

foreground the analysis of dominants and transformations within the system. (Mukarovsky, 1967:12&14) Some practical examples of universal influences, as well as correspondences in selected dramatic cultures are examined below.

2. CROSS-CULTURAL INFLUENCES AND INTERTEXTUALITY

Intertextuality as a theory, argues that a text does not and cannot exist as a self-sufficient whole and cannot be regarded as a closed system. It argues further that the work of a writer, and for the purpose of the present study, a playwright is a product of influenced experiences because the artist is not an island of his own. (Intertextuality: Theory and Practice, 1990:1) Culture-contact had long been established between Nigeria and the West through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, palm-oil trade, colonialism, activities of missionaries, including the introduction of western education, etc. Western influences on contemporary Nigerian dramatic culture and tradition are of two types: (a) any, or a combination, of acceptance, rejection, (b) “nativization” or domestication through appropriation, or adaptation of western plays. Examples under (a) above include:

The Ogunde dramatic tradition (Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Akin Ogungbe, Oyin Adejobi, Funmilayo Ranco, etc.) (Ogundeji 1988) Hubert Ogunde had adapted C19th western melo-dramatic and operatic form in his dramaturgy that is characterized by high-life music and elaborate plot. Here one observes an apparent improvement over the existing itinerant drama sketches that the indigenous Yoruba eegun alare is associated with. Ogunde, in addition, paid critical attention to adaptation of biblical and folkloric stories, as was the practice among his contemporaries. He saddled drama with direct social responsibilities. His protest plays include *Bread and Bullet*; *Strike and Hunger*; and *Yoruba Ronu*.

Similarly, examples of (b) above include, Duro Ladipo’s plays which also show theatrical trend similar to Hubert Ogunde’s dramatic tradition. Through the encouragement and support Duro Ladipo enjoyed from Ulli Beier, he was able to dig deep into tradition and historical archives to facilitate his propagation of Yoruba cultural history and heritage. His efforts at nativization, and adaptation of biblical stories, appropriation of the English medieval and Shakespeare’s plays were such that only very critical and discerning minds could recognize such cultural graftings and critical transplantations. The plays include:

a) Biblical (Mystery and Miracle) plays:

Kobiidi - (the story of David and Goliath)

Oluorogbo - (The nativity story). We must quickly add also that there is a historical parallel between the nativity story and Moremi-Oluorogbo – Ugbo historic encounters. Therefore, the play Oluorogbo doubles as an instance of inter-cultural influence and cross-cultural correspondence.

Alagbara-ma-mero (Samson and Delilah story)

b) Medieval Plays: Eda (Everyman)

c) Shakespeare's plays:

Karohunwi(Hamlet); Aare Akogun(Othello); Otun Akogun (Macebth)

Close to Duro Ladipo's nativized Eda, an adaptation of John Bunyan's *Everyman* is Wale Ogunyemi's *Eniyan*. Other Nigerian plays in this category include, Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, which is an adaptation of Sophocle's *Oedipus Rex*, Olanipekun Esan's *Esin Atirojà*, an adaptation of the Trojan Horse; and Femi Osofisan's *Tègoni*, an adaptation of Sophocle's *Antigone*, while his *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* and *One Legend Many Seasons*, to mention a few, are adaptations of Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, and Charles Dickens's novel, *Christmas Carol*, respectively. The observable intertextuality, no doubt, is a clear indication of inter-cultural influences. Besides, Femi Osofisan's dramaturgy shares a common ideological boundary with the Brechtian epic theatre. Again, this is another proven case of instances of cross-cultural influences and correspondences.

Furthermore, Western literary devices that characterize Shakespeare's dramaturgy have wielded much influence on contemporary Nigerian drama in the area of topicality and form. For example, Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* like its original version, Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, explores the concept of fate/ destiny and concludes erroneously though, that it is unchangeable. Similarly, in Ola Rotimi's historical plays, *Kurunmi*, *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, and *Hope of the Living Dead*, among others, one observes the use of comic relief, dramatic irony and soliloquy, coupled with a conscious adaptation of the plays to proscenium stage, instead of the arena-stage that characterizes most Yoruba indigenous festivals and formal cultural performances. It must be quickly added, however that in the case of *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, Ola Rotimi's adaptation is uncritical and therefore, fallible particularly when one considers the behaviour and general attitude of the indigenous African (Yoruba) gods and/or Oracles which he casts in the mold of the classical Greek gods characterized by vendetta. For example, the Ifa oracle is not bereft of solutions to any problem, no matter the complication or complexity. Therefore, the Oracle's failure to proffer a solution to Odewale's problem is un-African.

