characters tell stories about the lives of others and their own.

Tokyo tells a story about the spirits whose homes have been cut down and Professor tells a story of his quest of the world (*The Road*). Through storytelling, cultural ideas and community ways of life are revealed to the young generation.

Soyinka's plays revolve around his Yoruba culture. He blends African themes, imagery and performance idioms with western techniques and stylistics. His plays serve as a passionate commitment to human freedom and quest to bring his Yoruba heritage to the world.

3.4 Cultural and Religious Value in Modern African literature

Modern African literature is concerned with African literary works written by Africans on colonial and post-colonial African experience. Modern African literature in both oral and written forms has a long history rooted in the continent's famous storytelling and performance traditions. They are written in indigenous African languages and in European languages used in Africa. There are literary works in Yoruba, Hausa, Zulu and Sotho, among others, and writers like Fagunwa, Mazisi Kunene, Ngugi wa Thiong, Okot p'Bitek wrote, at first, in African languages and later translated them into English. Modern African literature, either written in English or any African languages, expresses the problems that plague the society which are as a result of colonisation. They mirror the reality of the society and highlight sharply the moral decadence with a view to instituting change.

The history of Modern African literature has been the history of the continent itself. Okereke (1994) identifies this when he asserts that all over Africa, important historical effects affecting the destiny of nations have been fit subjects for literary creativity among artists. Modern African literature is a reflection of an evolving consciousness which can be at once historical, cultural, and political. The basis of this consciousness is the colonial presence in Africa. It is, indeed, a truism that the African literature grew, in part, from a history of active resistance to the colonial encounter (Amuta, 1986).

Ayo (2004) posits that African artists believe that literature serves as the recorder and interpreter of the socio-political activities in its enabling milieu. He states further that in the first stage of its (African literature) existence, it concerned itself with the issue of cultural nationalism, whereby African cultures, mores, and traditions were glorified and eulogized. This was said to be the era of 'paradise on earth' which is best reflected in the negritude writings of Leopold Senghor, Aime Cesaire, David Diop and so on. This phase was also said to be preceded by the age of 'paradise disturbed' - the age of colonialism in the continent. African literature, at this stage, was also used as an anti-colonial weapon.

It is paramount to note that in the third and current period, modern African writers tend to assume the role of cultural propagation, reminding the readers of its rich culture and ethical standards that must not be forgotten. To the contemporary African artist, the hope of regaining paradise, as a result of independence, has been castrated.

African playwrights took a trip into the past with the aim of unearthing the rich culture, philosophy, folktales, poetry and other art forms which the colonialists had tried to bury under the guise of colonisation (Utoh, 2002). Playwrights such as Soyinka, Bode Sowande, Clark-Bekederemo, Ola Rotimi, Ogunde and a host of others were able to capture the confusion in values, which was as a result of a drastic historical change in the political, economic and cultural philosophy and the consequence of such confusion on both society and the individual mind. He added that modern African writers depict the need to retain the people's culture and re-create from it a set of new living values. This cultural, social and traditional approach gave rise to plays such as Clark-Bekederemo's *Ozidi* (1966), *The Masquerade* (1962) and *Song of a Goat* (1961), Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers* (1958) and *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963) and Henshaw's *Dinner for Promotion* (1967) and *A Man of Character* (1974). These works portray social conflict and traditional memories.

According to Ayo (2004), “Seven conflicts can be identified as parts of the thematic pre-occupations of modern African literature. These are the clashes between Africa’s past and present; between tradition and modernity; between the indigenous and the foreign; between individuality and community; between socialism and capitalism; between development and self-reliance, and between Africanist and humanity. Also included in this taxonomy of the thematic pre-occupations of the post-colonial African literature is the critique of social ills, including corruption and economic disparities”

Modern African literatures tackle the problem of cultural collisions which have been in place for the past decades, for example, in Nigeria, it began from the slave trade to colonisation by the British. The African literary writers are preoccupied with restoring and rediscovering their pre-colonial cultural identity from their past history, culture and religion. Literary texts such as those of Kobina Sekyi’s *The Blinkards* (1974) serve as a good example. The subject matter and thematic concern cut across all the colonial African states. Kobina consciously asserts the right value, the African value (page 125), our simple morality (page 132), and the joy of native dress. The playwrights expressed serious concerns on the growing influence of the Western culture whose culture is being uncritically imitated by some Africans, like Mrs Brofusem in *The Blinkards* who substitutes “Been to “s” as well as the likely effect on the home grown African traditionalists. Similarly in Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), Lakunle, the village teacher, is another example of an African who uncritically replicates the western culture. Efua’s Sutherland’s *Marriage of Anansewa* (1975) also represents cultural integrationist vision. Joe de Graft’s *Sons and Daughters* (1964) examines the predicaments of the new order under the brutal oppression of the old values. Furthermore, in Wole Soyinka’s *The Strong Breed* (1973), the playwright foregrounds the rites of passage which are integral to African culture; *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1973) is preoccupied with the attendant problems of moral atrophy of religious institutions, as well as general social life. In *Death*

and the King's Horseman (1975), Soyinka captures the colonial effort at banning indigenous African belief systems, among other things. In *A Dance of the Forests* (1983), Soyinka's quests into what might be the future of the young independent African state Nigeria's (the Half-Child) notable deities in the Yoruba pantheon are actively involved in the dramatic discourse. There are also other plays and songs like Hampate Ba's *The Fortunes of Wangrin* (1999), Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjeketile* (1970), Okot p'Bitek's *Songs of Lawino* (1984), Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers* (1978), Ene Henshaw's *This is our Chance* (1957), among others, which represent cultural integrationist vision. The African playwrights constantly draw materials from the rich African philosophical hermeneutics and loric tradition which informs the motifs, themes and characters.

Modern African literature is highly influenced by western dramatic culture. (Kwaku, 2000) notes that "the ravages of the Second World War, thus, becomes a symbol of European cultural indecency and a justification for the rejection of Western values. Nonetheless, the universal nature of these European problems and their implicit relevance to the Africa situation is reflected in the transposition of some European themes into the African environment. For instance, Sophocles' *King Oedipus* is swapped as *The Gods are not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi, *Antigone* is transposed as *The Island* by Athol Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona, while Euripide's *The Bacchae* is transposed as *The Bacchae of Euripides* by Wole Soyinka". The African versions of the plays represent some African playwrights' effort at a deliberate reworking of the plays of other cultures, and through which has evolved a truly African tragic form. The playwrights recast materials using African dramatic culture in order to present a dramatic form that is essentially African.

Kwaku (2000) added that such "a critical approach to foreign values indicate that the acceptance of those Western values some of which have become the centre of protest was partly as a result of a conscious selection and free choice by the colonized. It will be realized

that the introduction, to Africa, of new ways of doing things, is essentially an offer of an opportunity to choose between different options, at least the old and the new, the Western and the indigenous”.

The introduction of Christianity to Africa and particularly Nigeria resulted in the existence of two unrelated cultures; the Nigerian culture and the western culture. The life of African people is linked to the supernatural to guard against unpredictable powers of uncontrolled individualism. *This is our Chance* (1956) by Ene Henshaw explores the importance of religion in the life of the people; chief Damba consults the diviner before going to war against *koloro*. This is also reflected in Wole Soyinka’s *The Swamp Dwellers* (1961) and J.P. Clark’s *Song of a Goat* (1961).

Christianity serves as a weapon against indigenous tradition since traditional beliefs and religion were condemned as evil. This results in conflicts of systems and values. Christianity believes in the existence of only one God, which is very different from the traditional religious belief with its pantheon of gods. Christianity believes in universality which is accepted by Africans and particularly, the Yoruba people of Nigeria as comparable to the Supreme Power though they still believe in the gods who govern the lives of traditional people. The attack on the traditional religion brought about some changes in the religious lives of the people. “Traditional religious concepts and practices cannot accommodate, fully, the changing situation” (Kwaku, 2000). The impact of the new religion was overwhelming; it affected the most essential factor in the traditional system. The meeting of the old religion and the new religion can be likened to that of the meeting of two unrelated beliefs and also two different languages and cultures. Christianity confronted traditional people with alternatives by providing new values that were different from those offered by traditional religion, thus undermining the traditional social life of the people. Chinua Achebe captures this conflict in *Arrow of God* (1964), and the conflict revolves around the chief priest of Ulu,

a ritual and religious leader of Umuaro and the local British administration officer, Winterbottom. Similarly, James Henshaw's *Children of the Goddess* (1964) depicts the conflict of the two unrelated religions through the characters of King Amansa of Labana and Rev. Mc Phail, a missionary. It shows the conflict between the king and his rival, as well as the conflict with the king himself. "Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*" (1960) portrays the conflicts confronted by a learned young African who is held between the conflicting value systems of the traditional African life and the Europeanized values. Achebe's "*Things Fall Apart*" (1958) portrays the impact of the contact between western and traditional cultures. The existence of the two different religions results in a forceful situation which is why the African playwrights reconstruct the people's history in literature to reconcile the conflicting problems of the present. The playwrights have been dedicated to transformation through their plays; they try to achieve social, cultural and moral revitalization.

Chapter Four

The Lion and the Jewel: The Aesthetics of Culture and Religion.

Introduction

The beauty of Yoruba culture and religion in “Soyinka’s *The lion and the Jewel*,” from a post-colonial theoretical perspective, is illustrated in this section. It initially presents an analysis of *The Lion and the Jewel* and then highlights Yoruba cultural practices and religion and elucidates on their significance. Furthermore, it reveals a symbolic representation of the past and reoccurring conflicts between the colonized (Yoruba) culture and the colonizer’s culture. It, lastly, elucidates on the possibility of co-existence of the two cultures, explaining the awareness and acceptance of cultural hybridity and overlap, and not a promotion of one culture over the other.

4.0 Background and Context

Published in 1963, *The Lion and the Jewel* is a post-colonial text that is set in the Yoruba village of Ilujinle in West Africa, Nigeria. It is a satirical comedy in which Soyinka presents an interplay of western culture and the indigenous Yoruba culture through the characters in the play such that it reveals topical colonial and post-colonial disputes and harmony. The playwright uses the characters of Baroka, Sadiku and Sidi to represent the colonized Yoruba people’s culture and Lakunle to represent the western culture. The playwright writes to counter the western cultural influence on the cultural values and religious belief of the Yoruba people.

As the play unfolds, there is an opposition to values between the characters that uphold the Yoruba culture and the character that has acquired and imbibed the western ways of life. The contest is between two men, Baroka and Lakunle, both of whom uphold different cultural values. They have the same aim of marrying the most beautiful maiden in the village, Sidi. As a young school teacher, Lakunle prefers the western culture to his Yoruba culture. He draws his plan of re-fashioning the village of Ilujinle to become a modern village. Baroka, on the other hand, is the head of the village of Ilujinle who upholds strongly his Yoruba culture and opposes the western idea of progress as Lakunle expresses it. He uses his authority to prevent the transformation of Ilujinle village to a western one, be it in development of the infrastructure and ways of life. He also accuses Lakunle of wanting to marry Sidi, their village beautiful girl so that he can turn her into a Western girl and therefore seeks a way of making Lakunle's mission impossible. It is clear that given Soyinka's stand on traditional values, the character of Baroka represents the saner of the two and therefore the playwright's spokesperson in the play. Baroka's intention to marry Sidi is aimed at retaining her in the village in order to pass unto her the Yoruba cultural values.

It is in the culture of the Yoruba people to ask for bride price before giving their female children to a man in marriage. Sidi is a typical Yoruba girl who believes in Yoruba culture. Lakunle is in love with her, but he is not in support of the payment of bride price. He sees it as an old culture. In his words, it is an "out-dated" culture (Soyinka, 7). To him it is against Western culture and he will not do what is against his newly acquired culture:

LAKUNLE: A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated,

Rejected, denounced, accursed,

Ex-communicated, archaic, degrading,

Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant.

Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable. (Soyinka, 7)

Lakunle tries to appeal to her emotions to marry him and uses his little knowledge of Western social life which he reads in his western books, all to no avail. Sidi commits herself to the principles of her culture and will not yield to his persuasion. She holds her Yoruba culture in high esteem and stays firm in her decision not to marry Lakunle unless he pays her bride price. She loves him, but not at the expense of changing or bending the culture of her land.

Lakunle also refers to the Yoruba culture as a past and irrelevant culture which should be left behind and encourages Sidi to embrace the western lifestyle. His intention is to bring about a change to the Yoruba culture with his little understanding of the western philosophy. Meanwhile, Sidi develops her self-esteem as soon as she is aware of the recently published magazine in which her photographs occupy a whole page while Baroka, the village head, covers a small page of the magazine. Sidi knows that her beauty and fame now goes beyond the Yoruba village of Ilujinle to Lagos city. This causes her to pay no attention to Baroka's proposal through his head wife, Sadiku, when she approaches her about Baroka's intention of marrying her.

SIDI: "You'll make no prey of Sidi with your wooing tongue

Not this Sidi whose fame has spread to Lagos

And beyond the seas" (Soyinka, 20)

She also rejects the western ways of love making such as kissing and romance which Lakunle introduces to her. She perceives it as a deceitful way of getting married to a woman. Sadiku also rejects Lakunle's refusal to pay the bride price which is why he advises him to "take a farm for season, one harvest will be enough to pay the price" (Soyinka, pg36).

Similarly Baroka rejects the western ways of life thus hindering the civilization of Ilujinle, which would occur through the introduction of motor roads, railways. He believes it will bring about sameness among the people, as revealed by Lakunle.

LAKUNLE: “Voluptuous beast! He loves this life too well”

To bear to part from it. And motor roads

And railways would do just that, forcing

Civilization at his door. He foresaw it

And he barred the gates...., (Soyinka, 25)

Baroka learns of Lakunle’s interest in marrying Sidi and confronts him for attempting to take Sidi as a wife without permission or legal right to do so. Meanwhile, he (Baroka) wants to add a new wife to his harem as the village head and sincerely wants to marry Sidi because of her fame and also to keep her in the Yoruba ways of life in order to transfer the Yoruba cultural values to the upcoming generations, being the village maidenhead. Sidi’s rejection of Baroka’s hand in marriage causes him to use the old man’s deception to lure her to his bed with sweet promises. He was able to achieve his mission by deceiving Sadiku that he has lost his manhood. He hopes to regain it when he marries Sidi.

