



THE CULTURAL CLASH IN WOLE SOYINKA'S PLAY THE LION AND THE JEWEL

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the clash between cultures in Nigeria and western society as represented in Wole Soyinka's play The Lion and the Jewel. The study shows the relationships between the different cultures. Wole Soyinka was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for literature in 1986 acknowledging his stature as a great writer and his life long commitment for the cause of justice. There is no doubt that Soyinka is the pride of the Nigerian nation. Wole Soyinka is considered as one of the big men of the African world of letters. He likes traditional cultures so; he came out from all difficulties with power to enlighten his people. His upbringing reflected both African and western influences, and the conflict and interaction between these two forces occupies most of his writing. He wrote about the African experience. As the most radical and powerful voice from Nigeria, Soyinka played a significant role in shaping the consciousness of the world. Since 1986, hundreds of Nigerians have proudly studied Nigerian literature. Within his writings, he reflects the colonial and postcolonial suffering in Nigerian society. Soyinka depicts the post-colonial Africa, where modernity and tradition are in constant conflict. Thus, he creates characters who challenge themselves in an atmosphere punctuated with the defenders of modernity in one camp and those who are deeply rooted in the traditions and customs on the other side. The focus of this study is to demonstrate how Soyinka uses characters, themes, and plot to investigate the conflict between cultures. The play, The Lion and the Jewel is set in the village of Ilunjuinle in Yoruba West Africa.

KEY WORDS: *Examine, Demonstrate, postcolonial, culture, Modernity, Traditional.*

INTRODUCTION

The play has a chronological plot and the action starts in the morning and ends at night. The play is characterized by the conflict between cultures. This conflict exists between Lakunle the school teacher who is influenced by Western culture and Baroka who is uneducated and represents the traditional one. This study shows the concepts of culture that has focused on the conflicts between old and new, western and tradition. The researcher tries to highlight not only the plight of Nigerian people but the Africans continents as a whole. Thus the title depicts the relationship between the two leading characters of the play Baroka, the lion and Sidi the jewel of the village who gets tricked by Baroka in the end by sleeping with him and the Lion successfully engages in sexual relations with the jewel and she ends up in marrying him. The play is an amusing comedy renowned for its complex themes and allegorical structure and most notable for its insights into Yoruba tradition and culture. and Baroka who is uneducated and represents the traditional one. This study shows the concepts of culture that has focused on the conflicts between old and new, western and tradition. The researcher tries to highlight not only the plight of Nigerian people but the Africans continents as a whole. Thus the title depicts the relationship between the two leading characters of the play Baroka, the lion and Sidi the jewel of the village who gets tricked by Baroka in the end by sleeping with him and the Lion successfully engages in sexual relations with the jewel and she ends up in marrying him. The play is an amusing comedy renowned for its complex themes and allegorical structure and most notable for its insights into Yoruba

tradition and culture.

Baroka, Lakunle, and Sidi exhibit internal and external conflict with tradition and modern culture. Throughout the entire play, there is a battle between Baroka and Lakunle for Sidi's hand in marriage. She sees value in both of them and it is hard to choose one of them over another. She is confused between the two cultures. So, this reveals the conflict between modern and tradition. It represents many of Nigerians of this time who are caught between two worlds and wonder which one they prefer to live in. At the end of the play, victory will be for the tradition represents in Baroka by winning the girl Sidi that represents the new generation. Soyinka is one of the foremost contemporary writers and advocators of his native culture. Soyinka has written in the forms of drama, poetry, autobiography, novel, literary and cultural and political criticism.

Conflict between Cultures

The Lion and the Jewel tells a funny story involving four main characters. Lakunle is a school teacher of the village who is a young man of twenty-three years who is bent on bestowing Western culture onto the people of Ilunjuinle. Sidi is the jewel, the village's belle whose beauty has been captured by a photographer and published in a magazine. Bale Baroka is the Lion of Ilunjuinle, who is a chief and has several wives. Both of Lakunle and Baroka love Sidi. The final major character is Sadiko, the lion's head wife. The play shows the importance of every culture that should be allowed to be practiced in a way peculiar to the people. Cultural conflicts can be a clash between two opposing cultures. It can be faced



by individuals, and also it can be a conflict within a society or more societies. Cultural conflicts start because of the differences in values and norms of behavior of people from different cultures. Actually, conflicts arise because of human relationships. Thus, at the time, that culture has great impacts on our daily life and there are conflicts between individuals, this will lead to conflict between cultures as well. In this regard, LeBaron (1993) says that "culture is always a factor in conflict, whether it plays a central role or influences it subtly and gently. For any conflict that touches us where it matters, where we make meaning and hold our identities, there is always a cultural component" (1). The researcher would fully agree that the conflict in the play is a result of:

Culture and Its Role

Ideally, culture is a powerful force in any society. Culture plays an important role in the development of any society. Culture teaches the value system and the way of living in an organized society.

