

**THE DRAMATIST AND THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD: THE
CONCEPT OF 'DEATH' IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S
HORSEMAN* AND HOPE EGHAGHA'S *DEATH, NOT A REDEEMER***

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Abstract

Death has been said to be the leveller in that it does not recognize one's class, race, ethnicity or nationality. Death does not look at the face before it strikes; it pays no attention to one's beliefs or outlook to issues in life. Death has often been said to be inevitable. So it is glaring that for as long as people are born, people are bound to die someday but how man dies is a huge mystery. This paper examines the issue of death vis-a-vis man especially as documented in the works of two prominent writers in Nigeria. Wole Soyinka and Hope Eghagha present the issue of death in similar manner in their works, *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Death not a Redeemer* respectively. The two plays examine the psychology of man in the face of death; it also looks at culture as a determinant of man's destiny. The paper takes a closer look at the role played by religion and emphasizes that death very much like 'change' is constant in every religion and culture. For this reason man must constantly live in anticipation of the inevitable-death. The paper pays close attention to myth as a given in traditional societies as well as in the contemporary world where one often sees the relatedness of old forms with new insights into what is obscure and hidden and what is visible. The playing field as one sees it is the consciousness of the individual in the society. The question is: how does man adapt to this inter-relatedness? Since it is in the nature of man to wonder and investigate the unknown, this paper seeks answers especially from Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World*. If one accepts myth as not just history recounted, then one has to take into account the issue of death as presented in the two plays under discussion.

Introduction

Art is said to be a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe. The artist does this by holding a mirror (to appropriate Matthew Arnold) to every aspect of human endeavour. By so doing, he tries to hold the fragment that he feels he can rescue possibly from its original oral form and through its movement, forms and colour, he is able to divulge the very essence and substance of its truth to first the reader/listener, to the generality of the public and then he leaves it for posterity.

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The contemporary dramatist, therefore, is saddled with the complex task of disclosing and interrogating what is unknown or hidden to the public. He is given the responsibility of making known what is dark and obscure; he is to pierce through the darkest part of things to reveal their underlying truth. This paper tries to highlight these realities vis-à-vis their relation to the larger society and see the role of the dramatist in the scheme of things. Particularly the paper will be viewing these realities from the point of view of two very important dramatists from Nigeria. They are Wole Soyinka, a Nobel laureate and Hope Eghagha. These playwrights in their unique ways are compared here because of the relatedness of subject matter which is death, its impact on the psyche of man and perhaps its influences which may be found in oral tradition.

Comparison in this case is an attempt to distinguish the two plays in order to prevent confusion probably dancing to the tune of Remak (1981) who sees comparative literature as an integrated single body of knowledge transcending the frontiers of national literature and traditional subject areas, such as the study of literary phenomenon (e.g. symbols, themes, setting and style) which are beyond the confines of one's own culture. The idea of keeping the traditional subject area, according to Remark (221), is primarily "to make the literary phenomenon more understandable, more significant, more authentic". Arguments for traditional approaches continue with prominent scholars of the discipline lending their voices to it. To Gillespie (137-42) "The consequences of the altered cultural climate have been devastating for Comparative Literature".

But beyond altering and adhering to the definition of comparative literature, this paper is trying to understand the reason why oral forms find their ways into modern literary compositions and in spite of modernization, hybridity and technology, and how they still survive. It was Plato according to Kaviratna (1971) who explained how writing tends to diminish the power of recollection saying that truth should find lodging in the soul of a learner, not by literary composition, but by oral transmission. He equally believes that the written word can give only an idea of the fact, but the word is not the fact itself. But in our world, one has come to realize that through learning by memory and oral transmission, writers imply oral forms in their literary works and this is what Soyinka and Eghagha confront in their analysis of death in their plays.

The particular texts for comparative analysis are Wole Soyinka's *Death and the king's Horseman* and Hope Eghagha's *Death, not a Redeemer*.

The focus will be on the influences of the western world (the written) and the African tradition (the oral) which could be traced back to the colonial era especially with the European incursion into African soil. It is no longer news

that this incursion has interfered with the day-to-day life of the African, particularly his culture, belief system, custom, tradition and his world view.

