

Orisa-Shakespeare:
A study of Shakespeare Adaptations Inspired by the Yoruba
Tradition

By

Olalekan Is'haq Balogun
(PhD with creative component)

A thesis submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre

Victoria University of Wellington
(2017)

Abstract

This thesis combines creative practice with critical analysis to intervene in the field of post-colonial Shakespeare where, for over a generation, the process of adaptation has been presented as one of the main strategies by which Shakespeare's ambiguous legacy in successor cultures can be both confronted and manipulated. Scholars often use the term "writing back" to designate a set of adaptations which challenge the cultural capital that Shakespeare privileges. By linking Yoruba spirituality in its political and cultural terms to the wider field of the relation between Africa, African writers and theatre makers and Shakespeare, the thesis proposes a new sub-field or genre of adaptations, "Orisa-Shakespeare," rooted in Yoruba traditions. The thesis argues that, written in Nigeria and the Yoruba global diaspora, this set of adaptations are not necessarily challenging the Shakespeare canon but addressing their own societies, thus "writing forward." The thesis examines the cultural and political significance of this burgeoning body of adaptations of Shakespeare through the lens of Yoruba epistemology and its aesthetic principles.

The thesis is broadly divided into two parts: an exegesis of selected adaptations of Shakespeare as case studies of post-colonial works that reflect and integrate Yoruba creative and performative idioms and translate them into dramaturgy; and an original play, *Emi Caesar!* in which core elements of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* are transplanted into the complex, violent world of Yoruba politics of the mid-19th century, as a parable for contemporary Nigeria politics where factionalism (specifically tribal/ethnic bigotry) works against the integrity and security of the society.

In the context that the thesis proposes, the present has constant recourse to the past, especially the ancestors, and engages in rituals which create ongoing, living links between human beings and the realm of the Yoruba Gods (*Orisa*). The outcomes are the documentation of a uniquely Yoruba theory of literary creativity, a new play based on *Julius Caesar*, and an original contribution to the broad field of postcolonial (Shakespeare) adaptations scholarship.

Acknowledgements

Iba Olodumare----Olojo, Oyigiyigi, Atererekaye, ojiji-biri a ji p’ojo iku da!

Iba Orisa----ile gbogbo nile orisa!

Iba Eniyan----.aye to-o-to mo juba!

Foremost, I acknowledge the generous financial support of the New Zealand government and the Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) through the Faculty of Graduate Research (FGR) for the Victoria Doctoral Scholarship that was awarded to me in 2012, including the Research Grant I received in 2014 and the Completion scholarship of 2016, which made it possible for me to conduct the PhD research in the university.

At the Victoria University of Wellington, I was welcomed by a multi-talented staff of the Theatre programme who combines academic work and artistic ingenuity with rare sense of humanity and kindness. First, I acknowledge with utmost respect my supervisors: James Stuart McKinnon and Megan Evans, with whom I forged a relationship beyond mere supervision. While I will continue to cherish the memory of working with both of you (“learning from you” is actually the right expression), I will particularly mention Megan’s unusual openness and James’s “brotherly-support” ever since I arrived in Wellington. I also say my “Thank you” to Shannon Friday, for the warm hospitality I received while staying with you (and James) during the first month of my arrival in Wellington in the winter of 2013.

My unalloyed gratitude to the Head of the School of English, Film, Theatre and Media Studies and distinguished award-winning international theatre director who also happened to be my University examiner, Associate Professor David O’Donnell; James Davenport for his knowing and encouraging words and smiles; the brilliant Shakespeare scholar and theatre director, Dr Lori Leigh; as well as Dr Nicola Hyland, Kerryn Palmer and Bronwyn Tweddle and the ever-reliable Cathy McCullagh. I thank Prof. Gbemi Adeoti of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria and Dr. Mark

Houlahan of the University of Waikato, New Zealand; Prof Duro Oni; Prof Tunde Babawale (Chief Executive Officer), S.S. Bamikole and the entire staff of the Centre for Black and African Art and Civilization (CBAAC) for their many years of assistance.

