

## The Impact of Resistance on Religion and Politics in the Play *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka

Basim Khudhair Sabr\*, Lajiman Janoory

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of language and communication, Sultan Idris Education University, Perak, Malaysia

Corresponding Author: Basim Khudhair Sabr, E-mail: basimlife75@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper examines the political, social and religious sectors that have resulted in a rupture in dramatization. It further elaborates the idea of political and religious resistance in the selected play of death and horseman by Wole Soyinka (1975). So, the tyranny of history and cruelty of colonial powers have made a sharp impact on the thought of colonized. Thus, Africa has been subjected to various forms of naked slavery, exploitation, colonialism and neo-colonialism since the last four hundred years. African world has had an obvious historical and cultural experience in the language and religion which have become significant components of one's cultural identity. As a result, African history, culture and politics cannot only be deeply rooted but also continues in the African consciousness even after independence. Post independence scenario is not absolutely free from the reflection of colonial era. Here, Soyinka highlights the issues of the fundamental forces of African politics, betrayal, victimization and resistance in his chosen play. Thus the portrayal of African resistance in the context of the present study needs to be placed in a wider perspective and larger implication because the strategy of colonization and subjugation is not one-dimensional. For him, it is an impossible to conceive his work outside Yoruban beliefs and systems of thoughts based on dimensions of human existence. This study further discovers forms of drama that developed in pre-colonial African societies and incorporating them in Soyinka's play, especially the emphasis on the Yoruban cosmos, the ritual closure. The playwright sheds light on human understanding of cultural and religious relations that are possible for promoting a co-existence of different cultures. The use of the Yoruba mythical tradition for personal gain, it is an attempt to resuscitate the best of the culture of the Yoruba people and redeem their vanishing value systems in an era of globalization. In addition, the study shows the prospect of co-existence of the best of old order, new order and how the playwright focuses on human understanding of cultural and religious relations. The study concludes that an acknowledgement and respect for other people's religion and ways of life will reduce conflicts and, therefore, promote co-existence of different cultures.

**Key words:** *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka, Yoruban Religious Beliefs, Political and Religious Resistance

### INTRODUCTION

Soyinka was a seasoned playwright largely known for his novels. Soyinka was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in recognition of his accomplishments. *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) is one of Soyinka's earliest plays, it takes a critical view at Yoruba tradition, religious, political and cultural universe. According to Bhatt (2012), the role of religion in every society can be an interesting station and a regulated system of beliefs, ceremonies, practice and worship. Therefore, religion focuses on one supreme God or the value of the God that helps groups of people to find a solution to the question of an ultimate meaning. Religion has become the most powerful trace in traditional African culture which does

great impact upon the conduct of the African people. As for Omobola (2014), religion is closely bounded with the traditional way of African life. Thus, religion shapes the lives of Africans; at the same time, life shapes religion as well. Thus the post-colonial has paved the way for the vital role of the awareness in history, culture and religious practices in Africa. According to Singh (2013), the post-colonial experience of most Asian, African and Southern American countries play a significant role in perception of the history, culture and religious practices of these countries (p. 2).

...Therefore, the ritual is enacted with the clear purpose of resisting the way of Western cultural symbols are deliberately structured and consciously designed. Soyinka's use of Yoruba culture is an effective means of resistance to enhance

the sense of the originality of the African mode. According to Smith & Eicher (1982), the Yoruba tradition has been influenced on the use of these in the traditional past. This art, which combines colonial models with the powerful elements of a rich and vibrant tradition, was served as a powerful resistance mechanism.