BAROKA: “The time has come when I can fool myself

No more. I am no man, Sadiku. My manhood

Ended near a week ago” (Soyinka, 29)

Sadiku relays the news to Sidi so that they can mock him for the loss of his manhood. She invites her to attend a village women’s gathering where they will be able to make fun of Baroka, the lion of Ilujinle. Sidi shows excitement regarding the news from her speech.

SIDI: O-ho-o-o-o-!

...We won! We won! Hurray for womankind! (Soyinka, 33)

She is ready to go and mock Baroka's impotence though she receives warning from her suitor, Lakunle, not to go to Baroka's house, but she refuses his warning, hence she is de-flowered by Baroka, a sexually active man of sixty two years old. She returns to Lakunle and Sadiku with the news of how she was de-flowered by Baroka. Lakunle also shows unhappiness but still offers to marry her without paying a bride price since she is no more a virgin, but Sidi rejects his offer being a woman of culture and chooses to marry Baroka who agrees to pay the bride price. Sidi chooses to marry Baroka because he will pay her valuable bride price to honour her as it is significant in her culture. She loves Lakunle but rejects his proposal because he has no regard for his own Yoruba culture. The story ends with the marriage of Sidi and Baroka, and this shows the triumph of Yoruba culture over the Western culture.

Summarily, Soyinka uses Ilujinle village to represent Africa as a whole. Lakunle, the village school teacher, imbibes wrongly the Western culture which he uses against his Yoruba culture. He is cast off by Sidi, his lover, who prefers Yoruba ways of life by getting married to Baroka, the village head, who also believes that Yoruba culture and religious practices should not be replaced or go to extinction.

4.1 Significance of Yoruba Cultural and Religious Practices

As earlier stated, culture could be classified into material and immaterial concepts. The material concept includes physical expression of culture which covers expressions such as technology, architecture and art. The immaterial concept of culture is the intangible cultural heritage of a society which includes music, dance, kinship, marriage rites and so on. This section explores the cultural and religious practises of the Yoruba society and their

significance as illustrated in the play. These cultural and religious practices are acknowledged to influence and guide the conduct of the people living in it.

4.1.1 Moral Obligation of Women

Morality is an aspect of culture that deals with human behaviour; it is an intangible aspect of culture. Adisa et al. (2014, p.335) citing Mbiti (1969) declares that for the Yoruba, character (*iwa*) is the essence of their morals. Good character shows itself in so many ways; chastity before marriage and faithfulness among couple, hospitality, generosity, “kindness, justice, truth and integrity as essential virtues, avoiding stealing, keeping covenant and avoiding falsehood, protecting the poor and weak, especially women, giving honour and respect to older people, and avoiding hypocrisy”.

In *the Lion and the Jewel*, Soyinka depicts the morals of the Yoruba people through his characters in the play. Sidi exhibits this morality when she refuses to release the bucket of water she is carrying on her head to Lakunle who wants to relieve her of the load. The load represents commitment to hard work and, therefore, integrity. There is integrity in hard work. Sidi does not want to be deprived of this integrity which is key to her Yoruba culture. He sees her as an illiterate girl while she looks at his action as a shameful act because in Yoruba culture, it is part of the responsibility of a woman to fetch and carry loads on the head. Lakunle condemns her as it is not a civilized way of carrying loads.

LAKUNLE: “Let me take it.

SIDI: No.

LAKUNLE: Let me. (Seizes the pail”

SIDI: ... Have you no shame? (Soyinka, 1)

Soyinka also portrays Yoruba morality through the same character, Sidi, in another instance when she lost her virginity to Baroka. Lakunle willingly accept to marry her, but she refuses to marry him.

LAKUNLE: Dear Sidi, we shall forget the past.

But you will agree, it is only fair

That we forget the bride-price totally

Since you no longer can be called a maid. (Soyinka, 60)

Sidi turns down his marriage proposal because of her moral stand that a woman is bound to the man that deflowers her based on her words:

SIDI: "Marry who...? You though...

Did you really think that you, and I...

Why, did you think that after him,

I could endure the touch of another man?" (Soyinka, 63)

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. 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". In the play, Soyinka portrays the Yoruba culture of ethics and morality. Morality is the reason why Sidi marries Baroka even after he deceived her into his bed. It is also why she rejects Lakunle's proposal after she lost her virginity to Baroka. Yoruba culture requires women to live with one man, especially the man to whom they lost their virginity. It is taboo and against their

culture for women to court more than one man. Familusi (2012) supports this point in explaining that the Yoruba woman is duty bound to be faithful to her husband. “A Yoruba proverb says: *A k ii moko omo tan, ka tunmale omo*” meaning it is not proper to know one’s daughter’s husband and her concubine.

Sidi is a representative of the Yoruba ethical and moral life in the play. This moral value makes a woman to remain a virgin until her wedding day. Sidi maintains her virginity until she falls into Baroka’s hands and eventually gets married to him.

4.1.2 Procreation

The Yoruba people believe that human life is a continuous, starting from the spirits of the unborn child to the existence of a child to the spirits of departed ancestors. This makes a complete life cycle. In *the Lion and the Jewel*, Soyinka identifies the reality of the invisible world of the gods; the spirit, the unborn and the dead. According to the Yoruba, the ancestors regulate the human life. He uses the characters of Sidi and Sadiku to live out the essentiality of the religious Yoruba worldview. In the Yoruba mind, the ancestors, the living and the unborn are forces that revolve and give meaning to human life. Thus, bearing a child after marriage is a very significant part of the Yoruba culture. According to “Ngcobo (1988, p. 19), marriage among Africans is mainly an institution for control of procreation. Every woman is encouraged to marry and bear children in order to express her womanhood to the full. The basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman’s fertility to the husband’s family group”.

In the Yoruba worldview, child bearing makes a complete life cycle. Lakunle is the character in the play who does not see child bearing and other Yoruba cultural beliefs as necessary in marriage due to the influence of western culture which overrides his Yoruba culture; the society, therefore, refers to him as a mentally derailed being. They see him as someone who is in a state of confusion in between the two cultures and cannot use his newly acquired

Western culture in a way that will benefit his society; instead, he challenges the Yoruba tradition of child bearing.

In his conversation with Sidi, his lover, he promises her that she does not need to undergo the process of child bearing as he is not getting married to her to bear children.

LAKUNLE: “Sidi, I do not seek a wife

To fetch and carry,

To cook and scrub,

To bring forth children by the gross...

SIDI: Heaven forgive you! Do you now scorn

Child-bearing in a wife? (Soyinka,7,8)”

To him, child bearing is not important according to his new belief, which he uses against his Yoruba culture. According to Alaba (2004) as quoted by Ojo (2014), the primary purpose of marriage among the Yoruba people is to sustain Yoruba race through legitimate and responsible procreation. Sidi, an archetypal character of Yoruba culture, seeks to preserve her cultural heritage and rebukes him sharply because child bearing makes a complete family life and generational continuity. Sadiku also portrays the essentiality of child bearing in the family life of the Yoruba people when she prays for Sidi for her to give birth to children as she decides to marry Baroka:

SADIKU: “I invoke the fertile gods.

They will stay with you. May the time come soon when

You shall be as round-bellied as a full moon in a low sky”. (Soyinka, 64)

4.1.3 Songs and Dance

For the Yoruba of western Nigeria, music is an integral and all-pervasive part of their culture. Without it, “the people cannot properly create poetry, record history, educate children, celebrate at festivals, praise or abuse, entertain, marry, or even die” (Colin, 2004). Songs and dance in Yoruba land are means of communication such as, expression of joy, storytelling and praise of influential people and deities. According to Omojola (2012, p. 3), “music in traditional Nigerian societies provides an efficient means through which community-shared values and skills are transmitted from one generation to another”. In traditional Yoruba music, social meaning is communicated when structural elements are interpreted within social situations in which they are performed. Even when they are not performed within specific social situations, musical performances in Yoruba land still arouse specific feelings and reinforce social values usually associated with their traditional contexts of performance. Soyinka draws on Yoruba interpretation of life through music in the play and through the dance of the lost travellers, Sidi, Lankule and Sadiku. The play starts with the dances of Sidi, Lakunle and other village girls and miming of the lost traveller. A dance for the initial appearance of the photographer to the village who takes the photograph of Sidi and Baroka to print a magazine is also performed. The play also tells of Lakunle’s performance of a dance to Sidi and Sadiku during their discussion of the construction of the railway line from the nearest village to Ilujinle before Baroka bribes the surveyor. Similarly, as a show of excitement, Sadiku dances to mock Baroka when she heard of the loss of his manhood and when she further reveals the secret to Sidi and Lakunle.

SADIKU: Ask no questions my girl. Just join my victory dance. (Soyinka, 33)

Another instance where there is use of miming dance in the play is during the wrestling match between the wrestler and Baroka. Baroka mimes the wrestling stages to excite Sidi of his potency, and that is why he defeats the wrestler at the end of the game. She breaks into a

kind of shoulder dance and sings of his victory. At the end of the play, the playwright uses song and dance to show Sidi's acceptance to marry Baroka, an active man full of vigour.

SIDI: Now bless my wordly goods.

Come, sing to me of seeds

Of children, sired of the lion stock.

Mo te'ni. Mo te'ni.

Mo te'ni. Mo te'ni.

Sun mo mi, we mo mi

Sun mo mi, fa mo mi

Yarabi lo m'eyi t'o le d' omo ...(Soyinka, 64)

The interpretation is:

I have spread my mat, I have spread my mat

I have spread my mat, I have spread my mat

Come close to me, curdle me

Come close to me, entwine me

Only God knows which moment will produce a child

The Yorubas are singing people. Their songs are permeated with their beliefs and they employ songs in every sphere of their lives, in worship, in naming ceremonies, in weddings, in funerals, in wrestling, in cultivating the farm, in working, in going to war, in praising the rulers, in rocking babies to sleep and in many other activities. Such songs are usually accompanied by drumming and dancing (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005 cited by Omobola, 2014). Music and dance go hand-in-hand in Yoruba culture”.

Song, as part of a multi-media experience, is fundamental to the Yoruba culture. Songs and dance are highly cherished in Yoruba culture, used at the social gathering, naming ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, festive periods and also in ancestral worship. The ancestral worshippers sing and dance to praise their gods. Furthermore, societal norms and values are communicated through indigenous song, mime and dance.

4.1.4 Belief in deities

Yoruba people are spiritually-minded people. Among the religious system of the Yoruba people, as pointed out in the play, are the beliefs in divinities, spirits and ancestral worship, which are shown in the form of rituals and sacrifices. They believe that the divine plays an important role in their daily living. According to Greene (2010), religion permeated man's everyday life, moulding morals of the society and keeping man in harmony with his environment. 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, 33)

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 oath, 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 play, a girl swears by the god of *Ogun* in her conversation with Sidi to attest to the truth about the news of Sidi's photograph in a recently published western magazine:

SIDI: Is that the truth? Swear! Ask Ogun to

Strike you dead.

GIRL: Ogun strike me dead if I lie. (Soyinka, 11)

The Yoruba gods are fierce in anger and strike whoever offends them. This reflects in their prayer. In another instance, Sadiku also prays to the god of *Sango* for the restoration of Sidi's intellect when she speaks strange words, and according to her belief, Sidi has offended the angry gods unknowingly.

This belief is significant in the life of the Yoruba people because it brings about unity in the society; it also makes people to speak the truth as well as to assume good behaviour since a wrong behaviour provokes the gods into anger, and they can strike the offender. Likewise, Yoruba gods identify with human beings. The gods intervene and influence human struggle and are responsible for their misfortune and offer solution to it. Soyinka exemplifies this in the play where he tells of how the actions of human and the gods mutually influence each other, as seen in the conversation between Baroka and Sadiku.

BAROKA: "The time has come when I can fool myself

No more. I am no man, Sadiku. My manhood

Ended near a week ago.

SADIKU: The gods forbid!"

The gods must have mercy yet

BAROKA: “My veins of life run dry, my manhood gone!

Sango bear witness!” (Soyinka, 29)

Furthermore, Lakunle urges *Sango* not to interfere in his misfortune when he realises that Sidi lost her virginity to his enemy:

LAKUNLE: Let Sango and his lightning keep out of this. It

Is my cross,... (Soyinka, 60)

Furthermore, according to the Yoruba people, some occupations have a link with the worship and belief in *Ogun*. *Ogun* is principally believed to be the deity in charge of iron, which is iron for working and iron implements, weaponry; hence, he is the patron of blacksmiths, hunters and warriors and all who use metal in their occupations. *Ogun* is, however, known to be flexible and adaptive, changing and modernizing with society. In modern times, he has become the patron of motor vehicle mechanics and drivers (Abiola & Jeyifo, 2010).

According to Courlander (1973, p. 23), in Yoruba land “no hunter goes on a hunting expedition without giving offering to *Ogun* or paying due regard; no soldier goes to war without paying homage to *Ogun*; no truck driver considers himself safe until an offering is made to *Ogun*. All workers of steel and iron look up to *Ogun* for protection against accidents or for help in their work. If *Ogun* is neglected, he can cause very bad accidents and bloody battles. To avoid catastrophes, offerings to propitiate *Ogun* are offered by Yorubas. In this way, *Ogun* is seen as a symbol of the superior one, the conquering one”.

In Yoruba society, *Sango* (god of thunder) and *Ogun* (god of Iron) are known to be prominent gods who carry out punishment against unlawful acts. Every Yoruba man or woman fears the two gods. Abiodun (2004) argues that prior to the influence of Western culture, the Yoruba mostly avoided criminal acts because of the fear of being destroyed by the gods. Such fear deterred most of them from engaging in criminal acts. Sometimes, the gods strike the

offender with madness, death or any other evil, even before such an offender is known and brought before the traditional court. However, with modernization and westernization that the Yoruba people had experienced, less emphasis has been placed on these two gods as agents of supernatural punishment. The aesthetic of Yoruba culture and religion in their belief in deities is expressed in the words of Sofola (1994) stating that the Yoruba culture, particularly the non-material aspects, the humane, moralistic, humanistic and spiritual values are seen as superior, more meaningful, and more beneficial, in terms of salvaging the twentieth century world of man's inhumanity to man, greed, avarice heartless acquisitiveness and materialism.