Obviously, the play is set in the Nigerian village of Ilujinle, it takes place within a day and is divided into morning, noon, and night. The main theme is the conflict between traditional Nigerian Yoruba values and the Western influence of Nigeria's colonizers. In this play, Soyinka seeks to satisfy his thirst for Afro-centricity by applying many methods, which are in African origin, in his play. The play draws on Nigerian traditional poetry, music, and dance. It is needless to say that this play enabled the Nigerian drama to become part of the world theater. He introduces two male characters and by them, he introduces two worldviews; the Afrocentric view and the Eurocentric view. Hence, the play turns to be a kind of ideological war between these two poles; and furthermore, Soyinka adds another important character who is a female to mediate the conflict.

Conflict between Old And New

In fact, the play explores the value of traditional Yoruba ways against the European innovations. The first character is Lakunle, an eager but naive schoolteacher who believes in modernity and Western ideas and accepts them without understanding.

Baroka, the village leader, accepts traditions and sees modern ideas as a threat to his authority. In this regard, the two characters represent the two sides of the major social and political issue in Africa. The researcher highlights that the play has its setting in the village of Ilunjiunle in Yoruba West Africa. The play is characterized by culture conflict. Thus, the lion is Baroka and the jewel is Sidi. She is the village belle. The lion seeks to have the jewel. More centrally, *The Lion and the Jewel* is about a beautiful young girl named Sidi who should choose either the young schoolmaster or the old village chief as her husband. At first, she makes fun of the chief for his impotency, but after some events, she marries him.

Actually, the play is a comedy with a message, which puts the Westernized schoolmaster Lakunle against the leader Baroka, illustrating the division between the modern and the traditional. Thus, Wole Soyinka writes about Yoruba

rituals and beliefs to reveal his roots. The play starts with Lakunle pouring out his heart to Sidi but she does not want to pay attention. If only Lakunle can pay dowry then she would marry him. However, to Lakunle, that is being barbaric, outdated and ignorant. Lakunle is dressed in an old style English suit, threadbare but not ragged, clean but not ironed, obviously a size or two too small. His tie is done in a very small knot, disappearing beneath a shiny black waistcoat. He wears twenty-three-inch-bottom trousers and blanco-white tennis shoe" (*Collected Plays 2, The Lion and the Jewel*, 1). Erapu (1975) illustrates that:

The school teacher turns out to be a man with a missionary zeal to transform the village from „primitivity“ to „modernity“. Lakunle is a romantic and a dreamer on the one hand and a jester with an imperfectly hidden zest for life on the other hand (3-4).

He proves to Sidi that he is a man of words not action. She says "These thoughts of future wonders- do you buy them or merely go mad and dream them?" (The Lion, 5). Therefore, she calls his speech nonsense. Moreover, he says Nonsense? Nonsense? Do you hear? Does anybody listen? Can the stones

Bear to listen to this? Do you call it

Nonsense that I poured the waters of my soul To wash your feet? (6).

Baroka is the leader of the village and sticks to his traditional beliefs. We learn that he is distributed by issues from the beginning of the play that represented in his secret to his wife and his apparent impotence. In addition, he manages to lure Sidi into coming to his palace. Baroka is cunning and has power than Lakunle who fails to persuade Sidi to marry him. Finally, Sidi is responsible for her decision. If she chooses Baroka as a husband, she will reflect the playwright's opinion that old tradition are better than the new and western one.

Bride-Price and Its Importance

It is clear that, the price of the bride is money or property given by the bridegroom to the family of the bride. In the primitive African societies, they follow the footsteps of tradition and culture. Thus, the good price is an honour to the bride. If a girl marries without the price, it is assumed that she is not a virgin. In Sidi's case, she insists on dowries, because she is untouched by the foreign ideas and culture.

The bride price is a traditional African custom of marriage. As for Lakunle, he calls the system of bride price as "a savage custom, barbaric, out-dated...upalatable (8). Lakunle opposes this custom because of his influence on the Western concept of gender equality or his empty pocket. In his concept, this custom is a disgrace and humiliation to women, he says, "To pay the price would be to buy a heifer off the market stall" (9). Also, he completes:

"To pay price would be to buy a heifer off the market stall. You would be my chattel, my mere property" (22).

In this regard, Sidi does not pay attention because he believes in modern marriage. To her, a girl for whom dowry is not paid will be hiding her shame for she will not be known as a virgin. Her beauty has captured many souls besides Lakunle.



The researcher would fully argue that Sidi's traditional viewpoints have been shown in her rejection of Lakunle's many modern advances towards her. In the first scene, she denies Lakunle's request to carry the pail for her because she is aware of his motives for doing it. Thus, she will not allow him to put aside her values, she makes it clear to Lakunle that her declination of his marriage proposal is based on his refusal to pay the price, because she would not be a "cheap bowl for the village to spit" (8). He thinks that bride price is uncivilized and outrageous custom.