Other interesting areas of influence include characterology and historicity. While it is hoped that characterology will be treated under cross-cultural correspondence subheading in this paper, history or historical plays for example, Shakespeare's

Julius Caesar and *Coriolanus*, or Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* deal with the historical accounts of historical figures with same names as play titles who are known to be highly principled Roman 'warlords', a Yoruba war generalissimo and a Benin Kingdom monarch, respectively. Like Shakespeare's the Richard plays which reenact aspects of the English history with a chain of topicalities from over-ambition, power succession or usurpation, to regicide and retributive justice, Adebayo Faleti's historical play, *Basorun Gaa* is cast in a similar vein, while Ola Rotimi's *King Ovonramwen* is a historical play involving the monarchy, the British imperialists' incursion into Benin Kingdom, all foregrounded by conflict of interests.

3. CROSS-CULTURAL CORRESPONDENCE

3.1. MYTHOGRAPHY

The Elizabethan–Shakespeare's universe was similar to what obtains in the indigenous Yoruba spi-Ritual cum-psychosocial setting. This is evident in the representation of myths in the Elizabethan as well as indigenous Yoruba plays. The Yoruba world-view, which shares a striking similarity with its Elizabethan counterpart, is particularly multidimensional to the degree that it is not restricted to the physical or the tangible.

Explaining further the constituents of Yoruba cosmological planes of existence, B.M. Ibitokun (1995:22) states:

... there are the realms of ancestors (the past), gods (the eternal) and the unborn (the future) (the departed)... their home is a "resting place". The ancestral is the measure of the Yoruba Past... stationed in the same metaphysical edifice are the unborn whose exact apartment Wole Soyinka rightly calls a staging house (22)

The abode of the unborn is likened to a "staging house" in the sense that before it arrives in the world of the living as a newly born child it must have rehearsed and gotten itself well prepared. The fourth plane of existence according to Ibitokun, "is the natural home of the unseen deities. In a terrestrial-based culture like the Yoruba, gods and mortals freely interact. The former have to sustain their divinity by humanizing with the latter" (22)

The Yoruba and indeed most indigenous African communities because they are, by nature, largely animist, celebrate the belief in life-after-life. It foregrounds the belief in the interaction between their world (of the living) and the world of the (living-)

dead (ancestors). The Adamu/Adimu-Orisa festival, an annual event in Lagos, Nigeria, or the egungun-masquerade and its variants among the Yoruba and the Igbo, and in most other indigenous African communities are clear indication of ancestral belief and worship.

Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Strong Breed*, and *A Dance of the Forest*; Duro Ladipo's *Oba Koso* and Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* are a few examples of contemporary Nigerian plays in which interaction between the world of the living and the world of the ancestors are represented and graphically re-enacted. Some Shakespeare's plays do suggest apparent similar traits of the belief in ancestral spirit though slightly in an uncategorical mold. It explains, to some extent, the impressive audience-reception Shakespeare's plays had enjoyed in his days and which could only have meant that the Elizabethan society identified with, particularly, ghosts of the dead and the evolving myths arising from such animistic belief. Examples abound in Julius Caesar, and Hamlet, among others.