4.1.5 Drumming

The activity of drummers is also a significant part of the Yoruba cultural practice that Soyinka presents in the play. According to Colin (2004), drumming, as one of the Yoruba traditions, provides drummers with a repository of cultural knowledge and practices from which to draw, while at the same time, offering them a creative outlet capable of reshaping and redefining those very same traditions. Drumming is a profession in the Yoruba land, and the drummers speak to the people through drums, and people readily understand. Colin (2004) supports this thus: "The technique employed in Yoruba drumming enables a drummer of sufficient skill and dexterity to literally "talk" with his drum. This is possible because Yoruba is a tonal language, and the specific drums used by Yoruba drummers allow them to mimic the tonal utterances in order to approximate actual speech." The drummers make the society interesting and lively; they drum to praise people at home, especially at ceremonies and so on, and they are usually rewarded with gifts or money. Soyinka shows this through the character of Sadiku:

SADIKU: Have you any money?

Don't be a miser. Will you let them go without
giving you a special performance?

LAKUNLE: If you think I care for their obscenity...

SADIKU: Come on, school teacher. They'll expect

it of you ... the man of you ... The man of learning ... the young sprig

of foreign wisdom... You must not demean yourself in

their eyes... you must give them money to perform for your lordship...(Soyinka, 56
& 57)

Lakunle did not want to give money to the drummers because he is not interested in all the aspects of the Yoruba culture, but Sadiku dips her hand into his pocket and brings out money which she gives to the drummers. They drum to her praise.

Drumming is significant because it plays an important role in physical, emotional, spiritual and communal life of the Yoruba people and their communities. As an essential part of Yoruba culture, drumming acts as a musical bridge between humans and gods, enabling the worshippers to appeal to the gods for assistance and intervention in their daily lives (Akpabot, 1983). The drummers play a crucial role in the religious experience of the Yoruba people and act as agents of cultural transmission through their drumming traditions and practices and by beating drums of Yoruba origin. Drummers perform to celebrate, mourn, entertain, praise and communicate during relevant situations like birth, death, planting, harvesting, peace and war situations.

4.1.6 Bride Price

Bride price is highly significant in the Yoruba cultural and religious practises. Soyinka depicts the importance of bride price to the Yoruba people throughout the plot of the play. As a common practice in Africa, payment of bride price is believed to be sacred, symbolic and has cultural and religious implication. Bride price, which can be in monetary or in the form of goods, is given to the family of the bride by the bridegroom and his family before or during

wedding ceremony. According to Farahmandian (2012), bride price is money or property given by the bridegroom to the family of his bride. Big bride price is regarded as a great honour to the bride and if a girl marries without the price it is assumed that she is not a virgin or she is not worthy to marry. Soyinka points out the conflict between western and African culture through the character of Lakunle who, in the play, is presented as being confused with the Western ideas. He disagrees with paying the bride price when he proposes to Sidi. He sees the payment of bride price as an old Yoruba culture which should be abolished. He believes that the Western idea should supersede the old Yoruba culture. He, therefore, seeks to turn the village of Ilujinle to a westernized village by changing all the Yoruba cultural beliefs to Western ideas. Sidi, who upholds strongly her Yoruba culture, refuses to marry Lakunle without paying her bride price as this idea is against her cultural belief. She will not give herself cheaply to Lakunle. She is also aware that without payment of bride price, the community will see her as a maid without honour.

SIDI: I shall marry you today, next week

Or any day you name.

But my bride-price must first be paid

Aha, now you turn away.

But I tell you, Lakunle, I must have

The full bride-price. Will you make me

A laughing-stock? Well, do as you please

But Sidi will not make herself

A cheap bowl for the village spit. (Soyinka,7)

Sidi is a virgin and a beautiful Yoruba girl who will not yield to Lakunle's persuasion except if he pays her bride price to honour her. She loves Lakunle but loves and respects her culture much more; that is why she insists on getting the bride-price before they get married.

SIDI: They will say I was no virgin

That I was forced to sell my shame

And marry you without a price.

LAKUNLE: An ignoble custom, infamous, ignominious

Shaming our heritage before the world. (Soyinka, 7)

Arowolaju (2005, p. 12) posits that "bride-price is traditionally or culturally required of a man for the woman. It is a social and family dishonour and disgrace for a bride not to be found as a virgin on the night of the wedding when the marriage is traditionally consummated. This means that premarital intimacy or intercourse is treated as a social taboo or even an abomination by the Yoruba, which no one thinks of committing".

The rebuke of Lakunle by Sidi, when he tries to kiss and cuddle her, is a contradiction to her culture and her reaction further restates the importance of the payment of bride price. Olarinmoye (2013) states that "the bride price is an instrument to ratify a marriage. It is one of the highest honours confirming a bride's value and womanhood giving a husband the full rights to the sexual, economic or procreative powers of his wife".

LAKUNLE: Bush-girl you are, bush-girl you'll always be;

Uncivilized and primitive- bush-girl!

I kissed you as all educated men-

And Christians- kiss their wives.

It is a way of civilized romance.

SIDI: A way you mean, to avoid

Payment of lawful bride-price

A cheating way, mean and miserly. (Soyinka, 9)

The significance of this cultural practise to the Yoruba people cannot be over-emphasized. Bride price is given to the family of the bride in gratitude of her nurturing from infancy to maturity. Payment of the bride price confirms the bridegroom as the legal owner of the bride and comes along with parental blessing for a fruitful union. It demonstrates the ability of the man to continue to take care of their daughter as they begin life's journey together. Women whose bride prices are not paid before marriage often feel cheated and the man considered a cheat. A marriage is further considered illegal and incomplete when the bride price is still outstanding, and until the man does the right thing, the woman's family will not accept him as an in-law.

4.1.7 Polygamy

Polygamy is a significant feature of the Yoruba cultural life, which is traditionally acceptable. It is a common practice among the Yoruba people. It allows men to marry more than one wife as he desires, provided he can provide for them. Horton (1993) notes that the marriage customs of the Yorubas permit polygamy and incestuous marriages, as well as the practice of marrying a dead male relative's widow and adopting his children. The traditional Yoruba society is agrarian in nature, which requires a large output of labour, this, the father gets from the number of wives he marries and the number of children he has. According to Falola (2001), a large family provides the labour necessary for the maintenance and growth of the business for those in agrarian production. He adds that the tradition allows widow inheritance, in which a man marries the widow of a deceased brother. This implies that when a married man dies, his younger brother has the right to remarry any of the brother's wives, if

he wishes. This practice is of significance because it ensures that the woman and her children are under care, economically and socially. Omobola (2014) stated that the “Yoruba people did not practice polygamy in the sense that it is understood today. A man had more than one wife usually because of his office, for instance, the king. At other times, rich and successful farmers take on more than one wife for reasons of manpower to keep up the workload on the farms. In addition, brothers take on their deceased brother’s widow because she remains a member of the family. Meanwhile, to have children by the widow is optional and oftentimes decided by the entire family”.

Soyinka portrays this Yoruba culture in the play using the character of Sadiku, Baroka’s head wife, when she ridicules Baroka’s loss of manhood. She recalls how his father also lost his manhood before his death after which she married Baroka and became his senior wife.

SADIKU: So we did for you too did we? We did for you in the end.

A- ya-ya-ya ... we women undid you in the end. I was
there when it happened to your father, the great Okiki. I did for him,
I, the youngest and freshest of the wives. I killed him with my strength
(Soyinka, 32)

Sadiku is a good representative of this Yoruba tradition. She understands her role within the polygamous setup, which is why she tries to woo Sidi, the village girl, for her husband. Sidi rejects his proposal because it is coming after her fame is known to the world. Sadiku then reminds her of the benefit of being another wife to the Bale (Chief).

SADIKU: Sidi, have you considered what a life of bliss awaits you?

Baroka swears to take no other wife after you.

Do you know what it is to be the Bale’s last wife?...

I'll tell you. When he dies – and that should not be long;
even the Lion has to die sometime- well, when he does,
it means that you will have the honour of being the senior
wife of the new Bale. And just think, until Baroka dies,
you shall be his favourite. No living in the outhouses for
you, my girl. Your place will always be in the palace;
first as the latest bride, and afterwards, as the head of the
new harem... it is a rich life, Sidi. I know. I have been
in that position for forty-one years. (Soyinka, 20)

Sadiku explains the benefit of wife inheritance to Sidi; whenever the Bale dies, the new Bale inherits the wives of the deceased, and his last wife will be the head wife of the new Bale and receive all glory of the family.

Specifically, polygamy is significant such that the wives and the children, collectively, can contribute to the progress of farm work. This ensures that widows are under economic protection in the family, which keeps the society in peace and harmony.

4.1.8 Family life

Soyinka praises the traditional Yoruba life and condemns individualism. He mocks the western ways, as represented by Lakunle's character. "The Yoruba traditional family system plays significant roles in all spheres of life in the society. The family is the most sacred and significant institution to the Yoruba, who are child-oriented, ruled by the elderly and controlled by adults. The family is an effective unit of political control, religious affiliation, resource allocation and assurance of safety. It is also the most effective agent of socialization. The family teaches the first lessons in discipline, personal gratitude and affection" (Oyeniyi,

2012). Yoruba family, like every other family in the world, comprises the father, mother and children. Each position has defined household duties and plays a significant role in social control such as father and mother motivating children to conform to societal norms and values. Every individual in indigenous Yoruba setting belongs to a family and has the responsibility of protecting the image of the family by not performing shameful acts in the society. The Yoruba people are guided by social values such as religion, morals, economics, politics and so on. The characteristics of the Yoruba social values include religiosity, respect for authority and hospitality. Each family exposes their children to the virtues of communal life also the societal norms and values. These guide them in exhibiting positive conducts that promote and protect the good image of the family and eschew negative activities that can mar it. The Yoruba people control social menace in the society through norms and values which characterize their cultural heritage. Any member of a family who goes against the accepted norms will be disgraced in the society. The Yoruba family ties are strong in regulating the behaviour of its members and ensuring adequate provision of social security and justice (Okunola & Ojo, 2012). Adejumo (2010) explains that in the Yoruba society, satire is a form of weapon for public ridicule used among the Yoruba to checkmate erring members of the society. It is also used as a form of traditional judicial system. The pre-colonial traditional period was non-violent, and western intrusion battered the Yoruba traditional family system. In the Yoruba community, societal norms and values are highly honoured. Parents, as well as the mass media, educate children to uphold the right social values of good behaviour, hard work and so on, as this is the way to succeed in life.

4.2 Conflict between the Yoruba cultural beliefs and Western ideas

Cultural conflict is known as a conflict of behaviour, values and lifestyles that arises as a result of intentional or unintentional integration of dissimilar and unrelated cultures. In this study, it is seen as conflict between the western culture and the Yoruba culture, as illustrated

in the play *The lion and the Jewel*. It is a conflict that arose as a result of colonisation. Adewoye (1984) expresses his view on the conflicts between westernization and traditionalism as a clash faced by individuals or societies. This conflict is more echoed in the philosophy and lifestyle of the older generation and the contemporary 21st century generation. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the characters, Baroka, Sadiku and Sidi are representations of the Yoruba culture while Lakunle is a depiction of the western culture. Cultural conflict as portrayed in the play is reflected in the non-acceptance of the ideas of Lakunle by Baroka, Sadiku and Sidi and vice versa.

Firstly, the idea of the characters on marriage is an example of confusion and conflict between the two cultures.

LAKUNLE: Sidi, I seek a friend in need.

An equal partner in my race of life. (Soyinka, 8)

Here, he intends to introduce the western notion of monogamy to the Yoruba society as part of his transformation agenda of Ilujinle to a modern village. He also wants to ensure that there are equal rights between him and his wife, therefore, women in the community should exercise the same equal rights with their men. This contradicts Yoruba's cultural belief where women are to perform their duties as wives in the family, and not strive with the husband in the family or in the society.

Lakunle's confusion is seen where he equally equates paying of the bride price to buying a heifer off the market stall (Soyinka, 8). This is totally unacceptable in the Yoruba setting where payment of the bride price is held in high esteem.

He also offers her new ways of marrying a woman, the western system of marriage process where courtship, 'romance', kissing' are introduced (Soyinka, 9). In the Yoruba system of

marriage, romance and kissing does not exist during courtship and is seen as perversion. This is seen in the reaction of Sidi to Lakunle when he kisses her:

SIDI: No don't! I tell you I dislike

This strange unhealthy mouthing you perform.

Every time, your action deceives me

Making me think that you merely wish

To whisper something in my ear.

Then comes this licking of my lips with yours.

It's so unclean. (Soyinka, 9)

Lakunle, in aspiring to reforming and changing the village of Ilujinle into a civilized society expresses his plans:

LAKUNLE: Within a year or two, I swear,

This town shall see a transformation

Bride-price will be a thing forgotten

And wives shall take their place by men

A motor road will pass this spot

And bring the city ways to us

We'll buy saucepans for all the women

Clay pots are crude and unhygienic

No man shall take more wives than one...(Soyinka,37)

Lakunle's expression is totally a move away from the typical Yoruba culture of polygamy and payment of the bride price. The outright rejection of Lakunle's plan by Baroka the Bale is seen by the sad expression of Lakunle, referring to Baroka while discussing with Sadiku and Sidi:

LAKUNLE: Is it for nothing he is called the Fox?

His wiliness is known even in the larger towns.

Did you never hear

Of how he foiled the Public Works attempt

To build the railway through Ilujinle

Sworn against our progress...

Adventure, success, civilization, fame, international conspicuosity... it was

All within the grasp of Ilujinle... (Soyinka, 24)

Baroka, the Bale and a conformist of the old Yoruba cultural system who is not in support of change, uses his power as the head of the Yoruba race to fight against it. He was accused of preventing progress in Ilujinle, which is in form of trade, railway construction, fame and other western attractions.