Concomitantly, I thank Dame Dawn Sanders (ONZM), the Chief Executive Officer, Shakespeare Globe Centre New Zealand (SGCNZ) and member, Shakespeare Globe Council, London; Brian Pearl and the entire members of the Shakespeare Society, New Zealand, for hosting me in May, 2016, at their monthly gathering where I presented a section of the thesis “Shakespeare in Africa” and excerpts from *Emi, Caesar!* In the same vein, I thank Brendan West, Kassie McLuskie and Morgan Hopkins, who acted in the excerpts and offered useful advice; my colleagues in the PhD programme, Dor Fadlon and Indranil Chakravarty; my friend and brother, Dr (Engr) Ramoni Adeogun and his family, my Sri-Lankan friend, Anas Sherifdeen and his wife, Fatima and importantly, my Iraqi friend, Tahir Nawaz, who did wonders!

My gratitude flows like a river, endless on its path, to people who made my trip to New Zealand possible, even as they also strove to make my family comfortable at home in my absence. Still, I wonder why I am so blessed to know these people: Taiye Olaniyi, Dr Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan, Femi Olaiya, Nurudeen Alamu (Baba Lagbaji), Emmanuel Adetumbi (Obalola), and Wasiu Popoola.

Olaniyi --- father, mentor, and confidant. I will forever remain grateful to you and your family, especially your wife, Mrs Kofoworade Olaniyi, and my brother and sisters: Tomiwa, Tejumade and Tolulope. I thank you for being “You”, one of the most distinguished individuals that I have ever met --- “*Iyeru Okin, olofa moja omo laare*”-- -and perhaps will ever meet!

Dr.Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan--- sister, friend, mother, and source of inspiration, all beyond a former lecturer. I have never met anyone so caring, so focused and so determined, even with a smile. This PhD was a DREAM... you were instrumental to its realization in many ways than you can think of!

Femi Olaiya --- friendship akin to blood and flesh, soulmate, trusted ally. You broke the boundaries of friendship seeking instead something more glorious. “Thank you” is not enough!; Baba Lagbaji --- I will always be grateful....*warafa nau makana aliyani*!; Obalola --- great soul, intelligent being, compassionate, unique!; Wasiu (and Sherifat), your prayers are answered...in shaa Allah!

I will never forget you, Uncle Olu Adeniregun... “Thank you a million times”; Otunba Tunji Sotimirin (Shadow), a mentor and inspirer; and my childhood friend and first critic, Sola Martins Ikumelo, who led me straight to the Centre for Cultural Studies where the journey started.

True friendship is sometimes found in the most unlikely places and among people that one least expected. Such is the case of Sesan Fasanu (Omo Yellow), Sumbo Saheed Bello, Kamar Adekunjo and Sola Adeyemi, who believe in me more than I ever believed in myself: “THIS IS IT...Thank you, my brothers for life!” I will not forget Seye Onatolu, Barney Obi-Abiezue and his family, Rotimi Agbebi Williams and my most committed younger friends (disciples): Habeeb Awoko Ayodeji, Aderemi Adegbite and Wale Lampejo.

I thank you, Alagba Kehinde Salako and “Baba” Olatunji Iranloye, for your prayers and trust in my ability; and Dr Johnson Ademola Adewara, for your advice and brotherly love; Prof Danoye Oguntola-Laguda and Sina Ayodele of the Lagos State University, LASU, for the illuminating discussions we had on Yoruba rituals and the *Orisa*, as well as the useful comments you provided after reading a draft of my thesis. Similarly, I thank my informants: Chief Oluawo Akanni Sofolabo of Ijo Orunmila Adulawo, Somolu & the Reformed Ogboni Fraternity; O/I Canon Ifaniyi Babatunde Adetayo, the Apena Iledi Joel Ogunaiké Adase & the Reformed Ogboni Fraternity; the distinguished thespian, Chief Priest Ademola Fabunmi of Ijo Orunmila Ato, Ebute Metta; and Babalawo Afolabi Ifasogbon (Afoo), the Chief Priest Otuku & Atuwara Heritage, Ota, respectively.

I thank my mum, and brothers and sisters for their love and prayers.

Last but by no means the least, I thank my wife, Ganiyat Oluwakemi Balogun (nee Adeyemo), the first true believer in my life, career, and self. I couldn’t have done this without you. Actually, this PhD is yours, not mine. *Ire gbogbo, gbogbo ire!*

And to my lovely daughters: Queen Moremi Ololade (Moremscoco!); Princess Olamipo Abeebat (Ollykoko!); and Princess Kanyinsola Azeezat (Muyanmuyan!), who endured my years of travel and absence from home. I hope this PhD compensates for everything.