Much of traditional theatre in the West, from the classical Greece all through to medieval England, the Oriental Asia, and Africa originated from religious rituals, and even now in some cases, still resembles some form of ritual. No doubt, ritual and theatre share a common boundary of elements of performance which Aristotle identified as including the mimetic, stylized speech, costumes, music and dance, dialogue, spectacle, etc. Besides, performers in the theatre or in a religious ritual may fall into a trance, or appear to be possessed by some deities during performance. The fundamental difference is however, that while a religious ritual is for such purposes as healing, fertility inducement, and good harvest, etc., theatre on the other hand, its therapeutic effect on its audience notwithstanding, operates outside such functions, and is primarily aimed at providing entertainment and enlightenment. Euripides's *The Bacchae*, a classical Greek drama, and the contemporary Nigerian plays like Obotunde Ijimere's (*Ulli Beier*) *The Imprisonment of Obatala*, and Duro Ladipo's *Oba Koso*, reenact the belief in godlike humans and human-like gods. Wole Soyinka (1979), succeeds in identifying and drawing attention to some observable similarities that the Greek Dionysus and the Yoruba Ogun have in common: their unusual disposition and penchant for pleasure and wine, cholera and awe. Besides, the African theatre shares with her Asian counterpart the fusion of religious and cultural practices. For example, Buddhist and Shinto elements are integral of Japanese No play. In Indonesia there exist masked dramas of spirit possession similar to Elegun Sango in Sango ritual worship. Although in the case of Sango worship the Elegun is not masked, his peculiar hairdo and dress, as well as his role as priest mark him out for the deity to possess. Akin to Elegun Sango phenomenon is Soyinka's attempt in *Death and the King's Horseman* in which Olohun-iyo the Praise-Singer is visibly possessed by the spirit of the departed Alafin. The spirit of Alafin uses the Praise-Singer as a vehicle to communicate to the living his worries over the apparent

disturbing delay. Similarly, the egungun or ancestral cult also has masks as essential part of the masquerade dress and paraphernalia. Besides being possessed occasionally by the spirits they designate, masquerades are believed to assume the pedestal of ancestors and as such, are revered.

3.1.1 *OMENS, DREAMS, PREMONITIONS*

The seriousness with which dreams, ominous signs and their meanings are regarded in indigenous African society cannot be over emphasized, so are premonitions. The Elizabethan society's belief in dreams and premonitions, supernatural forces (including witches), are graphically represented in some Shakespeare's plays. For example, in *Macbeth* the play opens with three witches deliberating on when next to meet. It is suggestive of the active involvement and role of the supernatural forces in the context of the play, as well as the world-view of the Elizabethan society. Again, in *Julius Caesar*, the supernatural forces actively engage in sending the right signals as a way of warning to the executors of the assassination plan against Julius Caesar, as well as a warning to Julius Caesar and his wife, Calpurnia. For instance, there is a warning through the report of Casca, about some unusual happenings at the market place where ominous elements had been very visible: owls hooting in the market place at noon; near the Capitol, a lion was seen though without threat to anybody in particular (I.iii); a warning to the conspirators that the gods are aware of the heinous crime being hashed.

Another warning bordering on premonitions is made known through Calpurnia's dream: she had seen Caesar's corpse and some Roman nobles bathing their hands merrily in Caesar's blood. Unfortunately, Decius Brutus succeeds in flattering Caesar by deliberately twisting the meaning of Calpurnia's dream (II.iii). In a similar vein, Cinna the poet has had some premonitions about his own impending doom. First, he dreamt that he ate with Caesar. Now that Caesar is assassinated, Cinna's death becomes inevitable. Again, Cinna has a premonition, warning him not to venture out on the day Caesar is murdered, but he feels compelled by some irresistible force to go out. He goes out and falls into the hands of an irate mob that tear him into pieces for his "bad verses".

The ominous reality in which nature elements are believed to play crucial roles in determining or predicting events and characters constitute a significant aspect of mythography. Nature elements are believed among the indigenous Yoruba to be capable of determining socio-economic stability or instability, equilibrium or disequilibrium in the syntax of actions of a people or individual. Nature elements do effect changes that warrant the manifestation of the ominous through unusual behavioural patterns. Such changes become all the more evident in the timing of

appearance or manifestation, etc. For example, the stars (the moon, the sun and other planetary bodies); the Earth's rotation and its effects on day, night, storm/flood, etc.; and vectoral agents of the ominous (lion, horse, dog, rat, owl, bat, eagle, vulture, ravine, etc.)

In Akinwumi Isola's *Efunsetan Aniwura*, Itawuyi (a slave-girl) narrates a dream she had to Adetutu, her boy friend, also a slave, in which during their wedding ceremony a flock of akala-birds came to the venue and one hit Adetutu on the head with its wings. Their effort to stop the escaping birds also failed. Itawuyi and Adetutu had pursued the habingers of evil message, the birds, but could not get at them. She woke up suddenly.(Efunsetan, p.22) The akala-bird is an ominous bird. It is therefore suggestive of the ill-fated proposed marriage and the doom which befalls them shortly after.