It is seen that cultural conflict in the play arose as a result of the perception of the ideal values of the Yoruba rigidity to change and determination to preserve their cultural heritage on the traditional Yoruba characters, and the improper assimilation and erroneous lives out of the western cultures he reads about in western books as he explains:

LAKUNLE: And now I know I am the biggest fool

That ever walked this earth

There are women to be found

In every town or village in these parts,

And everyone a virgin

But I obey my books.' (Soyinka, 61)

In addition, a conflict of value, with respect to the Yoruba virtue of humility, is seen in the arrogant response of Sidi after her image appears in the Lagos magazine. This is observed in her conversation with Sadiku when she brings the news of Baroka's intention to marry her.

SADIKU: Will you be Baroka's own jewel?

Will you be his sweetest princess, soothing him on weary

nights? What answer shall I give my lord?

SIDI: Sadiku, head of the Lion's wives.

You'll make no prey of Sidi whose fame has spread to Lagos

And beyond the seas.

Why did Baroka not request my hand before the stranger

Brought his book of images?

Why did the Lion not bestow his gift

Before my face was lauded to the world?

Can you not see? Because he sees my worth

Increased and multiplied above his own;

Because he can already hear

The ballad-makers and their songs

In praise of Sidi, the incomparable,

While the Lion is forgotten.

The school-man here has taught me certain things

And my images have taught me all the rest. (Soyinka, 20 & 21)

Soyinka uses the magazine as representing the destructive element of western culture. The fact that Sidi becomes arrogant after her picture appears in the magazine and abandons the caution and humility of her Yoruba culture led to her downfall in the end. However, the goodness of the Yoruba culture saves her as Yoruba culture demands that whoever disvirgins a young maiden, must marry her.

By extension, based on a look into the contemporary Yoruba society, it is evident that cultural conflict, coupled with its related confusion, is highly visible. Virginity is no more cherished, and polygamy has been highly replaced with one man one wife. Divorce is on the increase, childbearing is no longer important in marriage, premarital sex is now a norm among the contemporary youth, equality between man and woman in the family and society is being promoted, while moral decadence and ill-discipline is rampant in the society. The continuous and long-lasting influences of western culture are being aided by globalization, mass media and the entertainment industry and western literature. Additionally, the introduction of western education into the Yoruba society has reinforced and elevated the belief that western culture is superior to that of the Yoruba culture, thereby permitting the continual neglect and disregard for the Yoruba culture.

4.3 Possibility of coexistence of the best Yoruba culture and western culture

In the era of globalization and economic integration, where no country could be said to be an island, cultural interaction and the subsequent cultural conflict is indisputable. However, a peaceful co-existence of different cultures that have interacted with each other needed to curtail the issue of cultural conflict. This can be achieved through respect for each culture and adoption of the best of each of the interacted cultures without promoting the superiority of one above the other, which could further lead to neglect of the so-called inferior culture. In *the Lion and the Jewel*, the playwright illustrates through the characters the possibility of co-existence and adoption of the western and Yoruba culture which is a study case for this research.

Baroka, though a traditionally inclined Yoruba leader, confessed in his talk with Sidi that he is open and willing to accept change.

BAROKA: The town-dwellers have made up tales

Of the backwardness of Ilujinle

Until it hurts Baroka, who holds

The welfare of his people deep at heart.

Now, if we do this thing, it will prove more

Than any single town has done!

I do not hate progress, only its nature

Which makes all roofs and faces look the same. (Soyinka,52)

He also realizes the need to learn from Lakunle, the school teacher, and exploit the knowledge for the good of the society.

BAROKA: The proof of wisdom is the wish to learn

Even from children. And the haste of youth

Must learn its temper from the gloss

The school teacher and I must learn one from the other.

Is this not right? (Soyinka,54)

Furthermore, in his conversation with Sidi, he emphasizes that the old Yoruba culture and the western culture can co-exist without displacing one another.

BAROKA: The old must flow into the new, Sidi,

Not blind itself or stand foolishly apart. (Soyinka,54)

In the play, Soyinka shows the utilization of western technology (stamping machine) by Baroka and its benefit to the community as said by Baroka. The imprint of the image of Sidi on stamps for the promotion of their village could also be figured out as an idea from western civilization.

BAROKA: The work dear child, of the palace blacksmiths

Built in full secrecy. All is not well with it-

But I will find the cause and then Ilujinle

Will boast its own tax on paper, made with

Stamps like this. For long I dreamt it

And here it stands, child of my thoughts.

I hope you will not think it too great

A burden, to carry the country's mail

Of course be modest. We shall begin

By cutting stamps for our own village alone. (Soyinka ,51 & 52)

Sidi as well agrees with the words of the bale, Boroka.

SIDI: Everything you say, Bale,

Seems wise to me. (Soyinka, 54)

Generally, the words of Baroka indicate that he does not totally reject the western culture that comes along with civilization. However, it is seen that Baroka decides to choose the best part of western civilization that would be of benefit to his community without having to abandon his traditional culture and lifestyle. This is a verification of the possibility of co-existence of two dissimilar cultures in a community.

Chapter Five

Yoruba Culture and Religion in Death and the King Horseman

5.0 Background: The Legacy of Human Sacrifice in Yoruba culture

Human sacrifice is prevalent in Africa (Mbogoni, 2013); it is not peculiar to the Yoruba society, and the motives behind it vary from one African country to the other. In some African countries, people have been sacrificed as a means to appease the deities. The sacrificial being is offered to deities in exchange for some supernatural help. The Asante of Ghana also believes in the life after, that in hereafter, the dead continue to live and do what they had done in life. According to Mbogoni (2013), the shedding of human blood to accompany the funerals of Asante's kings is not unusual. They believe that the king would need some people to comfort him in the same manner that he had enjoyed while alive. Similar to Elesin's role, Mbogoni noted that the Asante willingly offer themselves to accompany their dead king to the world beyond. Ayi Kwei Armah, a Ghanaian novelist in his novel, *the Healer*, explicates the importance of Asante's human sacrifice following the death of a king:

A king, after all, must have slaves and attendants to ease his passage through the world. When the time comes for a king to go on the last journeys, the journeys into death, the royals thought it necessary to provide him with slaves. Just as slaves had made his days on earth easy so slaves should be sent with him to death; they should ease every passage of his spirit; they would give the spirit all the luxury the body had grown accustomed to (1978, p. 22).

According to Wrigley (1996), among the Bagandas, a tribe in Uganda, human sacrifice is required for an important occasions such as *Okukula kwa kabaka* meaning a king's coming of age which is done two or three years after his accession to the throne to ameliorate the health

of a king and the death of a king. Wrigley (1996) defines the coming of age of the king of Baganda as usually involving an elaborate nine-day sacrifice of rituals and journeys attended by much killing. The essence is that the king's life though endless, would be long. Roscoe (1973), notes that the king's death cost human blood because Bagandas believe that the victims provide a befitting entourage for the departed king, which is similar to Elesin's role, however, the victims in this case, are not duty-bound like Elesin.

In the Yoruba worldview, ritual sacrifice is not an alien custom. The Yoruba people strongly uphold the belief that communal interest and well-being clearly supersede that of any individual, be it king or any chief. According to Ojaide (2012) "order to Africans is perceived as natural and ritualistic to ensure harmony, the absence of which will bring calamity to the whole group. For this reason, an individual could be sacrificed to avoid a war, plague, or any anticipated communal disaster. In other words, the individual can be sacrificed for the well-being of the community". It is further believed that after the death of the communal sacrificial lamb who could be a male or a female, an adult or a minor or sometimes, specifically a virgin, he or she is assumed to begin the role of a mediator between the people and the world. Kumar (2012) asserts that his act will reinforce the bridge between the ancestors or gods and the living while establishing a close knit connection between the phenomena of conception, birth, life and death, as a continuum.

Soyinka, in an interview with Appiah (1995, p. 223), explains the Yoruba philosophy of life, as well as the justification for ritual:

We believe that there are various areas of existence, all of which interact
Interlock in a pattern of continuity: the world of the ancestors,
the world of the living, and the world of the unborn. The
process of transition among these various worlds is a

continuing one and one which is totally ameliorated.

For instance, the function of seasonal ceremonies, is

in fact allied to the ease of transition among these various worlds.

Soyinka unravels the peculiar nature of the Yoruba people as a superstitious society. The Yoruba people are known, the world over, for their homogenous population and fame in world affairs, history, politics, tradition and cultural heritage. Ojo (2012) observes that their traditions are very unique, and also, their socio-cultural institutions are distinct. It is noteworthy that the play, *Death and the King's Horseman* exhibits rich cultural traditions of the Yoruba race. Its role in Yoruba cultural education, traditional political institutions and socio-economic situations cannot be over-emphasised because basically, it is the foundation of Yoruba traditional religion and theology. Dasyuva (2004) asserts that *Death and the King's Horseman* is perhaps the most controversial of all the plays of Wole Soyinka. This is probably so because of its complex dramatic form, its unique poetry and linguistic hybridity. These features especially point to the dynamics of the significant cultural codes with which both the formal organisation of the play, as well as its internal organisation cohere to engender meaning. To resolve the issue of complexity, many critics like Oyin Ogunba (1975), Femi Osofisan (1978), Femi Fatoba (1982), Gotrick Kacke (1984), Steve Ogunde (1985), Charity Pever-Ge (1988), Mathew Umukoro (1990), James Gibbs (1991) and Dasyuva Ademola (2004) have worked on the play to demystify and shed more light on the seemingly obscure dramatic work.

The Horseman in the Yoruba society is not just a horse rider or an orderly of the king, but he is like a Marshal or Prime Minister to the *Alafin* (King). The activities and responsibilities of the Horseman have been a long-term standing order in the Yoruba community, and one of such is the accompanying of the king to the world beyond when he (king) dies, which is referred to as sacrifice. Mbiti (2006) noted that most African people accept or acknowledge

God as the final guardian of law and order and of the moral and ethical codes. The breaking of such orders, whether by the individual or group, is ultimately an offence by the corporate body of society. So it is, with the order of the sacrifice of the Horseman, which is not expected to be broken. Sacrificing such an honourable person is not an easy task, yet his death is essential for the survival of the society in the future. As the prime saviour of the society, he must safeguard the spiritual well-being of the society. It is his duty to enhance the spiritual well-being of his community (Kumar, 2012).

5.1 Synopsis of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*

It remains an obvious fact that Soyinka fully explores the resources of Yoruba cultural values in his play, *Death and the King's Horseman*. He draws mainly from the rich Yoruba traditional philosophy, oral lores and mythology. Commenting on the text, Ogunba (1996) as quoted by Dasyuva (2004), insists that Soyinka's Horseman is the traditional African world in which traditional rites, in this case, transformative rites, play a dominant part. In a more general sense, transformative rites involve different kinds of performance expressed in various ways for the purpose of self or communal rejuvenation.

The aura of authenticity and cultural identity that *Death and the King's Horseman* comes with can be traced to African oral literature. The oral lores weaved into the play are not extracted from external cultural traditions while they remain unadulterated by western influences in the presence of external influences. *Death and the King's Horseman* bears the similitude of African literature, as perceived by Akporobaro (2010). African literature constitutes the most authentic expression of the creative intelligence and worldview of African people. Considering this, it is safe to believe that Horseman is a mode for the transmission of cultural traditions of the Yoruba people. The playwright painstakingly

provides a unique and invaluable insight into the cultural life which constitutes the beliefs, customs, values and aspirations of the Yoruba people.

The play begins with the king's horseman (Elesin Oba) parading through the street together with the drummers and praise singers in expectation of the performance of statutory duty.

Elesin is a prominent character in the play that serves as an embodiment of culture and a symbol of the ancient '*abobaku*,' meaning one who accompanies the king in their journey (final glorious exit) to the great beyond. Kumar (2012) corroborates this, and according to the "native tradition, when the king dies, he must be followed by his favourite horseman, Chief Horseman, and his dog to the eternal world, after a month of his death. Soyinka depicts the ritual practice of Yoruba through the character of Joseph who mentioned that the practice is a native law and custom.

JOSEPH: It is a native law and custom.

The king dies last month. Tonight is his burial.

But before they can bury him, the Elesin must die so as to accompany him to heaven. (Soyinka, 29)

Elesin himself clearly states his mission and how it affects the royalty;

ELESIN: Nothing. What! Has no one told you yet?

I go to keep my friend and master company

Who says the mouth does not believe in

'No, I have chewed all that before?' I say I have.

The world is not a constant honey-pot.

Where I found little I made do with little.

Where there was plenty I gorged myself.

My master's hands and mine have always

Dipped together and, home or sacred feast,
The bowl was beaten bronze, the meats
So succulent our teeth accused us of neglect.
We shared the choicest of the season's
Harvest of yams. How my friend would read
Desire in my eyes before I knew the cause-
However rare, however precious, it was mine. (Soyinka, 13)

Against this backdrop, *Elesin* (the king's horseman) freely enjoys his sojourn on earth; as such, he is not deprived of any benefit deemed to the royalty. This unbridled cultural liberty eventually turns into his undoing. Soyinka provides a glimpse into such Eldora do;

PRAISE- SINGER: Your name will be like the sweet berry a child places under his tongue to sweeten the passage of food. The world will never spit it out.

ELESIN: Come then. This market is my roost. When I come among the women, I am a chicken with a hundred mothers. I become a monarch whose palace is built with tenderness and beauty".

PRAISE- SINGER: They love to spoil you but beware. The hands of women also weaken the unwary.

ELESIN: This night I'll lay my head upon their lap and go to sleep.