History of colonialism cuts across the socio-economy, political, religion and other issues in Africa. Two distinctive conditions can be said to have truly influenced the contemporary African dramatist. They include: colonialism, that is, the encounter with Europe, and then the traditional African culture, which is indigenous. The marriage between the two points to the hybridity of the African consciousness today and this is where identity comes in, what the true African represents, identity of themes, of forms, of audience, of content, of what is truly African. What is a hybrid? It was J.P.Clark who refers to the typical African as a cultural mulatto in the sense that we have two cultures and one cannot forget DuBois' double consciousness or two souls in one body. According to Ilo (2006) the worst assault on a people's consciousness is their linguistic colonisation which is what Africa is experiencing today. Fanon (1967) notes that the issue of language is important because speaking a colonizer's language means existing absolutely for the colonizer:

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but also to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation.... Every colonised people -- in order words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality -- finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation: that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonised is elevated above the jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards (17-18).

Thus, Fanon rejects the colonizer-colonized relationship and advocates a total rejection of the standards of the colonizing culture including its language.

Wali and Ngugi rising from the 1963 conference at Makerere are in agreement with Fanon especially the adoption of English and French as media for literary creation by African writers and they see it as an aberration which could not advance African literature and culture. For Ngugi, therefore, Africa is in need of healing from the longstanding injuries that colonialism has wrought on the indigenous languages and cultures, and this healing can only come through cultural autonomy and self-determination which is what the two dramatists tried to do with their plays. Irele (2001) applauds the total appropriation in order to bring African expression into a living relationship with the tradition of literature in English. Soyinka equally subscribes to the method of indigenising the colonial language in African literature.

Hybridisation of the African is where the crack on the tradition is well evidenced, for there is now adulteration and contamination of the original

culture. There is an incursion into the African mythology. Africans are known for their rich culture and traditions; they are known for their traditional beliefs which are well rooted in folktales, oral traditions, masquerades, hunting, festivals, etc. But with the contact of African tradition with the western tradition, one sees that the story has changed drastically. Soyinka recognizes the colonial factor in Africa when he states that *the Colonial Factor is an incident, a catalytic incident merely*. Possibly this is the reason why the contemporary African dramatist has always sought to promote the cultural values of his people, making sure that these values do not disappear completely even while using the colonial language.

It is in this vein that the comparison of the primary texts can be analysed. The texts dwell so much on the issues relevant to the burial of a king which African tradition places emphasis on because it believes that the king has a rite of passage that is required to be done in a ritualistic manner as a way of accompanying the king to the land of the ancestors. One must remember the ancient Bini and Oyo kingdoms and many others and the kind of rituals that accompany the burial of kings in these lands. In looking at the key terms or concepts in this paper, it is pertinent to pay special attention to death. One has constantly been reminded that God never assigned immortality to any human being; hence the saying that 'no man is immortal' and the saying that every soul shall taste Death

The Concept of Death in African Literature

Generally speaking, Africans seem to have a common concept of life, death and the hereafter and this concept has come to influence their lives and character in a number of ways. Idowu (187) points to the Yoruba belief that death is a creation of 'Olodumare' the creator. He is of the opinion that Olodumare (God) made man for the purpose of recalling any person whose time on earth is fulfilled. The bible says that 'the soul that sins shall die' but the reality is whether man is a sinner or not, same fate befalls him. For this reason, no man should claim immortality because death is the inevitable lot of every person who comes into the world. Mbiti (25) looks at death as a process which removes a person gradually from the 'Sasa' period to the 'Zamani'. The Sasa period simply means the time of physical existence on earth and the period after death within which the departed is remembered by family members and friends who knew him. From the above analysis, one may say that both critics share the same view particularly on the inevitability of death. They agree that death removes people from the world after a specific time. But Opoku (133) says that death is not the end of life, but a transition from this world to the land of the spirits. To him, death does not sever family connections, but the dead become ancestors and this should be considered an honour. Death as viewed by the two dramatists under consideration is a creation of God emphasized by tradition because the African concept of death is well played out in the two plays under discussion.