More centrally, in this play, Soyinka manages to describe the existing environment that has been enriched with variegated realistic scenes. He depicts the life of Africans, for example, he shows the characters holding a mirror up to nature and presents life as it is. The main theme of the play is tradition versus modernity. He offers some of the customs of Yoruba such as bride price, polygamy, and wife wooing girls for her husband. No doubt, the modern customs challenge the outdated customs and traditions. Soyinka has made use of elements such as songs, dance, and mimes to forward the action of the play. It is clear that he offers the native tradition, and confirmed the people's livelihood policy and role of women.

As the main theme in the play is the conflict between tradition and modernity, the play shows the intimacy of Soyinka with the various aspects of African traditions. On the one hand, the play also shows the influence of the modern world on the African mind. On the other hand, *The Lion and the Jewel*, focuses on the failure of an elementary school teacher to apprehend the sense of culture and advancement. Feld (1993) writes "the comedy clearly operates in terms of the characters adjusting ideology [tradition or modern], or selecting convenient aspects of it, in accordance with their situation and their psychological needs" (307)

Actually, the main characters of the play exhibit external and internal conflicts with modernity and tradition. There is a battle between Lakunle and Baroka for Sidi's hand in marriage and this is the main plot of the play. The conflict reveals a confrontation between their two different ways of life. Hence, Lakunle stands to represent "progress" and cultured romance who was captivated by Sidi's own charm. Unfortunately, he failed at the crucial hours to obtain her while encountering.

Women's role in the society: Polygamy and wife wooing girls to the husband

Hence, Soyinka portrays the customs and traditions in his Yoruba country. It is new to the reader. The Polygamous society gives importance to the Bale, for example: It allows him to marry as many girls as he wants. He just uses them for his pleasure and after the arrival of the new favourite, he sends the last favourite to an outhouse. In our society, we represent this as the society that never gives respect to woman as Lakunle says "they are used to pounds the yam or bends all the day to plant the millet ...to fetch and carry, to cook and scrub, to bring forth children by the gross" (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 7,9). The researcher would fully stress that the characters can be classified in two groups: Baroka, Sadiku, and Sidi represent the traditional African values, whereas

Lakunle stands for modern European especially British-values of life. So, Lakunle is infatuated with Sidi. When Sidi is passing through the corridor near the school, Lakunle has the opportunity to see her and begins to express his appreciation of her beauty. As he sees her carrying a pot of water on her head, he feels anxious for her and advises her:

One main issue that can be shown in the play "*The Lion and the Jewel*" is that this society is a polygamous one. In Nigeria, marrying multiple wives is legal and it is a prominent feature of traditional life. Soyinka, in his play, portrays the African Polygamous society. The practice ensures that the women and her children remain under the economic and social care of the family. According to the tradition a Bale can have as many as wives he can, but he has to follow some conditions like, treating all equally, distributing resources equally to all wives and children, avoid discrimination among wives and children.

The successor of dead Bale or chief of the area some times; marries the last and favourite wife of the dead Bale, as his first wife. According to the custom, the first wife of the Bale becomes the senior and receives all honors in the family.

CONCLUSION

The Lion and the Jewel presents a clash between an traditional chief of the village and a young teacher. It is an amusing play where Soyinka has presented a young man who adheres to all the vulgarity and superficiality of the Western world and thus appears as a caricature of a modern human being. Soyinka loved the traditional culture of his country. His love was based on sound knowledge and deep understanding of the elements in Nigerian heritage that have perennial worth. He was fully aware of the strong points in the Nigerian tradition. For Soyinka, he points out that the man who is genuinely modern is not the one who turns his back upon tradition but rather the one who reinterprets it creatively and rationally. He also accepted the fact that tradition can help people go into the future without being uprooted or alienated from the past. The play *The Lion and the Jewel* illuminates the vision of Soyinka, which is explicit in these words of the Bale, who is Soyinka's mouthpiece:

"The old must flow into the new, Sidi. Not blind itself or stand foolishly" (*Collected Plays 2, The Lion and the Jewel*, 54).

In fact, blind imitation of the glamour of modern world and forgetting all the traditional values can make the society hollow like husk. At the same time, sticking superstitiously to tradition can also reduce a human being to the status of an early man. Soyinka argued that British colonization found its justification in the ideology of the nation as the British came to Nigeria only to plunder and so prosper his nation. He was never interested in developing the occupied country because colonization had hidden aims. Actually, different people of Africa have neglected some of their cultural heritage and adopted the white man's culture (western culture). So, this leads to a clash between those who kept their heritage and the other of Western culture. In this research, the researcher tried to explore how the author uses the theme of disparity between



the two points of view and the final resolution such as immaturity and maturity, sincerity and insincerity and traditional victory over modernism.

Wole Soyinka's works can also be criticized from a feminist view; in *The Lion and the Jewel*, women are really considered the second sex, essentially created for serving men, and in *The Road* there is not female character at all. On the other hand, Euba claims that when women appear in Soyinka's works they appear in a dramatized womanhood, because they are manifestations of the Yoruba goddesses Oya, Yemoja, and Oshun, which represent beauty, love, sensual power, etc (450).

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