### **Yoruba Religious Practices in Death and the King's Horseman**

#### ***Clothing as religious symbol in death and the king's horseman***

Clothing is an important 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). All human being has been searched for food and clothing since its existence in this universe and clothing has become a basic principle for man. Man has made a change in clothing to protect him from nakedness and the harsh elements of life (Payne, 1965). The idea of covering the body began from the Garden of Eden (Genesis, 1999, Chapter 3). He decided to cover his naked body with leaves which were the first materials available to him. Man later gradually changes to the use of animal skin (hide and skin) that advanced into tanning. According to Katrak (1986) states that tanning includes 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:

*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. (Oyetade, 2004)*

...In our contemporary society, clothes have not lost their traditional fashion, although there has been a lot of improvement in their design, production and use. It is full obvious that Yoruba traditional attires are no longer merely used as attires to decorate the body, but also become the status symbol of wealth, socio-cultural and religious identity of individuals. In the play of *Death and the King's Horseman*, Just as Oyetade (2004) reveals that 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.

...We can say that it is difficult to detach the word religion from culture because religion is defined as a collection of cultural systems. As noted above, Malinowski (1991) states

that "culture is an important part of human existence" (p. 7). In Soyinka words, religion and culture are primary parts of an African's life which is not only respected but also protected dearly. However, it has been realized that "culture is not static"; it evolves and changes as the belief system and ways of life of various groups organized under the pressure of other cultures as a result of colonization and mass media to create new identities. Literatures are expressed and predicted in these religious practices, histories, cultures, and intercepting influences. Literature is as mirrors for the society so that it reflects the various aspects of human life (social, political, economic, religion, culture and history) in literary form. Literature also reveals and gives more foresight to many cultural systems in societies around the world than any other form of writing because the experiences of life which specify culture are presented in literary works in a peculiar way (Adejumo (2010) citing Ogunsina (2006).

...According to Akinbileje (2010) presents 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. This is exemplified in *Death and the King's Horseman*. Thus, this is exemplified in *Death and the King's Horseman*:

*ELESIN: Words are cheap. 'We know you for a man of honor'. Well tell me, is this how A man of honor 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 honor is alari Sanyan is the band of friendship Boa-skin makes slippers of esteem. (Soyinka, 15 & 16)*

...Diyaolu (2010) states that the "Yoruba people, for them, it is socially needed for both men and women to be decorated attire on ritual occasions, and the dress must be convenient to the occasion among other tribes, add remarkable significance to their appearance in the public. This is perhaps the reason why the Yoruba say *aso la nki, ki a to ki eniyan*, meaning (It is the attire we should greet before greeting the wearer), and *eniyan lasoo mi*, that is (people are my cloth)" (P.18).

...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).

#### ***Drumming as religious symbol in death and the king's horseman***

Drumming is practiced in courtyard of the Yoruba monarch which is the royal palace for the member of the royal and

the noble families. Drumming in Yoruba culture is regarded as influential factor in the Yoruba society. The Yoruba, the people perform unique drum for their gods which they listen to and enjoy. Adegbite (1988) gives a reason for explaining with words “appropriate drums must be used for particular *orisa*, otherwise, they [the devotees] will incur the wrath of their tutelary deity”. Drumming can be mixed with songs, chants and dance during ceremonies and worship. Drumming also was used profoundly for religious rituals. The presence of the deity is evoked to worship by drums. 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-embrano-phonetic (single headed) 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 significance of drums in Yoruba traditional worship cannot be overstated. They serve as the way by which the people are pleased in communing with their God. Yoruba drums communicate, like most African musical instruments, though they vary, the untutored ear cannot perceive the rhythms of drums. Thus, we see in the character of Joseph when Pilkings and Jane do not perceive the sound and meaning of drumming in the audience which to them regard it noise whereas the drummers and the indigenous people regard them as a spirited role to the Ellisin’s ritual wedding ceremony. Pilkings asks Joseph: “What’s the drumming about?” (Soyinka, 1975, 32).

...Adegbite (1988) says that on many occasions, the people in Yoruba enjoy so much with the sharp voice, especially when the human being’s voice mixes with the sound of the drum. He highlighted two roles of drums in traditional Yoruba religion: “One role is to make the worshippers of the gods to connect 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. Regardless 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. Adegbite (1988) highlights 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” (P.75).