Africans tend to believe that the dead go to the land of the spirits or ancestors which may not be visible to the human eye but some people do not visualize any physical or geographical separation between the physical and spiritual world. It is believed that the dead simply goes 'home in his spirit form (Mbiti160). According to Opoku (137) the afterlife portends that the dead are not cut off from the living, for they may reveal themselves in dreams or appear to their living relations to give instructions, warnings or information. Some actually come back to be born in the same family or another family. This is well documented in the 'abiku' saga. However, some people believe that the dead return to their creator, and the final destiny of man depends on how he lived on earth. Judgment is rolled out to man immediately after death.

Death is a recurring theme in African literary works. In some works, one sees death as an experience that is unknown to man until it is time for him to experience it. In some still, the persons involved can easily say when their time is up very much like the two protagonists in the two plays under discussion. Wole Soyinka and Hope Eghagha use the phenomenon as a theme in their plays. Their purpose is to show or express their own ideas or views of death, and some of the reasons for dying. Suicide as pointed out by these writers is uncommon to the African. Africans love life and no matter the travails and hardship, no African will want to willingly submit to death.

In *Death and the King's Horseman* one sees Wole Soyinka as a dramatist whose work can hardly be exhausted largely because themes of his works are potent and have a universal appeal. Though many critical works have been written on Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, debates on it are a conclusion where nothing is concluded. The work has remained open in that he, like Shakespeare in his time, has been able to assert the uniqueness of African culture and literature and their roles in society. He has been able to build a connection between the dead, the living and the unborn, an association he terms "the cosmic totality". In his works, he is able to elicit from ritual, mythology, history and contemporary literature, the self -appreciation of the African world as a cultural entity by observing that "myths arise from man's attempt to externalize and communicate his inner intuitions".

Concept of Death in *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Death, Not a Redeemer*:

The play, *Death and the King's Horseman* is set in Oyo, a centre of Yoruba civilization, a place where other cities in the Western part of the country look up to, a place where tradition is viewed as vital to the survival of the community. Oyo at the time the play was set was a constitutional monarchy. The king, that is, the *Alaafin* was elected from several candidates within the

ruling dynasty with the help of the oracle. The then Oyo had military powers and controlled trade routes particularly during the pre-colonial era. The confrontation in the play as Soyinka points out is largely metaphysical, contained in the human vehicle; one sees how man confronts forces beyond him but struggles to avoid his destiny. To confront one's fate of course may be impossible as the school of fatalism believes that what will be must be, no matter how hard man tries to fight it. So Elesin confronts his fate head-on and therefore fights the Yoruba world-view - the world of the living, the dead, and the unborn. Soyinka uses examples taken from Yoruba mythology and cosmogony to provide glimpses into the African "inner world". But Elesin in *Death and the King's Horseman* tries to cheat death by committing sacrilege. He goes into a young lady on the day he is supposed to tackle the inevitable - death. Elesin avoids what he is expected to embrace with pride. To Soyinka, man has always been preoccupied with the task of mastering the metaphysical world with a view to explaining his being and its cosmic location. But for Elesin to want to change the course of his destiny is considered unpardonable, a sacrilege, an act of cowardice and this is unacceptable.

Elesin knows that death is a "debt of birth"; he is aware of the inevitability of death whether it is done willingly or not. He knows that it is what man must encounter as he journeys on earth. He equally knows what man is aware of which is that death is an end to physical life; an end to all that man holds dear, all that is important and endearing, so he tries to avoid it anyhow. But man also tries to make his time of existence on earth meaningful by rendering good service to God and to man. His contribution to life before the final day of reckoning is a necessity, since one does not have his/her eternal abode here on earth; one definitely sojourns on the earth, and eventually leaves it to an eternal abode. The rite of passage for the king and his horseman is essential in a ritual drama. It is usually a rite of the gods (hero) and is usually in form of passage - rites of hero-gods. As Hepburn (1988) suggests, the issue of ritual is crucial; it is an age-old thing and it involves human sacrifice. To Hepburn, rituals have phases and they usually end with the re-integration of a scapegoat into or separation from his community.