This night, I'll touch feet with their feet in a dance that is no longer of this earth.
But the smell of their flesh, their sweat, the smell of indigo in their cloth, this is the last air I wish to breathe as I go to meet my great forebears. (Soyinka, 10)

The dialogue between *Elesin* and his praise singer unveils the state of mind of a cultural slave who is perceived as the custodian of the Yoruba culture on the rite of passage. The diction used is metaphoric as it sheds light on the personality of the most revered *Elesin*. The praise

singer calls the attention of his subject to the untold beauty that awaits him once he summons the courage to leave. This is in line with the Yoruba philosophy that you do not speak ill of the dead. In the Yoruba myth, a dead person automatically becomes an ancestor that wields greater powers than humans. They are believed to visit the world anytime their loved ones are in trouble and need supernatural assistance. Hence, ancestors are perceived to be another *deux ex machine*. Sometimes, the spirit of the dead is invoked to ask pertinent questions that affect the lives of living. It may be solely for settling disputes that have so much degenerated among the loved ones of the dead. The dead are seen as better custodians of culture which may be fast forgotten by the younger ones. Adisa et al. (2014) state that in African notion, death is an experience that is pertinent to everybody. The Yoruba, like all African people, believe in life after death. That is, man continues to live in another form even after his death. However, what is strong among all people is the belief in the living-dead who are considered the ancestors. Considering this backdrop, *Elesin* faces the decision of immortality through wilful death or unending shame and reproach of a coward who refuses to remain brave in the face of daunting challenges.

Elesin seems so fearful with his utterances. The picture of someone afraid of treading an unknown path is really evident here. Like a normal human with blood flowing in his veins, he quietly wishes to stay a bit longer. ‘This market is my roost’ (Soyinka, 8), as clearly stated by him, signifies this. In the Yoruba world view, the planet earth is synonymous to the market. It is also pertinent to note that they are used interchangeably to achieve some special effect. Yoruba people believe that anybody given birth to has come to transact in a very big or global market called earth (*aye*). According to Adeeko (2000), “the market square facilitates more than just the exchange of goods and services for humans. Spirits, goblins, and other ethereal characters are believed to come there to buy and sell, and to bless and curse humans” as well. To them, people assume their positions in whatever capacity they are privileged to

operate when they are born and quit the market when death closes their eyes. They also believe that some quit the market earlier than others due to pre-destination (*ori*) while others leave the stage when they are fully grown and accomplished. In the same view, Alamu (2004) maintains that the essence of man is what the Yoruba call *Ori*, which has close relationships with the destiny of man. This Yoruba philosophy matches that of William Shakespeare who believes that this world is a stage, and human beings are mere actors who stage the play and exit after playing their roles (*As You Like it*, cited in Dolan, 2000)

Elesin (the king's horseman) does not want to lose the opportunity of being shielded from the harsh reality of the unknown since this market is now his roost. He sees the world as a resting place, no wonder he finds nothing discomfoting in having a sexual escapade with a virgin to quench his thirst for worldly pleasures he claims to leave behind in a couple of minutes. The praise singer reels out a note of timely warning. Just like Samson longed for Delilah's laps and still achieves the much awaited victory against the Philistines (Judges, Chapter 13), *Elesin* wanted to ride on the chariot of lustful fire to 'paradise'. Meanwhile the praise singer warns him of the danger of delay in fulfilling his responsibility.

PRAISE- SINGER: They love to spoil you but beware.

The hands of women also weaken the unwary (Soyinka, 24)

The praise singer serves as a check on the excesses of *Elesin's* indiscreet wantonness, but he is not sensitive, he lingers until his earthly desires overwhelm him and eventually override his responsibility.

Meanwhile, Simon Pilkings the colonial district officer arrests *Elesin* in order to stop him from committing ritual suicide, what he sees as 'barbaric custom' (Soyinka, 58). Meanwhile, *Elesin's* son, Olunde, a medical student in England returns home to perform burial practice

for his father, his anger kindles against Pilkings' arrogance in intervening in the Yoruba culture he knows nothing about. At the same time, he feels shameful at his father's failure of his duty in which his entire life revolves. He fears the disaster that could happen to the community due to Pilkings' interruption. In order to return honour to his family and redeem the community of imminent danger, he commits suicide. Eventually, when Elesin sees the corpse of his son Olunde, he could not face the shame and he also kills himself.

5.2 Significance of Yoruba Cultural and Religious Practices in *Death and the King's Horseman*

5.2.1 Clothing as Necessity and Cultural Symbol in *Death and the King's Horseman*

Clothing is a significant factor in human development. This development came as a result of the efforts of man to cover his nakedness and protect himself from shame and the harsh elements of life (Payne, 1965). The idea of covering the body started from the Garden of Eden (Genesis, 1999, Chapter 3) when the first man (Adam) discovered that he was naked. He decided to cover his nakedness with leaves which were the first immediate materials available to him. Man later graduated to the use of animal skin (hide and skin) which progressed into tanning. Tanning, according to Katrak (1986), involves a series of processes whereby raw skins and hides are converted into more durable commodities. These processes are aimed at rendering the skin or hide durable by making it not putrefactive and at the same time yielding a product with technical characteristics suitable for a wide variety of purposes (Akinbileje, 2010). Oyetade (2004) affirms this as he states the reason why humans are clothed:

Bi o si aso

bi o si ejigba ileke

oniruuru idi la ba ma a ri

bi i Ikoko

bi oowo

bi i iki

bi agbaarin

omo enikan iba bosoole won jobo

omo enikan iba bosoole won a jomodo

Enikan iba bosoole won a jora kunugba

Oniwaanu bosoole o kun bi iru esin

Iwa nmu moja alekan

Igi meta la ba se lore

E je a segi owu lore

Eeyan to ba regbonse

Ko ma fewe owu nudi

Ojo a ba ku

Aso ni I sin ni

TRANSLATON:

If there were no cloth

If there were no beads

We would have seen different kinds of buttocks

Like lumps

Like boils

Like swollen hips

Like grape-sized swelling

If naked, some people would look like monkeys

If naked, some people would look like wart-hogs (*phacocoerus africanus* after)

If naked, some people would look like Western Hartebeestes (*Bubalis major*)

Oniwaanu puts off his cloths he still remains full like the horse tail

‘Good character’ (inner beauty) the offspring of Alekan

Three types of tree should be shown kindness

“Let us show kindness to the cotton tree

Anyone who goes (to the bush) to relieve him/ herself

Should not use the leaves of the cotton tree to clean up

On the day we die

Cloth will be used to wrap us for burial” (Oyetade.2004)

In *Death and The King's Horseman*, it is crystal clear that Yoruba traditional attires are no longer merely used as attires to adorn the body occasionally, but have also become the status symbol of wealth, socio-cultural and religious identity of individuals. In our contemporary society, clothes have not lost their traditional savour, although there has been a lot of improvement in their production, design and use. Just as Oyetade (2004) unveils the idea that human beings would have been ridiculously exposed without cloths, Soyinka, through the character portraiture 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.

The Yoruba traditional clothing is an all-encompassing fashion fabric in the cultural context. Though there are foreign influences in the use of these traditional wears 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:

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, 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 cursory look at the conversation throws more light to the importance of dressing in the Yoruba society and a signifier for the Africans. Dresses are not just worn anyhow, but communicate a lot, as do our language. Diyaolu (2010) submits that the “Yoruba people, among other tribes, attach considerable importance to their appearance in the 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 greet 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, 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. 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 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).

Suffice to say that some proverbs are pure indicative of the premium value placed on clothing in the Yoruba community, which further buttress what Soyinka tries to portray in his play:

Irinisi ni iseni lojo

A good dress-sense commands respect

Bi a ba rinrin iya, ti a woso ise wo lu, igbakigba ni won fi I bomi fun ni mu

If we walk disorderly and dress raggedly into the town, an unwholesome calabash will be used to serve one drinking water.

Eni to kan akanpo ewu ti kuro ni ile san tabi ko san

The nobility of someone who is dressed in gorgeous garments is without qualms.

Akinbileje (2010) explains that the measure of respect that is accorded an individual, more often than not, is determined by the quality and value of his or her outlook. Personality here means the total outlook or appearance of a person: it includes clothing and its accessories. The underlying philosophy of these proverbs is admiration and honour. Among the Yoruba, greeting is accorded a very important value; a man or woman is greeted respectfully according to his age, status or dress code. Sometimes a well-dressed person is acknowledged in a gathering, and his vocal contribution accepted while other people who are casually

dressed are often ignored or placed lower than the well-dressed. No wonder Elesin Oba (the king's horseman) refuses to be carried away by the women who eulogised him and sang his praises when he was not clothed with a garment of honour to distinguish him from the multitudes (Soyinka, 14 &15).

The first proverb centres not only on the dress but the general comportment of a person. It refers to whatever look a person wears that sums up the way that person is accessed. Diyaolu, (2010) buttresses the fact that, “the dress of an individual is an assemblage of modifications of the body or supplements to the body (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992). It includes a long list of possible direct modifications of the body such as coiffed hair, coloured skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as garments, jewellery, accessories, and other categories of items added to the body”. The first proverb informs us that the outward appearance of a person speaks volumes on what the general opinion of people will be shaped. A person can be assumed to be proud with his disposition or pass of as a humble personality. It is a general perception that someone who dresses well and covers his or her nakedness properly is tagged responsible. This proverb explains that people of questionable traits and unwholesome businesses will not find such decent people appealing, hence they will find it difficult to approach them with their dirty ‘theatrics’. One can easily infer through the first proverb that to be less vulnerable in a world like ours, people should dress in the same way they want to be addressed. The other proverbs also reiterate the idea that clothes are signifiers of a person's status and dress sense.

5.2.2 Drumming as a Symbol of Yoruba Culture in *Death and the King's Horseman*

Drumming in Yoruba culture is seen as the basis of Yoruba influential music. It is found in the courts of the Yoruba monarch, the house of the noble and royal families. The Yoruba gods also have their individual drum which they listen to and enjoy. Adegbite (1988) gives a reason for this. In his words “appropriate drums must be used for particular *orisa*, otherwise,

they [the devotees] will incur the wrath of their tutelary deity” (Adegbite, 1988). It can be accompanied with songs, chants and dance during ceremonies and worship. Drums are used in worship to evoke the presence of the deity. According to Euba (1990) “Drumming is the one imbued with the greatest spiritual significance. Drum ensembles are generally of two main categories-sacred and social. Even though these two categories are not mutually exclusive, Yoruba sacred ensembles are dominated by uni-embranophonic (singleheaded) membrane drums. Prominent examples include cylindrical drums like *igbin*, *ipese*, and *ogidan*, each of which, like most sacred drums, is associated with a specific spirit or deity”.

The importance of drums in Yoruba traditional ceremonies and worship cannot be overstressed. They serve as the media through which the people are delighted in communing with their God and gods. Yoruba drums communicate, like most African musical instruments, though they vary, and the untutored ear cannot understand the rhythms of drums. To the inexperienced ear, the complex rhythms produced by various drums in a performance may be difficult to comprehend. This, we see in the character of Joseph when Pilkings and Jane do not understand the sound and meaning of drumming in the community which to them constitutes noise while to the drummers and the indigenous people, it has a vital role to the wedding ceremony of Elesin and the ritual. Pilkings asks Joseph: “What’s the drumming about?” (Soyinka, 32) His response is that he does not know. He does not know the meaning because he is inexperienced. However, to those who understand the language of the drum, the sound produced by each drum is unique, and the resultant music of the patterns of the individual member drums is still more exclusive. The rhythm of the Yoruba drum music is not only interpreted by way of dancing; it can also be interpreted textually. This means that the drum, especially the leading drum, is capable of playing phrases or even sentences verbalized by a chant. This is possible because when a Yoruba master drummer recites the *oriki* (praise) of an *Orisa* (deity) on his drum, he does not merely play a set of rhythms like

most other drums do within an ensemble; he verbalizes his knowledge of the *oriki* and of the *Orisa* on his drum. The tonal characteristics of the Yoruba language make the reproduction possible (Laoye, 1990).

The Yoruba drum is closely related to vocal music, even though on many occasions, the "voice" is not that of human beings but of the drums (Adegbite, 1988). He highlighted two roles of drums in traditional Yoruba religion: "One function is to enable the worshippers of the gods to bridge the gap between the visible and invisible worlds and bring them into direct contact with all those supernatural forces that control the fate of man. Apart from their role as instrumental accompaniment to recitations, chants and songs during religious ceremonies, drums provide the medium through which the worshippers are in constant communion with their gods". Drums arouse people's emotion especially when they are praised. 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).

5.2.3 Belief in the Existence of the gods in *Death and the King's Horseman*

The playwright's allusions to the Yoruba divinities are suggestive of his deep acknowledgement of the numinous space that is dominated by the Yoruba pantheon, which informed the Yoruba universe and general cultural setting. As seen in the words of Elesin:

ELESIN: Death came calling...

Forwards or backwards now he dare not move

To search for leaves and make *etutu*

On that spot? Or race home to safety

Of his hearth? Ten market-days have passed

My friends, and still he's rooted there

Rigid as the plinth of *Oranmiyan*...

Tremble like wet wings of a fowl

One day he cast his time-smoothed *opele*

Across the divination board. And all because

The suppliant looked like him in the eye and asked,

‘did you hear that whisper in the leaves?’

‘Not I’, was his reply; ‘perhaps I’m growing deaf

Good-day’. And *Ifa* spoke no more that day

The priest locked fast his doors,...

...He wonders if *Elegbara*

Has tricked his buttocks to discharge

Against a sacred grove. (Soyinka, 11, 12 & 13)

Agbor (2008) opines that *Elegbara* is the name for Yoruba, *Esu-Elegbara*, (the trickster god) who is best known as the ‘trickster’ deity. It is said that the first offerings are made to him so that he will not disrupt the proceedings with his mischief. He is also known as the god of choices that sits at the threshold of every decision and offers the options that decide man’s future. He is also said to be the messenger between God, the *orisa* (deity) and man.