### **Belief in the existence of the gods in death and the king's horseman**

The playwright’s suggestion to the Yoruba divinities is reference of his deep acknowledgement of the numinous space that is dominated by the Yoruba pantheon that told 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, 1975.11, 12 & 13)*

...Agbor (2008) casts his opinion that *Elegbara* is the name for Yoruba, *Esu-Elegbara*, (the trickster god) who is best known as the ‘hustler’ deity. Ystranger (2011) emphasizes that the West African *Esu-Elegbara* is “a figure of duplication of un-reconciled opposites, living in harmonization. The paradigm of paradox with the capacity to reproduce himself to the endless (Ystranger, 2011). In Yoruba mythology, Esu (the hustler god) is said to limp as he walks properly 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 means between *Olodumare* and other gods. Alana ((2004) has noticed that Esu often “receives a portion of the sacrifices offered to other divinities so that he might not stand in the way of the sacrifices”.

...Yoruba people were in interested in performing religious ritual. They faced some changes in their religion because of the western colonization who tried to apply their religious culture instead of the African culture. In the play of the death and the kings horseman depicts religious mythology. Wole Soyinka portrays how African resisted for saving their religion against any western changes. According to Agbeniga (2012) emphasizes 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 proper to realize 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, 1975.11 & 12)*

...In the story of the Not-I bird narrated by Elesin Oba here, *Ifawomi* (divination) is the *Ifa* priest who serves as an intermediary between the gods and human beings. One can engage a similarity between this and the western religion. In Christianity, particularly the Catholics, it is genially believed that anguished prayers should send their request to God

through Holy Mary. Their faith lies on the conception that Mary, being the mother of the savior (Jesus Christ), occupies a privileged position of interposing and appeasing God than other deities. Yorubas too believe strongly that requests directing through these smaller gods have a way of comforting the almighty as better intermediaries.

It is, however, inconceivable to digest the Yoruba culture through western theoretical models which is often tilted towards compartmentalization 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. Religion, politics, psychology, and medical practice are connected with arts to construct a complete system” (p.85).

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, the 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.

In this category are *Obatala* (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).

### Conception of Death as a Religious rite in Death and the King’s Horseman

Africans have a common belief regarding the concept of death and the hereafter. Death is inevitable for every human being. According to Idowu (2005), the Yoruba believes that death is a creation of *Olodumare* the creator. His opinion that *Olodumare is* (God) made man for the purpose of recalling any person whose time on earth is fulfilled. Opoku (1978) asserts that death is not the end of life, but a transition from this world to the land of the spirits. As for him, death does not disconnect family connections, but the dead becomes ancestors, and this should be considered an honor for them. He added that life after death foreshadows that the dead are not stopped from the living, because they may reveal 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 grasp of reeds? A twilight whisper in the leaves before the great araba falls? Did you hear it? (Soyinka, 1975. 10).*

The Yoruba people believe that a man joining his king in death is something merited of admiration and respect. The rite of passage is necessary for the king and his horseman. 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. Thus, we postulate 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. 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, 1957.46 & 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 reintegration of a scapegoat into or separation from his community.

### Practices of 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. According to Ogunade (2010) states that 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” (P.23). 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. Ogunade(2010) points out that 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”(p.32). 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. The supremacy and the exalted position of God is highly recognized among the Yorubá as noted by Idowu (1973) when he says: "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" (P.56). 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" (P.48). 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.