To exist in this world means that man wants to live his life to the desired end and the role of the gods in this case to Soyinka is that of an enhancer of man's existence within the cyclic consciousness of time. In exposing oneself to being, deciding one's destiny, projecting oneself to that which is ahead of one, one is invariably anticipating and acknowledging that death is the end of human life; it is an ultimate and essential project for man's existence.

Philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marcel and Sartre would have one belief that death is part of the existence of man. Meanwhile, whether or not one lives or dies is not a decision one makes willingly (not even those who commit suicide); it is rather determined by the forces man confronts daily.

One cannot say when he/she is to be born; neither does he/she know when he/she leaves the world, at least naturally. However, he has to embrace all the dictates of life without questioning the reason behind his coming to the world. Again, man has no pre-knowledge of where, how and when he will be born, neither can he determine who gives birth to him. He has no say in the rights and privileges he is to enjoy and he cannot challenge his creator, whoever the creator is. Can one say in this case that man is helpless? Existence therefore is paramount, a meaningful existence; that is on average man has to try and escape the reality of death to live as if there is no such thing as final end as it is the case of the *Elesin*. With his fear of death, man tries to live beyond what is comprehensible. After all death is inevitable. But anxiety sets in when he remembers this inevitability of death. So, anticipation makes man extremely conscious of the presence of death. Religion teaches us to aspire to make heaven at all cost, but making entails dying first but no one wants to die.

Man and death generally are mortal enemies, they would rather not meet; they would rather not co-habit because man knows unequivocally that the day he sees death, he is no longer the man he was or is. Death puts an end to life, to everything that is precious and beautiful to man. Death is the end of all the vital functions without the possibility of recovery. With death, one remembers that all one's treasures will come to an end. The kings, the queens, the lords, the significant and insignificant will all die; this may be the reason why people say it is an inevitable phenomenon. All human value, beauty, love, friendship and all the worldly achievements (except time) will give in to death hence Shakespeare implores death to do whatever pleases it but that death should not touch his love (work) and in spite of all the troubles and triumphs in the world, nobody wants to die.

Death which destroys anxiety, fears, oppression, poverty and man's inhumanity to man is regarded as a leveler because both great and small, rich and poor, all inevitably bow to the clutches and cruel hand of death and this issue is adequately addressed in the two plays under discussion. The two plays with almost similar titles dwell on the issue of death particularly and then the culture of regency.

Death is a problem, a challenge to mankind; it is hostile very much like time as documented by Shakespeare. Man runs from death, he searches for ways to defeat death. Surprisingly, all efforts made by researchers, scientists even technologists over the years to end or at least curtail the excesses of death have not yielded much results. They have only succeeded in postponing death which even in some situations ironically leads to an unexpected death. For instance, Professor in Soyinka's *The Road*, meets his untimely death while engaged in a research. Had professor succeeded, he would have unwittingly put an end to death at all levels: death by motor accident, war, industrial

accidents, diseases, crime, technological disasters and probably natural disasters.

Writing on Soyinka's exploration of the theme of death, Ogunba (1975) remarks that all quest after the meaning of life or the essence of death is futile; its apparent partial success is a mere dream. Ogunba is of the opinion that searching or looking for solution to death is an effort in futility and anybody who does so is not only wasting his time but rather moving closer to death. Death has been classified as the consequence of sin. The first sin was that of disobedience, that is, the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and man's punishment as far as this sin goes is death. The sin in the Garden of Eden is what man is still confronted with today. In the beginning of things, God had no intention that man should die, but the sin of man brought about death. Death is seen as the final solution for which man searches and what this entails is that man's search for life through the knowledge of death has brought nothing but pain and death.

Scientific research brought electricity to humanity. Ironically, this invention also claims lives. To move faster and cover a wide range of distance over a very short period of time man invented the motor-car and the airplane. These also have their disadvantages. Technology is helping the world move faster, making the earth flat but in doing this, it is also reducing the life-span of the earth and the people who live in it through a number of activities - global warming, gas emissions and the rest of them.