THANK YOU!

Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Contents.....	v
List of Illustrations.....	vi
Glossary of Yoruba words.....	vii
Foreword.....	xii
Introduction: Tracing <i>Atunda</i> 's Path on Shakespeare's Island.....	1
Orisa-Shakespeare: a conceptual framework.....	6
Research Questions.....	23
Outline of Research.....	24
Chapter One	
Orisa-Shakespeare: Towards a Theory of Yoruba Shakespeare Adaptation.....	26
Origin and Development of Yoruba Drama and Theatre.....	32
Shakespeare's Travels: Through the heart of Africa into Yorubaland.....	58
Chapter Two	
Introduction: Ogun vs Esu/Orunmila: the Quest for an Alter/Native Tradition...	74
<i>Wesoo, Hamlet!</i> : Myth, ritual, performance and the (un)becoming of history....	78
<i>Otaelo</i> : Throes of symbolic presences and metaphoric absences.....	97
<i>Lear Ananci</i> : Laalu gb'ode!: <i>Esu</i> , politics, and the aesthetics of transformation	125
<i>Harlem Duet</i> : Crying foul and 'legitimizing' the discontent of an <i>Omo ale</i>	144
Afterwords: Reflections on the analyses of the Orisa-Shakespeare.....	177
Chapter Three	
Introduction: Retelling Shakespeare's <i>Julius Caesar</i>	180
<i>Emi Caesar!</i>	190
Conclusion.....	297
Appendix of Yoruba expressions in <i>Emi, Caesar!</i>	301
Works Cited.....	303
Illustrations.....	315
Interviews.....	315

List of Illustrations

Opon Ifa.....	54
Iroke.....	54
Medium Mahogany Opon Ifa.....	56

GLOSSARY OF YORUBA EXPRESSIONS

aasan---the power to curse and drive insane.

adabi--- Except it is not so.

Af'ogbon ologbon sogbon ni kii je ka pe agba ni were ---To learn from other people's mistake is a sign of maturity and wisdom.

Agemo--- a mask ritual popular among the Ijebu in Yorubaland.

ajegbogbo ti nwe'ni kun 'ra ---The haughty fellow desperately in search of company.

Aje---power to enact spiritual communication.

ako a t'abo--- male/female principles.

Akunleyan---that which is chosen kneeling.

Arigisegi to ba segi, ori ara e lo maa fi gbe---The wood insects which gather sticks always bear the load on themselves.

Aroko--- a coded metaphor/language formed from a combination of different materials, meant to discreetly pass a message across to the receiver.

Ase/Ashe---the force and/or power by which things come into existence, and are taken charge of.

atubotan ---essence of life.

Atunda---the mythical personality credited with the coming into existence of the Orisa pantheon.

aworan--- a generic term for any artistic representations in two or three dimensions.

ayajo/awure--- the opposite of *epe* (see below).

Ayamno o gboogun---There is no armour against fate.

Ayanmo---that which is chosen or affixed to someone.

aye---the visible and the tangible world of the living.

B'oko ba ro'kun, bo r'osa, dandan ni ko f'abo f'elebute---After the ebbs and tides, the canoe must return to the shores.

Bara--- (royal mausoleum) often set up for kings or royalty.

Bi ko s'eniyan, imale o si---The gods would not be, if humanity are not ; a statement that underscores the relational nature of the Yoruba universe between human beings and their ancestors, represented in part by the Orisa.

Bi Ori ti pin o gb'ebo--- The portion affixed to *Ori* can never be propitiated with sacrifices.

Bibii re ko see f'owo ra; ki a bi'ni ko to ka tun 'ra eni bi ---Financial/social freedom does not necessarily determine the circumstance of birth; to be born is not as important as finding one's feet in life.

Candombles---(Dance in honour of the gods), a creolized version of traditional Yoruba belief and rituals brought by enslaved captives to Brazil and other parts of Portuguese colonies in the New World.