### Political Resistance

In the play *Death and the King's Horseman*, language has been impacted of the colonial past as well as the contemporary socio-political climate of the town of Oyo. Soyinka's story depicts the challenges that have been faced by colonizers on system beliefs. Readers recognize the influence of the colonizers in the story's progress. As Simon Pilkings and his fellow British envoys become progressively influential, Despite Soyinka's effort to struggle and resist a fully post-colonial reading of his work, the play shows a opulent fusibility of different rhetorical styles, some of which find their origins in western literary traditions. It may be impossible to

point out definitively whether the shifts in language occur as a cause or an effect of a changing culture, but it remains that variation in language are occasional of a society undergoing transmission. Thus, Machan realizes that language becomes charged with 'anxiety', an indicator that speakers feel the need to formulate new approaches to the ways they communicate through words. This very same sense of anxiety is also presented in *Death and the King's Horseman*, as Soyinka shows his ingenuities utilization of the English language and creates an extended connection of linguistic relations that reveals the dynamic status of the people of Oyo.

...Elesin enjoys the political benefit of his position which will qualify him for the task he has taken undertaking to implement. Therefore, Soyinka separate himself from Marxism as identified by Stratton (1988) is to implicate his characters who show such propensity and characteristics. The life and the suicide of Elesin therefore have particular meaning and precise importance within a self-sustaining universe. While he addresses the market women in the opening scene, Elesin illustrates this meaning:

*Our acts should have meaning. The sap of the plantain never dries. You have seen the young shoot swelling. Even as the parent stalk begins to wither. Women, let my going be likened to the twilight hour of the plantain. (Soyinka 1975, p. 20)*

...The Play *Death and The King's Horseman* raised some questions of ethics in political leadership. Prudence is an intellectual virtue that is essential in Leadership, while moral virtue demonstrates what is just an amicable. This paper grasps desire as a destruction of Nigeria's political leadership as portrayed in Wole Soyinka's *Death and King's Horseman*. The political role as well as the socio-cultural context of self-killing as an alternative moral course of action to death at the hands of others is depicted in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*.

...One thing to observe is that, ritual is an unavoidable constituent of culture, ranging from the largest-scale social and political processes to the most familiar aspects of our self-experience. Yet within the universality of the practice of ritual, the inherent multitude of ritual practices, both politics and religion also reflects the full diversity of the human experience. Ritual was used as an intricate tool of cultural and political reproduction employed by the dominant groups or elite members of society.

...Such political position tend to live larger and in total affluence of the people's wealth whom they are supposed to serve. Those occupying ironically, such privileges are products of the efforts of the people, which they closely compile and use for their benefit. Elesin after enjoying such privileges on the day of his ritual performance still decides to take for himself a bride. Even when he is cautioned that his intended bride is betrothed, Elesin grows rather angry. He uses the privilege of his office and the ritual he is about to perform as an instrument through which he endears the people and community to. The conversation that ensues reveals clearly Elesin's emotional reaction when he seems challenged by his choice of a bride:

Elesin: *What! Where do you all say I am?*  
Iyaloja: *Still among the living*

Elesin: *and that radiance which so suddenly lit up this market I could boast I knew so well?*

Iyaloja: *Has one step already in her husband's home. She is betrothed*

Elesin: *[irritated]: Why do you tell me that?*

Iyaloja: *Not because we dare give you offence Elesin. Today is your day and the whole world is yours. Still, even those who leave town to make a new dwelling elsewhere like to be remembered by what they leave behind.*

*(Soyinka 1975, p. 20)*

When our leaders and citizens adopt moral virtue and allow the greater reward of good governance of the people to inhibit the lust for power. This would influence on the future generation who will then have ideal role models to fashion their ideology of leadership in the right directions. Lust results in power-drunkenness and becomes toxic to political administration and leadership, because when a leader begins to put self-interest before that of the people he has been elected to serve, the citizens or masses inevitably suffer for this. The result of rightful, morally driven leadership is justice for all which should usher in contentedness and fulfillment.