Ystranger (2011) asserts that the West African *Esu-Elegbara* is “a figure of double duality, of un-reconciled opposites, living in harmony... the epitome of paradox with the capacity to reproduce himself to infinitum. He describes him as the guardian of crossroads, master of styles and of stylus, the phallic god of generation and fecundity, master of that elusive, and mystical barrier that separates the divine world from the profane; frequently characterized as an inveterate copula, connecting truth with understanding, the sacred with the profane, text with interpretation. He is also perceived to as the brain behind the link between the grammar of divination and its rhetoric (Ystranger, 2011). In Yoruba mythology, Esu (the trickster god) is said to limp as he walks precisely because of his mediating function: his legs are of

different lengths because he keeps one anchored in the realm of the gods while the other rests in this, our human world. Alana (2004) explains that *Esu*, the unpredictable god of human conduct, can be both cruel and compassionate, and who reports back to the *Olodumare* (God) on matters relating to human activities. *Esu* acts as an intermediary between other gods and *Olodumare*, and indeed “receives a portion of the sacrifices offered to other divinities so that he might not stand in the way of the sacrifices”.

Ifa (divination) is another god in Yoruba mythology. He is believed to have all seeing eyes that can decipher the thoughts and intents of the human heart no matter how deep and deceitful it looks at a particular period of time. Agbeniga (2012) emphasises that “the divinatory process of *Ifa* (divination) is a complex and elaborate system, usually considered by many academic scholars, anthropologists, and meta-physicians to be one of the oldest and most accurate divination systems in the world”. It is also pertinent to note that the *Ifa* priest in the Yoruba setting is called *Babalawo*, *Olodu*, *Elegan*, or *Oluwo*, which all means (Herbalist)

ELESIN: And take my good kinsman Ifawomi

His hands were like a carver’s, strong

And true. I saw them

Tremble like wet wings of a fowl

One day he cast his time-smoothed *opele*

Across the divination board. And all because

The suppliant looked like him in the eye and asked,

‘did you hear that whisper in the leaves?’

‘Not I’, was his reply; ‘perhaps I’m growing deaf

Good-day’. And *Ifa* spoke no more that day

The priest locked fast his doors,... (Soyinka, 11 & 12)

In the story of the Not-I bird recounted by Elesin Oba here, *Ifawomi* (divination) is the *Ifa* priest who serves as an intermediary between human beings and the gods. One can draw a similitude between this and the western religion. In Christianity, particularly the Catholics, it is fondly believed that distressed suppliants should send their request to God through Holy Mary. Their faith lies on the notion that Mary, being the mother of the saviour (Jesus Christ), occupies a privileged position of interceding and appeasing God than other deities. Yorubas too believe strongly that requests channelled through these smaller gods have a way of appeasing the almighty as better intermediaries.

It is, however, inconceivable to digest the Yoruba culture through western theoretical models which is often tilted towards compartmentalisation in its myopic analysis. For a credible and holistic critique of an African discourse, several factors must be looked into. To corroborate this assertion, Adedeji (1996) rightly observes that “there is compatibility among all Yoruba forms and cultural manifestations. The arts combine with religion, politics, psychology, and medical practice to construct a complete system”.

A cursory look at the dramatic work *Death and the King's Horseman* showcases a perfect blend of all these either in a grand style or introduced in a subtle way. African culture is complete as it parades several professionals who ensure that the society is in order. Sometimes, these roles are collapsed in such a way that they flow into one another, thus making the walls liquid. In Africa, it is never an aberration to find an astute religious leader combine the role of religious leadership with that of a local medical practitioner. Instead of doing guess work, he or she quickly conjures the ancestors or great forbears to know the history behind the patient's illness, the cure and methods of appeasement. After getting privileged information about the patient, this same person provides professional counsels that can help the patient in question recover soon and also dishes out counsels on how to avoid

related occurrences. Such a person can also be a political analyst or a powerful individual who shapes public opinion.

With this serving as a backdrop, it is crystal clear that the universe of the Yoruba consists of compound existences simultaneously conceived of as bipartite and tripartite. In its bipartite rendition, the universe consists of *aye*- the physical, temporal world of the living, and heavenly expanse, the eternal, spiritual abode of the supreme being, *Olodumare*, 'prime mover of things by whom the origin of our inhabited earth was commissioned.' Also inhabiting the heavenly realm are the *orisa* (secondary deities), through whom *Olodumare*, generally perceived of as distant and removed from human affairs, carries out his divine will on earth. Most *Orisa* (deity) are defiled ancestors. However, a few of them have identities quite separate from ancestorhood, and are believed to have existed in heaven before the creation of the earth. In this category are *Obatala* (deity), the creator of human bodies and patron god of the deformed and *Esu* (trickster deity), the ambivalent god of chance, king of the crossroads, overseer of sacred institutions and messenger of *Olodumare* and *Orunmila* (deity of divination). Other inhabitants of the heavenly realm are invisible to the temporal, and the two are not imperceptible to one another. Far from being polar existences, these two worlds interact at liminal crossroads called *orita* (junction) where three roads meet, and in other ritual and non-ritual contexts (Oyebade, 2001).

5.2.3 Conception of Death as a Religious rite in *Death and the King's Horseman*

Death is said to be inevitable. It is generally believed that it is a debt everyman owes. Africans have a common belief regarding the concept of death and the hereafter, and this controls their lives and natural world. According to Idowu (2005), the Yoruba believe that death is a creation of *Olodumare* the creator. He is of the opinion that *Olodumare* (God) made man for the purpose of recalling any person whose time on earth is fulfilled. Opoku (1978) maintains that death is not the end of life, but a transition from this world to the land

of the spirits. To him, death does not sever family connections, but the dead become ancestors, and this should be considered an honour. He added that life after death foreshadows that the dead are not cut off from the living, for they may divulge themselves in dreams or appear to their living relations to give instructions, warnings or information. Death in the play signifies transition from the visible world to the unseen. It is a way of escape from the visible world. Elesin acknowledges this:

ELESIN: Death came calling,

Who does not know his rasp of reeds?

A twilight whisper in the leaves before

The great araba falls? Did you hear it? (Soyinka, 10)

The rite of passage is necessary for the king and his horseman. The Yoruba people believe that a man joining his king in death is something worthy of admiration and respect. Africans love life, no matter the adversity they are experiencing, and no African will eagerly give in to death. In the case of the king's horseman, he is duty bound to die in the form of a ritual for the communal benefit. This, we assume from Elesin's words: "I go to keep my friend and master company" (Soyinka, 13). Iyaloja and praise singer emphasize the importance of ritual death of Elesin:

IYALOJA: It is the death of war that kills the valiant,

Death of water is how the swimmer goes,

It is the death of markets that kills the trader

And death of indecision takes the idle away.

The trade of the cutlass blunts its edge

And the beautiful die the death of beauty.

It takes an Elesin to die the death of death...

Only Elesin... dies the unknowable death of death...

Gracefully, gracefully does the horseman regain

The stables at the end of day, gracefully...

PRAISE-SINGER: The river is never so high that the eyes

Of a fish are covered. The night is not so dark

That the albino fails to find his way. A child

Returning homewards craves no leading by the hand

Gracefully does the mask regain his grove at the end of the day...

Gracefully, gracefully does the mask dance

Homeward at the end of the day, gracefully... ((Soyinka, 46 & 47))

Hepburn (1998) proposes that the issue of ritual death is crucial; it is an age-old thing, and it involves human sacrifice. He added that rituals have phases and usually end with the re-integration of a scapegoat into or separation from his community.

5.3 Symbolic Representation of Conflicts between the Yoruba culture and Western culture in *Death and the King's Horseman*: A Contemporary Context

Unlike *The Lion and the Jewel*, where conflict is discussed by comparing the old and new generation, in the *Death and the King's horseman*, conflict is discussed from the contemporary perspective where a symbolic representation of old and younger generation characters in the modern day Yoruba setting is observed, and not in the form of comparison between the two generations. While the older generation in the contemporary Yoruba setting

is symbolized by Elesin, Iyaloja and the women, the younger generation is represented by the characters of Joseph and Amusa.

Conflict in the play is portrayed from the action of Simon Pilkings, the Colonial District officer and the instantaneous contrary reactions of the community members which are exemplified in the characters of Elesin and Iyaloja. Pilkings finds out that the king's horseman is about to perform his societal obligation through ritual sacrifice. He orders his arrest in an attempt to discontinue the Yoruba cultural practice of him accompanying the king to the world of the ancestors a month after the death of the king. To the Yoruba community, this practice is very important because it signifies communal regeneration. Elesin strongly maintains his stand from the beginning of the play to perform his duty as the king's horseman with perfect understanding of the significance of his duty. According to Ojaide (1992), "ordinance to Africans is perceived as natural and ritualistic to ensure harmony, the absence of which will bring calamity to the whole group. For this reason, an individual could be sacrificed as an ordinance to avoid war, plague, or any anticipated communal disaster. In other words, the individual can be sacrificed for the well-being of the community". Elesin is aware of the certainty of death; it comes, willing or not. He equally knows that death is the end of the physical life, so he approaches it with fearlessness. He displays this through his Not-I bird poem:

ELESIN: 'Not I; shouts the fearless hunter, 'but

It's getting dark, and this night- lamp

Has leaked out all its oil. I think

It's best to go home and resume my hunt

Another day.' (Soyinka , 10)

He makes fun of the universal fear of death through his Not-I bird poem. He also recognises death as the mortal enemy of man which man is conscious and afraid of, thus resulting to inward battles because of the uncertainty of life hereafter. To him, death is nothing to be feared since he lives to fulfil it one day. He reiterates:

ELESIN: Tell my tapper I have ejected

Fear from home and farm. Assure him, all is well (Soyinka, 11)

Elesin frowns at the gods who though are immortal yet fears death; he compares these gods to himself who has no worries about the certainty of death. This we infer from his words:

ELESIN: There was fear in the forest too.

Not-I was lately heard even in the lair
Of beasts. The hyena cackled loud. Not I,
The civet twitched his fiery tail and glared:
Not I. Not-I became the answering-name
Of the restless bird, that little one
Of the restless bird, that little one
When whisper of his coming ran
Before him on the wind. Not-I
Has long abandoned home. This same dawn
I heard him twitter in the gods' abode.
Ah, companions of this living world
What a thing this is, that even those
We call immortal
Should fear to die. (Soyinka , 12)

Soyinka presents Elesin as one who understands the significance of his duty; that is why he fears no death. He is proud of his cultural practise:

ELESIN: My rein is loosened. I am master of my fate. When the hour comes

Watch me dance along the narrowing path. Glazed by the soles of my great precursors.

My soul is eager. It shall not turn aside (Soyinka, 13)

Elesin is proud of his communal obligation, and his language remains fixed without the fear of death. It is that of strength and harmony which shows a world of order. The significance of his duty to the community cannot be over-emphasized. He appreciates his role as a communal hope and cultural demand. His sacrifice is for the benefit of his community. The practice of human sacrifice, as an element of religious ritual, was prevalent in African cultures. It is carried out to appease the gods. Frazer (1993) argues that “in the ancient days, trees, vegetables, wild and domestic animals, birds, slaves, women, chieftains, priests, princes, sometime even kings were sacrificed”. The purpose of the ritual is to bring peace, unity and ensure the welfare of the society. Elesin in the play is the ritual sacrifice who arbitrates the world of the living, the dead and the unborn. His wilful death brings unity between the three stages of existence as believed by the Yoruba. This belief and practice of the Yoruba emphasizes sustaining the continuous connection between the three stages of life (the living, the dead and the unborn). The practice is also considered as a way of salvation of a community from diverse forms of danger. David (1995) notes that the Yoruba believe that death is not a cessation of existence but a transition from the physical world to an eternal world. He also states that the unborn, the living, and the dead form a pattern of continuity, and this underpins the play’s (*Death and the Kings Horseman*) mystical order. This is, however, different from the belief of individual salvation introduced by the colonizers which unfortunately, the contemporary Yoruba society has insensitively embraced. The inability of

Pilkings and his wife to understand the people's culture leads to their decision to prevent the sacrifice. They do not, however, consider the likely consequence of their action which will bring curse on the people instead of blessing, as their action will provoke the gods to anger.

Elesin faces death with unusual courage while combating the worldly enticement like food, wine, women and dance on his way. This is recognized from his words:

ELESIN: And they tell me my eyes were a hawk

In perpetual hunger. Split an iroko tree
In two, hide a woman's beauty in its heartwood
And seal it up again – Elesin, journeying by,
Would make his camp beside that tree
Of all the shades in the forest. (Soyinka ,18)

It is the love of women that brings about his fall; he requests to marry a new bride as the final gift of the living. The Praise singer is an incessant check on Elesin's licentiousness, warns him, but he did not listen.

PRAISE SINGER: They love to spoil you but beware. (Soyinka, 8).

Immediately after his marriage, he went in with his new bride. As he lingers the British officer arrest him; he allows his human flaw to catch up with his communal duty. He expresses grief at his fall:

ELESIN: My powers deserted me. My charms, my spells, even my voice lacked strength

when I made to summon the powers that would lead me over the last measure of earth
into the land of the fleshless. (Soyinka, 74)

He also blames the British officer as the stranger who hinders the performance of his duty as to why he fails. He explains:

ELESIN: It is when the alien hand pollutes the source of will, when a stranger force of violence shatters the mind's calm resolution, this is when a man is made to commit the awful treachery of relief, commit in his thought the unspeakable blasphemy of seeing the hand of the gods in this alien rupture of his world. I know it was this thought that killed me, sapped my powers and turned me into an infant in the hands of unnameable strangers. I made to utter my spells anew but my tongue merely rattled in my mouth. I fingered hidden charms and the contact was damp; there was no spark left to sever the life-strings that should stretch from every finger-tip. My will was squelched in the spittle of an alien race, and all because I had committed this blasphemy of thought- that there might be the hand of the gods in a stranger's intervention Soyinka, 76).

Pilkings considers it as his duty to arrest Elesin and keep him from killing himself; this results in the death of two personalities: Elesin and Olunde, his son, instead of one.

Iyaloja (mother of the market) is another character in the play who exemplifies conflict between the Yoruba culture and western values in contemporary Yoruba society. Like many older people in the modern day Yoruba setting, *Iyaloja* is well knowledgeable of her culture and keen on the preservation of her cultural heritage. *Iyaloja* acknowledges the importance of the role of Elesin to the community; no wonder she stands with Elesin to ensure he fulfils his obligation, which is why she honours him with all his requests and satisfies his appetite before the ritual. Elesin makes us aware of this in his statement.