3.2 PHILOSOPHY AND HERMENEUTICS

Philosophical hermeneutics constitute significant areas of universal correspondence both in the Yoruba indigenous setting and the Elizabethan setting. They include such concepts as monarchy (the Yoruba Obaship, or Kabiyesi or the Ekeji Orisa); the "the bastard, the law of primogeniture, the tragicomic, the law of retribution arising from, for example, regicide, the practice and prosecution of war, and finally, reenactment of key historical events.

We shall briefly look at some of these phenomena of common interests more closely for the purpose of identifying the obvious cultural correspondences.

3.2.1. *MONARCHY*

Monarchy is an institution that is held sacred in indigenous Nigerian Society, as well as in other nations with similar tradition. The Yoruba, for example believe that the O&ba or King is the sole representative of the Supreme Deity, therefore the title, Ekeji Orisa (deputy to the Supreme Deity), or Kabiyesi (in whom all power and authority reside). Ka bi o o si (Kabiyesi): literally means, he whose authority cannot be questioned. Both the Elizabethan and indigenous Yoruba societies seem to share the same belief in this regard. For example, it is considered an abomination when regicide is committed. Regardless of the gravity of the offence of the monarch, it is believed that he is directly responsible to the Supreme Deity and only He reserves the right to punish an erring monarch. However, the Yoruba have put in place some structures for checks and balances for the purpose of curbing any tendentious excesses on the part of any monarch or chieftain. Rather than kill a monarch, he was

allowed to take his own life by taking poison. There are historical instances in which certain individuals whose responsibility was to check the excesses of the monarch or to determine when an Oba must commit suicide, had abused the privilege by committing regicide. In such isolated cases, they also had died an unusually tragic death. In deed, anyone who committed regicide under any guise in Yoruba history had often ended in tragedy. Contemporary Nigerian drama has often represented this idea. Adebayo Faleti graphically illustrates this in his play, *Basorun Gaa*.

One observes similar trends in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the Henry and Richard plays. In *Julius Caesar* there is a similar trend. Although *Julius Caesar* is not a Roman monarch but a war general, he occupies a position of leadership that is in every way similar to that of a monarch. The consequences of his assassination by the conspirators led by Brutus his trusted friend are to some degree predictable. They all die by the very swords with which they murdered Caesar.

3.2.2. *WAR*

Causes of war and manner of execution are quite similar in the Elizabethan and indigenous Nigerian, especially, Yoruba society. Wars were waged to defend or expand the territories for the purpose of consolidation of the power of the monarch. The nature or manner of war execution was such that it was sporadic, coupled with pre-war boasting, alarum, drumming, singing and chanting of war songs, direct physical engagement with swords, machetes, guns, etc. and killings. The vanquished were usually carried away into slavery by the victors. Shakespeare's plays in this category include, *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, among others. Similarly, most of the existing contemporary Nigerian plays express or exhibit these features when reenacting indigenous wars. Examples include, Duro Ladipo's *Ajagun Nla* and *Moremi*, and Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, *Kurunmi*, and to some degree, *The Gods Are Not To Blame*.

3.2.3. *BASTARDS*

The idea of the bastard child, it is believed, arose from the fact of children born outside wedlock. In indigenous Yoruba setting a "bastard" (Omo ale) is regarded as a social misfit. Perhaps this was meant to discourage marital infidelity, perhaps not. But the general belief is that the child so born outside wedlock often possesses an unusual behaviour predictably traceable to the manner of his or her conception (by cheating). It is evident that the father and mother must have cheated by colluding

with an imposter, an illegitimate partner, to commit an adulterous act. It is in the opinion of the indigenous Yoruba mind that no matter whatever is done to treat an illegitimate child (a bastard) like a true child of the family, he/she is bound to misbehave some day. A Yoruba proverb puts the presumed psychotic behaviour of a bastard this way?

“Ile to ba toro, to tu ba to tu se, omo ale ibe ni ko i ti da’gba”

(A home that is very peaceful and happy is so because the bastard child has not yet grown up).