Death is a common denominator in all societies and hence a trans-class phenomenon. It does not matter whether one is white or black or socialist or capitalist. It is the same death that kills all. John Donne (1572-1631) meditates on the issue of death. In *Death Be Not Proud*, he ruminates on both the physical and spiritual need for death saying that death provides "rest of their bones, and soul's delivery." Donne is convinced both death and sleep are the same type of action, and for this reason, he makes no distinction between them. At the end of the poem, Donne remarks that after the resting period that death constitutes, humans will enter the afterlife, a period in which death itself will cease to exist. This is a paradox because Donne is of the opinion that death itself shall be no more, 'Death thou shalt die'. John Keats (1795-1821) all his life confronted death but could not defeat it. He talks about it in his poem "When I have fears that I may cease to be". Keats's poem has often been read as a poem about the poet and his fear of mortality. In this poem, he paints a clear picture of death and the root of this anxiety is obviously death as he sees death as the problematic cure. He reflects on life and mellows down on the thought of death.

It is in this stead that the two plays under consideration, *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka and *Death, Not a Redeemer* by Hope Eghagha give panoramic insights into the issue of death in African literature and society. For Soyinka, the issue of transition is not always a very smooth one hence

Jeyifo (31) feels that *The play presents a moment of negativity when the contradictions in our societies, at the level of psychic and spiritual disjuncture, are revealed and probed* and Soyinka's major aim in the play is to dramatize, through Elesin, the common fear of and unpleasantness of death, which brings people together irrespective of their socioeconomic status.

Soyinka's purpose in using mythic figures is not to evoke a perfect past but rather to fashion them for the modern world and enable them to speak to present-day humanity. This is not unconnected with Soyinka's obsession with the tripartite nature of existence and because man is constantly aware of the inevitability of death, he dabbles in and out of existence whether consciously or unconsciously and so, death announces the relationship of the finite nature of existence. Chief Karia in Eghagha's *Death, Not a Redeemer* is aware that death is staring him in the face so he tries to cheat death by moving closer to Christianity for explanation:

Chief Karia:

But the people, some people expect me to terminate my life. Death to redeem death!" Servant in this world...Servant forever. Three months more and they will all expect me to cut short this sweet life which is just beginning. God forbid! I shall die only when HE says so. Not before, not after. But I admit my faith wobbles sometimes. I must pray now... (p.1)

The reality and fear of death makes Chief Karia to violate the tradition of his people and laws of the land. He is so scared of death that he begs his wife, Avbero, to accompany him to be of service when in heaven. Of course Avbero's reaction is not unexpected:

Avbero: *Taboo! Taboo!! Such tasks are meant for men. Not women. Besides, no Woman has ever done it. (p.6)*

Her reaction here shows the fear death evokes in the individual. As a dutiful wife, she is expected to be there for her husband at all times but she declines this traditional role of the woman as a helpmate.

Elesin, in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, too manifests this fear. It is worthy of note and emphasis here that the two plays under consideration share the same storyline. The fear of death makes Elesin recoil even though he knows that this death will bring fame and honour to his family. Elesin is conscious of what will come to him as an individual so he does not think of the collective gain but his personal fear/pain. Soyinka, through Elesin, has been able to contrast the 'pleasure concept' with the 'reality concept'. Without work, life would be unpalatable. Work helps man gain pleasure. So, man has to sacrifice pleasure, temporarily, to work in order to get pleasure. In this case, sacrifice life for the benefit of the generality of the people as demanded by tradition. After all Christ did it for humanity; he was made a sinner for man, made a criminal for the redemption of mankind.

Elesin and chief Keira are mere mortals perhaps the reason why they are unwilling to be made sacrificial lambs like Christ. Christ however defeated death in His resurrection after three days.