ELESIN: In all my life. As Horseman of the King, the juiciest fruit on every tree was mine. I

saw, I touched, I wooed, rarely was the answer No. The honour of my place, the veneration. I received in the eye of man or woman prospered my suit” (Soyinka, 18).

He is greatly revered in the society because of his crucial responsibility. His first request is to be clothed with royal robes, which signifies honour, the women at the command of Iyaloja immediately clothes him richly. He then request to be honoured with a new bride:

ELESIN: Then honour me. I deserve a bed of honour to lie upon.”

IYALOJA: The best is yours. We know you for a man of honour. (Soyinka, 20)

Iyaloja ensures he gets all he desires even though the bride he requests is already betrothed to her son. She does not hesitate to arrange his marriage with the new bride “Now we must go prepare your bridal chamber” (Soyinka, 23). She understands that he wishes to marry the beautiful lady as his last action in the world. This last act will accomplish the three stages of Yoruba cosmology, the world of the living, the death and the unborn. Elesin will soon go through a passage; Iyaloja expresses the expectation of the child of the union:

IYALOJA: The fruit of such a union is rare. It will be neither of this world nor of the next, nor of the one behind us. As if the timelessness of the ancestor world and the unborn have joined spirits to wring an issue of the elusive being of passage... Elesin” (Soyinka, 23).

Elesin proudly comes out with the blemished cloth of the marriage bed to Iyaloja as evidence of the consummation of the marriage; he explains the meaning of this according to the Yoruba tradition:

ELESIN: “Oh you mothers of beautiful brides! Take it. It is no mere virgin stain, but the union of life and the seeds of passage”. My vital flow, the last from this flesh is intermingled with the promise of future life. When earth and passage wed, the

consummation is complete only when there are grains of earth on the eyelids of passage” (Soyinka, 43).

The passage is envisaged to be the passing through a phase of existence and the phase of life itself. Elesin is the intermediary between the living and the dead. His role can be likened to the Christian religion of the relationship between the Father and the Son. This is the significance of the role of Elesin to his society. This is why Iyaloja pampers him with all life’s good things; she often warns him of the excessiveness of life.

IYALOJA: “The living must eat and drink. When the moment comes, don’t turn the food to rodents’ droppings in their mouth. Don’t let them taste the ashes of the world when they step out at dawn to breathe the morning dew” (Soyinka, 23).

She equally warns him when he requests a new bride: “Well, the earth is yours. But be sure the seed you leave in it attracts no curse” (Soyinka, 23). However, despite the warnings Elesin delays in performing his duty. He laments when confiding in his new bride the calamity that befalls him as a result of his arrest by the colonial District Officer:

ELESIN: “For I confess to you, daughter, my weakness came not merely from the abomination of the white man” who came violently into my fading presences, there was also a weight of longing on my earth-held limbs. I would have shaken it off, already my foot had begun to life but then, the white ghost entered and all was defiled. (Soyinka, 71)

This means, therefore, that there are two shades of conflicts here; internal and external conflict. Internal conflict is represented by Elesin’s love of the good things of life, and the external conflict which is symbolized by the intrusion of western culture represented by Mr Pilkings.

Following his arrest, Iyaloja expresses her grief first at Elesin in prison where Mr Pilkings keeps him and for allowing his weakness to overpower him in the neglect of his duty. She reminds him that his desire was initially to the spirit world as much as earthly things. His failure symbolises betrayal of his culture and his community.

IYALOJA: I warned you, if you must leave a seed behind, be sure it is not tainted with the curses of the world. You have betrayed us. We fed you sweetmeats such as we hoped awaited you on the other side. But you said No, I must eat the world's left-overs. We call you leader and oh, how you led us on. (Soyinka, 74 & 75)

She, at the same time, communicates the depth of her despair and that of the community to Mr Pilkings, referring to the western values: "White one, you have a king here, a visitor from your land. We know of his presence here. Tell me, were he to die would you leave his spirit roaming restlessly on the surface of earth? Would you bury him here among those you consider less than human? In your land have you no ceremonies of the dead? (Soyinka, 78)". She frowns at Mr Pilkings' arrogance on interfering with her cultural practises, which are different from his western culture. She further explains the significance of the Elesin's ritual sacrifice:

IYALOJA: Child, "I have not come to help your understanding. (*Points to Elesin*) this is the man" whose weakened understanding holds us in bondage to you. But ask him if you wish. He knows the meaning of a king's passage; he was not born yesterday. He knows the peril to the race when our dead father, who goes as intermediary, waits and waits and knows he is betrayed. He knows when the narrow gate was opened and he knows it will not stay for laggards who drag their feet in dung and vomit, whose lips are reeking of the left-overs of lesser men. He knows he has condemned our King to wander in the void of evil with beings who are enemies of life" (Soyinka, 78)

Elesin's duty has appointed time according to the custom; any loitering renders it unacceptable. That is why she condemns his death at the end of the play saying it is too late. She is an example of the historical character that will do everything to preserve her culture and ensure it is duly passed to younger generations even though there is interference from western culture.

Elesin is an example of the historical character as the playwright portrays conflict of belief. The conflict arises between the two races with different beliefs about death. Elesin's conflicting belief is seen in his conversation with Iyaloja, he explains his confusion about death:

ELESIN: It is when the alien hand pollutes the source of will, when a stranger force of

Violence shatters the mind's calm resolution, this is when a man is made to commit the awful treachery of relief, commit in his thought the unspeakable blasphemy of seeing the hand of the gods in this alien rupture of his world. I know it was this thought that killed me, sapped my powers and turned me into an infant in the hands of unnameable strangers. I made to utter my spells anew but my tongue merely rattled in my mouth. I fingered hidden charms and the contact was damp; there was no spark left to sever the life-strings that should stretch from every finger-tip. My will was squelched in the spittle of an alien race, and all because I had committed this blasphemy of thought – that there might be the hand of the gods in a stranger's intervention. (Soyinka 75 & 76)

His explanation reveals the conflicting beliefs about death. His traditional belief met with the western belief, and even though he is rigid about his belief at the beginning, he fails at the end. He later commits suicide, but it is too late because it does not come with honour; this is seen from the words of Iyaloja:

IYALLOJA: He is gone at last into the passage but oh, how late it all is. His son will feast on the meat and throw him bones. The passage is clogged with droppings from the King's stallion; he will arrive all stained in dung (Soyinka, 83).

She displays her understanding of her culture throughout the play without compromising with western belief.

The older generation, though confronted with the alien belief, give high regard to their cultural heritage. Gibbs (1980) citing Moore (1978), while commenting on the Elesin's failure, sees it as "a failure of will as allegorical of a wider African failure to stick to indigenous values, even when not actually forced to abandon them".

Soyinka depicts the characters of Amusa and Joseph as examples of the contemporary youth who are caught between the two conflicting cultures. Joseph is the house assistant to Mr Pilkings, while Amusa is an officer in the colonial police. In the play, Joseph appears once in scene two, and at his first appearance, he gives them (Pilkings and Jane) information about what is happening in the community regarding Elesin's ritual sacrifice. Mr Pilkings and his wife are sceptical as to what the ceaseless drumming in the community signifies; they immediately decide to inquire from their native house help, Joseph. This conversation follows:

JANE: That drumming Simon, do you think it might really be connected with this ritual? It's been going on all evening.

PILKINGS: Let's ask our native guide. Joseph! Just a minute Joseph. What's the drumming about?

JOSEPH: I don't know master

PILKINGS: What do you mean you don't know? It's only two years since your conversion. Don't tell me all that holy water nonsense also wiped out your tribal memory.

JOSEPH: Master!

JANE: It isn't my preaching you have to worry about, it's the preaching of the missionaries who preceded you here. When they make converts they really convert them. Calling holy water nonsense to our Joseph is really like insulting the Virgin Mary before a Roman Catholic. (Soyinka, 32)

Joseph is colonized through religion. He imbibes western religion and totally neglects his own traditional belief to the extent that he cannot trace his cultural roots. He lost his cultural heritage to the colonizer; no wonder Mr Pilkings is surprised at his ignorance of the symbolic representation of the traditional events in the community. He has internalized the white man's religion to the extent that he forgets his indigenous religion, and his actions annoy Pilkings. Though the Pilkings' negative view of Yoruba culture is not surprising, their non-acceptance of Christianity as a true religion, however, is unexpected. They are perceived to have no respect for or belief in the religion that is associated with his society; that is why they ridicule it whenever they are faced by it. His reference to the Christian 'holy water' as nonsense is unreasonable. Joseph's gullible acceptance of western religion is seen as symbolic of the contemporary youth who abandon their cultural practice, beliefs and value systems and embrace the new ways brought by the colonizers and the agents of propagation of colonizers' ways of life without critical judgement.

Amusa is another example of the contemporary character that is in confusion between the two cultures. He is a devout Muslim; he appears thrice in the play. At first, as a police officer, he enters the Pilkings' house to report Elesin's ritual sacrifice; he is surprised to see Mr Pilkings and his wife wearing Egungun masks which in the traditional Yoruba world symbolize the spirit of death. He is in a state of confusion as he is there to report unlawful death to his master whom he sees dancing in a costume of death. He refuses to make his report inasmuch as he (Pilkings) is in Egungun mask. He explains:

AMUSA: Sir, it is a matter of death. How can man talk against death to person in uniform of death? Is like talking against government to person in uniform of police. Please sir, I go and come back (Soyinka, 26)

Confusion, as seen in the character of Amusa, is visible among the contemporary youth in the Yoruba society. He believes in traditional culture even though his job demands him to reject it and place it below the colonizers' culture. Amusa's loyalty to his traditional Yoruba belief is in conflict with his economic demands. One can say he is colonized economically and spiritually. This is seen in his conversation with Jane:

JANE: Oh Amusa, what is there to be scared of in the costume? You saw it confiscated last month from those egungun men who were creating trouble in town. You helped arrest the cult leaders yourself- if the *juju* didn't harm you at the time how could it possibly harm you now? And merely by looking at it?

AMUSA: Madam, I arrest the ringleaders who make trouble but me I no touch *egungun*. That *egungun* itself, I no touch. And I no abuse 'am. I arrest ringleader but I treat *egungun* with respect (Soyinka, 26).

Amusa has to arrest "*Egungun* (masquerade) on the power of colonial administration. Omobola (2010) asserts that the *egungun* cult, existing either as the collective spirit of the ancestors of a given community or as ancestral spirits of individual families, provides an important religious context for periodic veneration of, and interaction with, ancestral spirits by mortals who seek divine counsel to negotiate the human condition".

In another instance, when he has to arrest Elesin who is consummating his marriage with a new bride, he tries to find his way into the bridal chamber to arrest Elesin but the market women and the schoolgirls prevent and drive him and his entourage from the market. They mock him when he says "he is on official business": "Official business you white man's eunuch? Official business is taking place where you want to go and it's a business you

wouldn't understand" (Soyinka, 37). He is blinded by his confused sense of duty not to understand what traditional practice is going on in his community and the duty of Elesin. This is seen in his conversation with the market women:

AMUSA: I hope you women know that interfering with officer in execution of his duty is criminal offence. I warn you women to clear the road to that hut. I know he dey dere. The chief who call himself Elesin oba.

WOMAN: You ignorant man. It is not he who calls himself Elesin Oba, it is his blood that says it. As it called out to his father before him and will to his son after him. And that is in spite of everything your white man can do" (Soyinka, 37 & 38).

The girls also mock him that they do not want to see eaters of white man's left-overs at the feast (Soyinka, 40). Soyinka presents Amusa and Joseph as representing the Yorubas who have lost their cultural roots due to their embrace of the new religion. This state of affairs brings them in conflict with their traditional beliefs and values.

Mr Pilkings and his wife have no admiration for Christian religion; they have no regard for *Egungun* (Masquerade), Islam and traditional religion. That is why the playwright makes us believe that there is nothing special or moral in Pilkings' cultural belief that gives him the right to pass judgement on other people's ways of life. Mr Pilkings does not necessarily have respect for human life when he opposes the ritual sacrifice; his main concern is to destroy the people's cultural practises. He is ready to shoot down anyone who fights against his efforts to stop the ritual sacrifice. In his attempt to save Elesin's life, he is prepared to kill many people, and this is seen in her conversation with Iyaloja at the prison:

PILKINGS: My men have orders to shoot at the first sign of trouble

IYALOJA: To prevent one death you will actually make other deaths? Ah, great is the

wisdom of the white race. (Soyinka, 80).

This betrays his underlying purpose of his interference with the ritual sacrifice. It shows he does not value life and is only keen to obliterate the cultural beliefs of the people whose significance he does not understand.

5.4 The Possibility of Coexistence between the Two Cultures

This section examines the possibility of co-existence of the two conflicting cultures in the play, as portrayed in the characters of Olunde, the women and the girls.

The playwright portrays the schoolgirls as the contemporary youth who are taught the new ways brought about by the colonizers. They are the children of Iyaloja and the market women and appear only once in the play. However, they stick to their traditional culture even though they learn the new ways in school. The schoolgirls help their mothers chase Amusa and his associates away from Elesin's wedding chamber. They also imitate the white man in a performance, showing their knowledge of the western style.

GIRLS:

-And how do you find the place?

-The natives are all right.

-Friendly?

-Tractable.

-Not a teeny-weeny bit restless?

-Well, a teeny-weeny bit restless.

-One might even say, difficult?

Indeed one might be tempted to say, difficult.

-But you do manage to cope?

-Yes indeed I do. I have a rather faithful ox called Amusa.

-He's loyal?

-Absolutely.

-Had one like that once. Trust him with my life.

Mostly of course they are liars.

-Never known a native to tell the truth.

-We do our best for the old country.

-It's a pleasure to serve

-Another whisky old chap?

-Where is that boy? Sergeant!

AMUSA: (Snaps to attention) Yessir! (Soyinka 40 & 41)

The schoolgirls replicate the white man's speech perfectly because they readily access western cultural patterns through education. They do not, nevertheless, disregard their traditional ways of life even though they learnt the western ways. They are able to defend their cultural heritage against alien intrusion, unlike Amusa and Joseph. The playwright depicts through them the possible co-existence of the old and new culture without conflict or superiority of one over the other.