The implication is simply that a bastard is a home destroyer, a mischief-maker and a devil incarnate. The conduct of the biblical Abimelech a bastard son of Gideon the Jerobaal in the Book of Judges: murdered all the legitimate children of his father except Jothan who managed to escape, and in 1100BC destroyed the city of Shechem, confirmed similar belief. A number of contemporary Nigerian plays that feature a bastard child have such a character cast in the mold similar to the picture given above. This is also the impression that one gets in the role of Edmond, the bastard son to Gloucester in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, and Bastard of Orleans, John Dunois, an illegitimate son of Louis, Duke of Orleans, in *Henry VI*.

3.2.4. HISTRIONICS

There exist in many parts of Nigeria, especially Yoruba, dramatized indigenous historical events. The general perception of the role of history, as well as the collective objective of teaching morals in the traditional setting tend to correspond with those of their western counterparts, in particular, Shakespeare’s history plays: the Henry plays, the Richard plays (English), Julius Caesar, Coriolanus (Roman, drawn from Plutarch’s works), as well as those of his contemporaries. Similarly, in Yoruba traditional society the following exist:

- i. the eegun alare - players. Common examples of historical drama in their repertoires include, Alatinga – maje-maje (witch catchers); Awolowo versus Akintola; The visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Nigeria of 1957.
- ii. the Edi festival mock duel and the Inasanan scene which chronicle the legendary conflict between Ugbo and Ife (in Moremi festival).
- iii. the Obatala mock duel between Oluuwin and Ajagemo. The monarch, Timi is made to pay a ransom for the freedom of the vanquished. The freed vanquished is then led triumphantly into the palace of Timi with pomp and pageantry.

4. DIVINATORY & ZODIAC CHARACTEROLOGY

There are metaphysical means by which situations and events are determined. Besides, there exist character-signs which are informed by some governing planetary bodies (stars) that determine behavioural patterns, as well as shape the destiny of individuals in the indigenous African setting. Among the Yoruba, for example, predictions are based on relevant divinatory codes. This is also true of the Attic-Hebraic-Christian traditions that largely constitute the foundation of what is today known as European culture.

In some contemporary Nigerian history plays like Duro Ladipo's *O&ba Koso*; Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi and Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*; and J.P. Clark-Bekederemo's *Song of A Goat* (not a historical play), among others, predictions have been based on divinations.

Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, for example, is clearly indicative of this belief and practice as shown in the events that follow the birth of Oedipus to King Laius and Queen Jocasta. And in view of these shared beliefs between classical Greek and the indigenous African society, the Yoruba in particular, Ola Rotimi successfully domesticates Oedipus Rex under the title, *The Gods Are Not To Blame*. King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola invite Baba Fakunle the Ifa priest, to enquire from Ifa the message their new baby brings from the gods at the ikosejaye ceremony. The shocking revelation that the child would kill his father and marry his mother informs its parents decision to dispose off the evil messenger. At another instance in the same play, a drunken "uncle" describes Odewale as a "butterfly" that calls itself a "bird". The statement compels Odewale's quest for his true identity. Again, Odewale's quasi-epic journey into self begins with his consultation with the Ifa oracle.

In Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*, the protagonist leads his Ijaye warriors against the Ibadan warriors under Basorun Ogunmola. Kurunmi on getting close to the Ose River has to make a crucial decision for which he consults with the Ifa oracle, to know whether or not it is wise to cross the Ose River. This decision becomes necessary for the purpose of determining the appropriate time to launch an offensive against the Ibadan warriors; or in the alternative, wait for the enemy to meet his own warriors. Consulting with Ifa oracle before key decisions are taken, before names are given to a child, before a king is appointed or elected, and in determining specific days traditional festivals are to be held, is quite normal and imperative in an indigenous Yoruba setting.

Closely linked with this consciousness is the use of onomastic decoding of characters through the names given to individuals. For example, the Biblical

reference to Jabez (son of sorrow) whose mother had named so, because according to her, “I gave birth to him in pain”(I Chronicles 4:9&10), is indicative of its universality. The indigenous Yoruba regard names as sacred, as historical anchorage, a password into a man/woman’s alpha, his/her essence and life. Some Yoruba proverbial sayings confirm this belief. For example, the situation in a home is usually given a serious consideration in determining the name a child bears: Ile la a wo ka to somo loruko. Similarly, it is believed that the name one bears is capable of shaping, or determining one’s destiny and one’s general behaviour and attitude to life: Oruko n ro ni. Examples abound in many Nigerian plays of Yoruba origin. In Ola Rotimi’s *Kurunmi*, for example, the protagonist Kurunmi is the Are-ona-Kakanfo- the title given to the Yoruba war generalissimo. The name “Kurunmi” is a contraction of a simple sentence: Iku (noun/subject) run (verb) mi (object) meaning “Death ruins me”. It is therefore almost predictable the inevitability of death destroying the war general. His heir apparent is killed in the war, his army is wiped out, and he finally commits suicide as demanded by tradition for suffering a defeat in battle.