Both Elesin and Chief Karia do not see the supreme sacrifice that is expected of them to make for the peace, progress, and continuity of their communities as a necessity. To them, it should be a matter of choice. "Death" in the hands of the playwrights is subjected to rationalization, to be or not to be but the question here is the value placed on life. Is it worth it to die because of the promise of heavenly honour and respect in the community? In the hands of the two playwrights also, death is made uncertain; it becomes a matter of choice. Elesin, in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, would love to demonstrate rare courage in the face of death. The praise-singer and Iyaloja remind him that it is time for him to dance to the tune of his ancestors. Elesin is at all pleased with reminder and so he fights on. He would have loved to win a battle which no human being has ever won but Iyaloja knows he is fighting a lost battle when she says 'How boldly the lizard struts before the pigeon'. (p.67)

The psychological battle points to the fact that Elesin is not prepared to die. His lengthy proverbial story of the "Not-I-Bird" points to his unpreparedness. The African believes that there is honour in man joining the ancestors after death but this does not excite Elesin hence he talks about the 'Not I Bird' and the problem of dancing the dance. To approach one's duty with dignified readiness and willingness especially when it has to do with losing something as precious as one's life is usually not an easy thing to do, so Elesin avoids death with terror but the same time he boastfully and proudly narrates the story of 'Not-I-Bird.'

*Ah, companions of this living world.
What a thing this is, that even those we call immortal
should fear to die. (p.13)*

Elesin talks about the importance of honour but is he ready to embrace it? *Life is honour. It ends where honour ends* (p.15). Elesin talks about courage

Elesin: *You all know
What I am.*

Praise-singer: *That rock which turns its open lodes
Into the path of lightning. A gay
Thoroughbred whose stride disdains
To falter though an adder reared
Suddenly in his path.*

Elesin: *My rein is loosened
I am master of my Fate.
When the hour comes Watch me dance along the narrowing path*

Glazed by the soles of my great precursors.

My sole is eager. I shall not turn aside. (pp. 152-153)

The Elesin who rendered these beautiful words is not the Elesin one sees later in the end because he falters at the end of the day, trying so to say, to cheat death.

The idea of death as a passage to the ancestral realm is not in any way pleasant to Elesin and this shows in whatever he does. As one finds out, to whole-heartedly embrace death requires an ideal Elesin but the Elesin in this play is a mere mortal, a fearful one at that, who knows the tradition but does not embrace it wholly hence he chooses to be wiser than the society by challenging the age-long tradition. With this act, one is not wrong to say that he, is as Ibitokun (42) says, *creates his own system of values and rejects the stock morality of his group*. And if this is true of Elesin, critics feel that he is blind to the reality of his society, his culture, his gods, and his own sacred position because designing counter-tradition will only bring chaos to the community.

One sees this idea clearly demonstrated by the Elesin in Chief Karia created by Eghagha in his *Death, Not A Redeemer*. Elesin does not see any reason why one should fear death as he believes that he does not fear death. However, he could be likened to the 'Not-I-bird' who refuses to go and see the Chief Tax Officer, a metaphor for death, and sends his friends:

All dressed she was

To call upon your friend the Chief Tax Officer

But not she sends her go-between instead:

Tell him I'm ill: my period has come suddenly (p.9)

And when Iyaloja mentions the word 'shroud', Elesin is scared. He immediately remembers that the time has finally arrived, the time he dreads most.

Iyaloja: Now, we must go prepare your bridal chamber.

Then these same hands will lay your shrouds.

Elesin: (exasperated): Must you be so blunt? (p.20)

No matter how courageous one may be before death, one will falter when one is face to face with it. Elesin forgets, also, that the sacrificial chicken must be paid back, as an adage says. How he gets out of his predicament of the horror of ritual suicide is another thing altogether. Soyinka and Eghagha are saying invariably that there is an Elesin in everyman; no man readily embraces death, not even those who commit suicide.