The possibility of co-existence of Yoruba and western culture is also exemplified in the characters of Iyaloja and the market women who are custodians of Yoruba culture, yet they accept the best of the western cultures by sending their children to school to learn the new values and balance their knowledge with the old values. They express wonder at their performance:

WOMEN: Do they teach you all that at school?

WOMAN: And to think I nearly kept Apinke away from the place

WOMAN: Did you hear them? Did you see how they mimicked the white man?

WOMAN: The voices exactly. Hey, there are wonders in this world!”

IYALOJA: Well, our elders have said it: “Dada may be weak, but he has a younger sibling who is truly fearless (Soyinka, 42).

One of the markets women nearly keep her child from going to school because of the effect of western education on the contemporary youth, thinking that her child may imbibe the new ways learnt in school and neglect the old values she passes unto her.

Similarly, the possibility of co-existence between the two cultures, despite their contradiction, is exemplified in the character of Olunde which reflects in his decision to uphold his cultural heritage, having learnt the new ways. He understands the benefit of western education and the ideals of his Yoruba culture, and this enables him to accept the Pilkings’ offer of going to England to study medicine even when his father disagrees. He learns the western ways, acknowledges and respects the people together with their culture and at the same time, his own cultural tradition. He returns home when he learns about the king’s death to give compliments to his father whom he expects to find dead. He sees his father’s death as an essential sacrifice for the continuity of his culture. Olunde’s return coincides with the visit of the Prince of England to Yoruba society. He appears for the first time in Act four at the English Ball looking for Mr Pilkings. He finds Mrs Pilkings wearing the Egungun mask and mocking an ancestral masquerade to entertain the Prince at the Ball. He frowns and expresses his grief:

OLUNDE: But don’t you find it rather hot in there? Your skin must find it difficult to breathe.

JANE: Well, it is a little hot I must confess, but it’s all in a good cause.

OLUNDE: What cause Mrs Pilkings?

JANE: All this. The ball. And his Highness being here in person and all that.

OLUNDE: And that is the good cause for which you desecrate an ancestral mask?

JANE: Oh, so you are shocked after all. How disappointing.

OLUNDE: No I am not shocked, Mrs Pilkings. You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand.

JANE: I take it then that you did not find your stay in England altogether edifying”.

(Soyinka, 54 & 55).

Jane is surprised to see Olunde condemning the act of defiling the masquerade mask. She thinks he should overlook his religious practises, having been to England and exposed to western culture. Pilkings and his wife deal with the belief they do not understand without due consideration of the significance of such a belief. They referred to the masquerade mask as “fancy dress (Soyinka, 25). Soyinka reveals that Olunde is a man whose experience of the western world gives him profound understanding of his heritage. He throws not away his old ways but rather complements it with the new ways. The playwright further discloses his conviction of his Yoruba belief when he criticizes the western cultural arrogance of Mr and Mrs Pilkings. Olunde, unlike Amusa and Joseph, maintains his cultural roots with better understanding of his heritage despite his experience of the western world. He considers his father’s ritual sacrifice as a self-sacrifice which is necessary for the survival of his society. He happens to be in England during the war, where an individual sacrifices his life to save the lives of many. He admires the courage of the captain who blows himself up with the ship for the safety of others. Olunde does not condemn the western ways of survival but rather admires it together with his own religious belief. He requires Jane and Pilkings to respect the culture of his people even if they are not in agreement to it:

OLUNDE: ... But at least have the humility to let others survive in their own way

JANE: Through ritual suicide:

OLUNDE: Is that worst than mass suicide? (Soyinka, 58)

Olunde is a believer of his culture and tradition and also believes in the western values. He is motivated by the self-sacrifice of the captain, whereas Jane insists that life should not be wasted. This we see from their conversation:

OLUNDE: I found your people quite admirable in many ways, their conduct and courage in
this war for instance

JANE: Ah yes, the war. Here of course it is all rather remote. From time to time we have a
black-out drill just to remind us that there is a war on. And the rare convoy passes
through on its way somewhere or on manoeuvres. Mind you there is the occasional bit
of excitement like that ship that was blown up in the harbour.

OLUNDE: Here? Do you mean through enemy action?

JANE: Oh no, the war hasn't come that close. The captain did it himself. I don't quite
understand it really. Simon tried to explain. The ship had to be blown up because it
had become dangerous to other ships, even to the city itself. Hundreds of the coastal
population would have died.

OLUNDE: Maybe it was loaded with ammunition and had caught fire.

JANE: The captain blew himself up with it. Deliberately. Simon said someone had to remain
on board to light the fuse.

OLUNDE: It must have been a very short fuse.

JANE: I don't know much about it. Only that there was no other way to save lives. No time
to devise anything else. The captain took the decision and carried it out". (Soyinka,
55)

OLUNDE: I find it rather inspiring. It is an affirmative commentary on life. That captain's
self- sacrifice.

JANE: Nonsense. Life should never be thrown deliberately away.

OLUNDE: And the innocent people around the harbour? That was a risk the captain couldn't take (Soyinka, 56).

He ingeniously shows Jane that self-sacrifice is an inspiring human value. The ability to acknowledge other people's culture without necessarily suppressing one's culture makes one stable and balanced in his conscience and way of life, thus, eliminating the confusion that arises from doing otherwise. This is seen in the character of Olunde, and unlike Pilkings and Jane, his wife, who neither acknowledge nor respect the culture of the Yoruba people before instituting order against the people's belief. In addition, Pilkings considers not the disparity in the two cultures before instituting an order against the practise inherent in the Yoruba culture. That is why Olunde stirs up anger against his determination to prevent his father's death, which results in a clash between them. Soyinka depicts Olunde's courage and his sense of understanding of his culture and community as he stands to defend it against:

OLUNDE: But I knew I had to return home at once so as to bury my father. I understood that.

JANE: Well, thank God you don't have to go through that agony. Simon is going to stop it.

OLUNDE: That's why I want to see him. He's wasting his time. And since he has been so helpful to me I don't want him to incur the enmity of our people. Especially over nothing.

OLUNDE: I came home to bury my father. He has protection. No one can undertake what he does tonight without the deepest protection the mind can conceive. What can you offer him in place of his peace of mind, in place of the honour and veneration of his own people? What would you think of your Prince if he refused to accept the risk of losing his life on this voyage? (Soyinka, 57)

The case of the captain's sacrifice is rightly Olunde's opinion as regards his father's sacrifice. He points out the significance of his father's death as a blessed one that is based on honour which nothing can substitute. His father's transition to the world of the ancestors is an affirmation of the Yoruba belief in the life after death. Omojola (2010, p. 12) has a similar view; "Yoruba belief in the continuous roles of ancestral spirits. Departed ancestors, it is believed, merely pass on into another plane and phase of existence, and continue to participate, or interfere in the lives of mortals".

This is reverberated in the voice of the praise singer when he explains Elesin's sacrifice as a triumph over death "A child returning homewards craves no leading by the hand. Gracefully does the mask regain his groove at the end of the day...Gracefully, gracefully does the mask dance homeward at the end of the day, gracefully... (Soyinka, 46 & 47)". However, Jane claims that it is a barbaric custom

JANE: However clearly you try to put it, it is still a barbaric custom. It is even worse- it's

feudal! The King dies and a chieftain must be buried with him. How feudalistic can you get!

OLUNDE: "Others would call it decadence. However, it doesn't really interest me". 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, 58)

According to Soyinka, what Pilkings sees as a feudalistic barbaric custom is a very important system of communal renewal. George (1999) states that Elesin, at the moment of self-sacrifice, embodies the collective social and psychic aspirations of the Yoruba community; he

is a ritual scapegoat who mediates the world of the living, the dead and the unborn”. By his wilful death as a duty, he owes the community, “he ascends to the world of the dead on behalf of the living and the unborn. His death brings harmony between the three levels of existence constitutive of traditional Yoruba cosmic order”. Olunde reacts to Jane’s negative response that his culture is barbaric and asks:

OLUNDE: “Is that worse than mass suicide? Mrs Pilkings what do you call what those young men are sent to do by their generals in this war?” (Soyinka, 58).

He treats those who sustain injury at the war at the English hospitals, so he knows what happened. He requires Pilkings to justify his action of preventing his father from performing a societal norm since they also have their own way of surviving. As Olunde indicates, the British culture, during war, overlooks mass suicide in war “In your news reels I heard defeats, thorough, murderous defeats described as strategic victories. No wait, it wasn’t just on your newsreels. Don’t forget I was attached to hospitals all the time. Hordes of your wounded passed through those wards. I spoke to them. I spent long evenings by their bedsides while they spoke terrible truths of the realities of that war” (Soyinka, 59). Having known this fact, he submits that they are not of a better culture and so they have no right to pass judgement on their own cultural practices. He asks over again: “That a disaster beyond human reckoning be spoken of as a triumph? No. I mean is there no mourning in the home of the bereaved that such blasphemy is permitted? Before that even started I had plenty of time to study your people. I saw nothing, finally, that gave you the right to pass judgement on other peoples and their ways. Nothing at all (Soyinka, 59)”.

When Olunde sees his father is in the cell where Pilkings detains him, he denounces him “I have no father, eater of left-overs” (Soyinka, 66) and leaves the scene to sacrifice himself for the redemption of his people. Elesin has confidence in his son that he will not jeopardise his belief even when he rejects him due to his failure to sacrifice himself according to tradition.

He speaks to Pilkings: “you have stopped me in my duty but I know now that I did give birth to a son. Once I mistrusted him for seeking the companionship of those my spirit knew as enemies of our race. Now I understand. One should seek to obtain the secrets of his enemies. He will avenge my shame, white one. His spirit will destroy you and yours (Soyinka, 69). Olunde truly avenges his father’s shame by sacrificing himself to avoid the calamity that will befall the community. The intrusion of Pilkings results in catastrophe for the community: the death of Olunde who killed himself in place of his father for the stability of the community and to save his family from indignity, and the death of his father who sees his son’s corpse strangles himself in detention.

Olunde has a strong faith in his culture, so he is not open to the conflicting view of others to change his culture though he tolerates other people’s values. This is further seen from the tolerance he exhibits in England. His death is said to mark a cultural change in the ritual practises of the Yoruba people because he gladly submits himself to death for the preservation of harmony and peace in his community. His sacrifice shows a sense of belonging in the people.

Summarily, it needs to be noted that culture is not stagnant, and cultural habits and tradition change with time. The Yoruba cultural practise of the king’s horseman ritual suicide will correct itself even if the Pilkings and his wife are not there to interfere. Ojaide (1992) shares similar views while commenting on Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*; he maintains that the dramatist’s viewpoint suggests that the practice of the king’s horseman accompanying him to the spirit world by ritual suicide was already failing and needed no colonial intervention to stop. The colonial officer’s intervention resulted in a greater tragedy for the society in the waste of two lives in the place of one. The acknowledgement, tolerance and respect for other people’s culture will promote co-existence thereby reducing possible conflict that may arise from cultural contacts.

Conclusion

The foregoing study focuses on the aesthetic of Yoruba culture and religion while exploring the cultural and religious conflicts in selected plays of Soyinka. The study views culture and religion as vital to human existence. The study reveals the cultural and religious practises of the Yoruba people that they hold in high esteem and their significance. This study also reveals the historical and contemporary conflicts that exist as a result of contact with the western culture. It also looks at the possible coexistence of the best of each of the two cultures despite their contradictions. As stated earlier, this study is anchored on the post-colonial theoretical framework. The diversion of interest to western culture from traditional values, as well as the horrid disruption of the rich values inherent in Yoruba culture from past to the present are metaphors of a post-colonial society, and this informed the choice of the theory.

The *The Lion and the Jewel* answers questions that pertain to cultural identity with its related themes, and motivates the need to identify, redeem and revive the indispensable priceless values of the Yoruba that is fading. Soyinka, a seasoned Nigerian African playwright has showcased the fact that his life and background provides a bank of knowledge to the blossoming field of African literature. It is now an indisputable fact that he does not only fraternise with his Yoruba roots, but also stands tall. He sees the need to preserve the progressive part of Yoruba culture and religion and implant with them the best from western culture. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, he credits the new culture Olunde acquires and at the same time, manifests courage and understanding of his own culture and religious practises. This is unlike Lakunle in *The Lion and the Jewel* who incorrectly adopts western culture and was found to be eventually confused and having no sense of belonging. The playwright neither approves Baroka representing the old order nor Lakunle who represents

the new values unnecessarily. He, however, satirises the two cultures in order to bring about the application of the best of each of the two cultures.

The Yoruba cultural values are known to enhance and empower people to make the society worth living in because values and norms are determinants of people's behaviour. As a result of colonisation and the subsequent introduction of western cultures, the Yoruba experienced transformation which eventually results in the abandonment of Yoruba cultural values that could make the society a better place. As exemplified by the playwright, the culture and tradition of the people remains part of their life and adds value to the society, and an attempt to disrupt this will lead to a total destabilization of the social system. Thus, the idea of imbibing the whole western culture without balancing it with the Yoruba culture would lead to a total societal disorder. It is, however, acknowledged that the western culture and the Yoruba culture have both desirable and undesirable aspects.

To redress the confusion in values in the contemporary Yoruba society, there is the need to re-embrace the best abandoned Yoruba cultural heritage, modernize the old values and imbibe the best of the western culture to make a better society. The family should return to being the major agent of socialization where the younger ones are taught Yoruba cultural values from the cradle; this will enable the younger generations to grow up with good values while trying to match these with best western values. Recognition of the importance of achieving social justice or mutual respect as a basis for co-existence and peace within shared places and spaces is also important. The Yoruba youth should promote their cultural and religious beliefs and embrace a lifestyle of simplicity, decency, honesty and confidence which is one of the fundamentals of the Yoruba instead of a quest for materialism brought by the colonizer, thus leading to callousness and confusion. There is also the need for the unwavering propagation of the best of Yoruba value systems in this era of globalization while the Yorubas accept or probably modify the best of western culture.

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