### Colonial Politics and Performance Space

The defiance in the play is largely metaphysical as a result of the colonial factor that is an incident, a catalytic incident merely, contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe of the Yoruba mind—the world of the living, the dead, the unborn, and the spiritual passage which links all: transition. *Death and the King's Horseman* can be totally realized only through an appeal of music from the abyss of transition. In his confrontation with Pilkings, Elesin reveals that he is well conscious of the lasting outcomes his failure of will have on his community and does not hesitate to blame colonial intervention as the catalytic cause. After Pilkings' comment that he has saved Elesin's life, Elesin responds with the following:

..... Elesin: *You did not save my life District Officer. You destroyed it.*

..... Pilkings: *Now come on.*

..... Elesin: *And not merely my life but the lives of many.*

...The theme of the play *Death and the King's Horseman* is sacrificing in which protagonist martyr himself for the moral benefit of the society. Human sacrifice is the act of killing human beings as a part of political and religious ritual. This practice was common during old days in many cultures in the human society. James Frazer states "In the ancient days, trees, vegetables, wild and domestic animals, birds, slaves (humans), women, chieftains, priests, princes, sometimes even kings were sacrificed. Among all sacrifices, human sacrifice is considered as the greatest offering to God. The motives behind the rituals are the same, i.e. to bring good fortune and to pacify the gods to grant success in their attempts in warfare, magical purpose, business, buildings, and moreover welfare of the society." (p.67)

The play *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka's reveals much about power dynamics: it shows both the polit-

ical practices of the British in pre-Independence Nigeria as well as Nigerian responses to those practices in light of Yoruba ideology. The colonial context of the play is particularly significant as a position of power enactments, both British and Yoruba, within the framework of postcolonial theater.

...*Death and the King's Horseman* eventually treats a tragic theme. It portrays a profound and solemn level through the mechanics of rite and cultic symbolism, But it also functions the mechanics of popular theatre that of satire, comedy and masquerade. As for Yoruba Society, death is essential for the survival of the society in future most African peoples accept or acknowledge god as the final guardian of law and order and of the moral and ethical codes. In the context of the "large metaphysical nature of the confrontation" presented in the play (Ritual Theatre, 72), the role of the British is, in fact, merely catalytic. However, despite the ultimate failures of both the British and Yoruba, the significance of the colonialist presence becomes greater in light of the emphasis placed on the power dynamics expressed within each separate act of the play. As indicated by the clear power struggles enacted within each physical space—whether it be the market, the District Officer's bungalow, the Residency, or the prison cell attached to the Residency—the fact that there is a colonial presence in the Yoruba world at all cannot be ignored or dismissed. The presence of and enactments of these power dynamics reveal that members of the Yoruba community resisted the British political performance of power Nigeria in an attempt to maintain Yoruba ideology and culture. Colonialism, thus, was not merely an "incident;" the real tragedy of the play lies not in the failure of the British, but in their successful ability to interfere with the ritual and thus importantly disturb the Yoruba world— something that may not have occurred without their presence.

### Political Unconscious

Ritual was part of the cultural dominant in feudal societies, in other hand; ritual was part of a complex and false tool of cultural and political reproduction dominated by the dominant groups. In western societies, it is to be expected, given the superannuation of the feudal mode of production, that the phenomenon of ritual itself would have lost much of its social efficacy and social power.

...The idea of a political unconscious as a corollary for the collective consciousness is not a new one. Its hazy outlines can be glimpsed in the works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. In fact, Freud's concept of repression (i.e. the specific mechanism by means of which individuals and societies alike suppress hostile and intolerable truths as a strategy for containing or postponing confrontations with reality) actually foreshadows the theory of the political unconscious.

...Yet this notwithstanding, it is also obvious that within the context of post-colonial cultural politics, the entire concept of ritual has become a casualty of linguistic imperialism—a Eurocentric, unilinear notion of historical development which negates the other by a forcible evacuation of its space. Thus, in the industrial and scientific age, ritual has acquired the pejorative connotation of a meaningless exercise, a mundane routine.