While deliberating (very much like Hamlet) on whether to commit ritual suicide or not, both Elesin's (Chief Karia's) sons surface from abroad but with

different approach to the fundamental issues on ground. While Sankaria, the son of Chief Karia, in Eghagha's *Death, Not A Redeemer*, backs up his father's stand, Olunde in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* sees his father's procrastinatory tactics as unwarranted. His sudden appearance, though, surprising is predicted by a woman:

Woman: *Is it not the same ocean that washes this land and the white man's land?
Tell your white man he can hide our son away as long as he likes.
When the time comes for him, the same ocean will bring him back.* (p. 35)

The metaphysical power behind the community is seen in Olunde; the zeal to enforce that which is pertinent is what critics find outstanding. He arrives with western education but is not ready to give up his indigenous culture. Elesin's son looks very much like a possessed man, probably possessed by the gods of the land. So instead of paying attention to the negative aspect of his culture, he sees and rationalizes its significance. He is supposed to hate his so-called barbaric culture but he rises to be a competent spokesperson for the same culture. Olunde is seen in the play to be transformed by his culture and he does all he can to embrace it whole-heartedly. He is eager to show off his knowledge of this culture and equally shows that there is nothing barbaric about it. The hand of the gods is glaringly visible in his transfiguration. Unlike his weak father who rejects the culture of his people, Olunde, very much like Achebe's Okonkwo manifests courage and a sense of understanding of his culture and community with all that they represent.

When Olunde decides to commit suicide in place of his father, the general view is: how can a man well educated in a western sense do such a thing? But Olunde is a believer in his culture and tradition and will do everything in his power to preserve it. He has learnt from other cultures to strengthen his own but will never change his culture for anything. For this reason one sees why in spite of his education, Olunde believes strongly that his father has a major responsibility and that he needs to maintain his family's honour and keep the sanity of his people. His death in place of his father is said to mark a cultural change in Yoruba ritual practices because he willingly surrenders himself to death not only to earn that enviable position for himself but for harmonious existence of his community. He surrenders himself for the preservation of peace and stability in his community. He knows that not complying with tradition will definitely have a negative effect on society even up to the fourth generation. So his act of sacrifice helps to tranquilize and stabilize the society. It also ignites a sense of belonging in the people. The cord linking the community with the gods, the other world, that is, the world of the dead is preserved, but regrettably, it is a promising young tree (the young tree that Diop so much relies on for transformation in his poem 'Africa') that pays the price as Iyaloja explains:

Iyaloja: *The gods demanded only the old expired plantain but
You cut down the sap-laden shoot...* (p.16)

Meanwhile, Olunde's death is a challenge to the human race. His self-sacrifice is what every society needs for progress and smooth transition from one age or generation to the other. Self-sacrifice is quite easy for Olunde because he has been anticipating death as an heir to Elesin. He is not keen about earthly or ephemeral things like wealth, position and honour, and he cares about the peace of the community. One may at this juncture submit that it is these mundane things that attract Sankaria (the other Olunde in *Death not a Redeemer*) as he supports his father's bid to subvert tradition. For firm believers in tradition and culture of the people, Olunde, unlike Sankaria, has lived a life worthy of emulation. He stamps an indelible footprint for the unborn generations to follow which is not what one would say of Sankaria who subverts tradition in order to keep his earthly possessions. Sacrifice, integrity and responsibility are key words in Olunde's action which is what every society needs today for preservation and sanity of the society.

Conclusion:

This paper in so many ways has tried to peep into an African concept of life, death and the hereafter paying attention to the ways and manners different people view death and how they receive it knowing that it is inevitable. The paper also recognizes man's outlook to life and God as the originator of life and death which is seen as a transition and transformation from the physical into the spiritual world. The paper also pays attention to why Africans hold on to these beliefs. This strong attachment is hinged on tradition and culture of the people. But as one sees in one of the plays, western education, globalization, urbanization, foreign religions and modernization are fast modifying and affecting the African belief systems.

But Olunde teaches a lesson that with selfishness, the human race will definitely be plagued by problems, dangers, chaos and oppression. Olunde also teaches that there is beauty in tradition and culture. He teaches the need to hold onto what is truly African even in the face of westernization. So Nigeria needs the Olundes of our time to redeem the battered image of the country. The society needs the Olundes who are selfless and responsible, people who are willing to break inhumanity, oppression, poverty amidst affluence and restore Nigeria's lost honour and glory.

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