In Wole Soyinka’s *The Strong Breed*, Eman the protagonist is a teacher and a healer whose symbol is light. A quick reference to the Bible reveals Jesus Christ, as Emmanuel (Eman) and as the sacrificial lamb of the world. Emmanuel (God with us) was a teacher and a healer too. Eman in *The Strong Breed* is presumed by many critics including this writer, to have cleverly been molded by the playwright after the universal carrier-hero, Jesus. The fact that Eman of *The Strong Breed* is a scapegoat, a carrier-hero in the play is inevitable. In another play by Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King’s Horseman*, which is also informed by the scapegoat motif, Elesin Oba betrays his society by failing to commit the ritual suicide meant to facilitate the passage of the spirit of the departed Alafin to the ancestral world, the Oyo monarch had died a month earlier. This is in accordance with the demand of his office by tradition. His heir apparent Olunde, a medical student in England, returns home to bury his father. To his dismay, he discovers that his father has failed the people. Olunde therefore commits the ritual suicide in his father’s stead thereby saving his society from doom and shame.

Again, it is relevant to the present discourse, the predictability of Olunde’s heroic action should the semantics of his name be taken into account. “Olunde” has two possible interpretations going by the simple sentence contraction, Olu rin de and Oninkan de. Olu rin de means the champion or hero has returned. And going by the fact that the play reveals the efforts of Mr. Pilkings to educate Olunde abroad as a way of escaping from “a rather backward civilization” and to which Olunde had obliged, his dramatic return to the expected funerary scene for the purpose of burying his own father. Therefore, Olunde’s personal decision to take upon himself his father’s role as Elesin Oba, confirms the etymology of his name, Olu rin de. Oninkan-de, that is, “The owner has come” has a similar implication as Olu-rin-de. “The

owner” which is declarative, could only have been in recognition or acknowledgement of “the great one who possesses the correct vision and sense of commitment required traditional Elesin Oba should have”. In other words, Soyinka consciously chooses names that further engender meaning, development of plot, and topicality in his plays, so does Ola Rotimi.

Femi Osofisan’s plays are replete in onomastic characterology. Ifawomi (the fake diviner) in *Who Is Afraid of Solarin?* and Bicycle, the hotel hands, in *Midnight Hotel* are typical examples. “Ifawomi”, a Yoruba contracted simple sentence: “Ifa wo omi” Ifa-is-drowned. In other words, going by the context of the play, the guiding principles and moral ethics, which are required of an Ifa priest or his divination by tradition, are drowned by the deluge of corruption and general decay that pervade the society.

That Ifawomi is a fake is obvious and predictable. The name Bicycle, the co-receptionist, is equally suggestive of a good-for-nothing; a nonentity who, like a bicycle, can only be used as one does a donkey, beast of burden. However, characteristic of Femi Osofisan’s neo-rationalist theatre which shares ideological cum-cultural correspondence with Brechtian epic theatre, Bicycle, like Azdak in Brecht’s *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, or Shen-Te in *Good Woman of Setzuan*, is seen performing quite an unusual role in the play. Rather than be an underdog he, Bicycle, is in charge. He asserts his “authority” over those who obviously are regarded as being of superior social status. Similar onomastic elements can be found in Elizabethan plays of William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. It must be added, however, that these cultural tangents and indices are found either as consequences of cultural influence, or simply cultural correspondence.