...I have analyzed the political implications of Soyinka's pen chant for the mythic resolution of actual contradictions as well as the short comings of the historicist opposition to this position (Williams "Mythic Imagination"). *Death and the King's Horseman* reveals most explicit prevalence of ritual both as an organizing standard and as a surgical instrument for providing open people's multilateral recognition at a crucial moment of their historical development. The transformation in the play is a result of acute political and psychological threat to the ritual of human sacrifice. This is indeed a critical moment of history, and since the play *Death and the King's Horseman* is a reflection of an actual historical event that is bounded to support the playwright with an appropriate forum for attractive reflection on a communal impasse. Yet it is important to unravel the deeper ideological necessity behind the ritual in *Death and the King's Horseman*, that is, the actual collective "narrative" of which it is socially symbolic or, to employ the terminology of structural linguistics, the communal "langue" behind the author's "parole." To do this is to inquire into the political reality of the "political unconscious" behind both the social text itself and the playwright's textualization of it in his play.

...The political unconscious is connected with a theory of culture, but culture itself is always an unstable totality mediated by a whole range of countervailing forces. In a diachronic sense, these forces are often hostile accretions from earlier cultural modes or developments within the society whose sheer in concord with the dominant order might be occasional of newer modes struggling to come into existence. Raymond Williams has described these forces as the residual and the emergent.

...The issue here is less the correctness of Soyinka's choice of subject or of the revolutionary character of the "class" of his protagonists than the project which the choice of subject and protagonist serve. It seems to us that Soyinka's is a profoundly de-colonizing project, and that Jey ifo has lost sight of this in his demand that an alternative (although not actually opposed) project be undertaken by African writers. However, the route forward in Nigeriac, as in all post colonial societies, is in part through a preservation of what Soyinka has called "self apprehension." (81)

...what Soyinka accomplished in *Death and The King's Horseman* was to opposition the dominant culture of the ancient Oyo kingdom against the equally hegemonic culture of the white invaders. His strategy is a brilliant, decolonizing venture. In an age characterized by new forms of cultural domination that result from the economic marginalization of the third world, such an approach might well represent a more pressing project than analyzing the class content of indigenous cultures. In a perceptive critique of Jey ifo's position on *Death and The King's Horseman*, Gareth Griffins and David Moody conclude.

## CONCLUSION

The study views the religious and cultural practices of the Yoruba people hold in high esteem and significance. Thus culture and religion have played a vital role to human existence and paved the way for revealing the historical events

and contemporary resistance that exists due to the contact with the western culture. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka criticizes the new culture. At the same time, he acquires and shows courage of understanding his own culture and religious practices. Soyinka concludes that to fight racism in an effective way. Therefore, it must be accepted every culture has intrinsic values and traditions shaped by age-old practices and rituals. Ideas, beliefs and the way of white life related to race has been taken into consideration for accepting as the standards that should be measured and assessed. As a matter of fact, the culture is superior to another but only different.

*Death and the King's Horseman* has presented as a series of contradictions such as physical versus metaphysical, British versus Yoruba, personal versus social and an expression of failure versus as a form of redemption. Significantly, Soyinka has never touched any particular attention for Christianity. Although he does not distinctly criticize or denounce it, he has barely made any comment or observation in favor of it. In this paper, we realize that Soyinka has left an unforgettable impression both on political and literary scenes of the contemporary Nigeria. As it has already been observed that Soyinka is both the writer and the political activist, all his writings reveal his life that has been a crusade for liberating man from the shackles of political bondage and injustice. So, the form of the play has made a particular accessible to audiences who are familiar with the European tradition. Its meaning challenges have led audiences to come up with the Yoruba world view, metaphysical system, religion and code of conduct. However, Soyinka is only partly concerned to make the British appears insensitive and ridiculous, therefore, the major concern is to present the Yoruba world and world-view on the stage; and thus this helped him to be successful. Soyinka's works over the years; for this instance, the interruption not only has focused on a specific historical event, but also provided a general image of colonial intervention. Thus his treatment of his themes and the employment of the techniques are as a result of his reaction to the society.

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