STARS OR IRAWO (YORUBA)

Stars are synonymous with fame, glory and fortune in the indigenous Yoruba and most African communities. Philosophical statements and, at times, prayers are said with reference to one’s star. “Irawo re o ni wo’mi (or, wo’kun-kun): May your star (meaning fame or glory) not get drowned (or thrown into darkness). Suffice it to say that one’s star is a factor of one’s destiny. In incantations, positive correlates are employed through the use allusions to stars, the moon, or the sun; “Enikan kii dowo bo ogo osupa, beeni a kii dowo bo ogo oorun”: (No one succeeds in covering the (light) glory of the moon with the palm of the hand, neither is it possible for anyone to cover the light of the sun light (its glory) with the palm of his hand). This is usually followed with the logical conclusion: Enikeni ko ni le dowo bo ogo re: (no one shall be able to cover or drown your star). Cassius’s reference in Shakespeare’s

Julius Caesar to “stars” is informed by the same belief: “The fault dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings”. (Act 1:ii)

Often, stars are made to assume full stature of a character that shapes or orders the course of events and determines the syntax of human activities in Elizabethan drama. In *Julius Caesar*, for example, the Ides of March is tied to specific date that compels a dramatic twist, climaxing in the assassination of Julius Caesar. The moon, it is believed, plays no less a significant role in foregrounding human behaviour. Luna changes is believed to be responsible for some people’s periodic insanity. The lunatic, the imbecile or the fool constitutes the bulk of court jesters in most indigenous African royal courts. The court jesters in Yoruba palaces possess an unusual sense of humour, as well as strange behaviour and for which reason they are licensed to say whatever they feel or think, no matter the embarrassment or degree of scandal it may bring upon the monarch and his household. Often, the jesters’ utterances are inter-laced with irony such that when critically examined they are sour facts that lead to some fundamental clues. Few examples of fools or imbeciles who perform the role of court jesters in contemporary Nigerian drama include, Obo Lagido in Lawuyi Ogunniran’s *Aare Ago Arikuyeri* and Tegbe in Larewaju Adepoju’s *Ladepo Omo Adanwo*.

In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the two gravediggers are made to perform similar role of jesters. Again Artemidorus’s desperate attempt to put his message right in Caesar’s hands in his bid to prevent the latter’s assassination, could have passed for a jester or somebody out of his mind, as far as Julius Caesar is concerned:

Artemidorus: O Caesar! Read mine first, for mine suit
That touches Caesar nearer
Read it, great Caesar

Caesar: What touches us ourself shall be last served.

Artem: Delay not, Caesar, read it instantly
Caesar What! is the fellow mad?

(*Julius Caesar*, III.i)

4.1. FERTILITY RITES

Fertility rituals are universal phenomena and constitute an apparent cultural correspondence between western and indigenous African societies. These belief and practice come alive in such festivals as Edi festival in Ile-Ife, Osun festival in Osogbo; Oke‘Badan festival in Ibadan, Ojoyejusu festival in Ode-Irele, and Udje festival in Urhobo (Delta State) all in Nigeria. The experience is reenacted in some contemporary Nigerian plays. They include Wole Soyinka’s *The Strong Breed*, and

John P. Clark-Bekederemo's *Song of a Goat*, and lately, Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*.

Similarly, the Roman feast of Lupercal where willing and lighthearted nobles run about half-naked with whips in their hands and given representation in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* has a very close semblance of Ojoyejusu festival at Ode-Irele, in Ondo State of Nigeria. The festival involves the nobles of the town who, as demanded by tradition, voluntarily put on rags, or some weird costumes, and dance gleefully round the town with whips in their hands.

5. CONCLUSION

There is, perhaps, some justification for the apparent xenophobic reactions often exhibited by African critics against eurocentric insinuations or pontifications on universalism as a literary concept. So far, this study has attempted to identify instances of cultural influences through culture contact, as well as cross-cultural correspondence between contemporary Nigerian and other, particularly western, dramatic cultures.

The cross-cultural correspondence is a confirmation that the natural man, regardless of his race, colour or region, is very likely to react to the same situation or reality the same way. Similarly, the gradual globalization of dramatic culture is traceable to the cultural influences and is suggestive of the dynamic nature of culture. It is a dynamism that should be appreciated and encouraged and which as demonstrated in the present study, contemporary Nigerian playwrights have long recognized, drawing from its rich resources. It informs the overwhelming local and international audience-reception often accorded contemporary Nigerian drama. Besides, it further confirms the high degree of accommodativeness of modern Nigerian dramatist both in his social vision, as well as creative sensibility, in consciously advancing a neo-dramatic culture. Critics on both sides of the ideological or regional divide must, likewise, seize upon this encouraging development by promoting mutual xenophilous spirit for the purpose of evolving a truly global dramatic culture.

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