E gba mii, kaa ma kan?--- Oh dear, what is this?

ebo--- sacrifice.

eeta motif---three separate entities regarded as one.

eni-ori-sa-da--- the Select Heads/Deities

Eniyan bo ni lara ju aso lo---People are better raiment.

eniyan rere/daadaa--- (good person) or *eniyan buruku* (bad/haughty person).

epe--- curse, or strong diabolic words hauled at someone/thing at the height of anger.

Esu ma se 'mi, omo elomiran ni o se---*Esu*, do not tempt me or make me fall into errors; tempt others.

etutu/ipese--- various forms of appeasement often prescribed to a client by as Babalawo (diviner).

gbolohun--- tone of finality with metaphysical correspondence.

Ibi ori da'ni si la a gbe--- Wherever fate determines is home(land).

Ifa, a body of knowledge about Yoruba epistemology and its aesthetic.

ikose w'aye--- “Stepping into the World”; rites observed for a new-born to “discover” her/his destiny.

Iku ya ju esin---Death is more honourable than disgrace.

Ile Ogere--- (Sacred/Mother Earth).

Ile Yoruba---Yoruba land.

imo---mastery of time-honoured conventions.

imoose---technical proficiency.

imori--- Knowing the Head”; akin to the previous.

imule---oath.

Ina esisi kii jo 'ni lee meji ---One does not fall on the same spot twice.

Ipin-Ori---allotment.

Iroke--- divination tapper.

Isebo isoogun, bi a ti yan ki a to wa s'aye laari--- In spite of sacrifice and medicine, we are still what we chose before coming to the earth.

itan---story, narrative, history.

itumo--- to untie or unknot knowledge.

Iwa ni Orisa, bi a ba ti huu sin ii fii gbe ni---Character is an *orisa*, as we worship *orisa* so s/he favours us, and if we behave well we get her/his support.

iwi/esa, oriki, rara, ijala--- all forms of oral/verbal arts among the Yoruba.
Ko s'ohun ti o n'itan--- Nothing is, which lacks a story.

O ku tan, o d'Oosa, o d'eni a-kunle-bo--- Having died, he became a Deity, worshipped on bended knees.

ofo ase---the power to pray effectively.

Ogbon die, were die--- Much wisdom, little foolishness.

Ogbon lo so 'le aye ro---Wisdom is the anchor that holds the world in place.

Ojo to ro s'ewuro, lo ro s'ireke--- the same rain which falls on the sugarcane, also falls on bitter-leaf.

oju inu--- literally “inner eye” or “insight.”

ojuimo---lit. “artistic eye.”

ojuona---design consciousness.

Omo t'aye ba bi, l'aye ngbe jo--- circumstance of birth often determines temperament, society produces its own kind of people.

Omo t'eya ba bi, eya lo maa jo---The baboon can only produce its own kind.

Opon Ifa--- divination tray.

Opo-sisu--- the custom of levitation.

Ori--- “head,” an individual’s spiritual essence, the controlling feature of personhood.

ori inu--- inner essence.

Orirun---source, origin, identity.

OrisaNla—the Essence, Original Whole.

Orisa—several of the manifestations of *Olodumare* (God) in Yoruba belief.

Orita-meta tii n daamu alejo---crossroads; the point of turbulence, confusion and despair.

orita-meta---crossroads.

Orixa--- also Orisha/oricha is another of the religions in the New World which trace their roots to Yoruba tradition.

Oro---power of words.

orun---the invisible realm of spiritual forces.

owe (proverb)---short, even detailed, saying noted as a kernel of wisdom.

owe-onitan---proverbial story.

Owo ara eni la fi ntun oro ara eni i se---We choose our path in life.

Patakin—another religious rites closely identified with Santeria.

Pele--- a form of greeting and of warning.

Santeria—(Regla de Ochá, La Regla de Ifá or Lucumi), a syncretism of Yoruba and Roman Catholic rituals.

tunfunalo---Interpreter of riddles.

Vodun— (“spirit” in Fon language) also Vodon, Vodoun, Vodou, Voudou or Voodoo, mostly practised by the Ewe people, in Ghana and, in the Yoruba diaspora.

yipada---to turn around or to translate.

Yoruba—a group originally located in the south-west of Nigeria and with a universally acknowledged presence in the USA, North America, Asia and the Caribbean. They are also identified by a common religion and language, “Yoruba” marked by its tonal features.

FOREWORD

The foundation of this PhD research was laid many years ago while I was at the Centre for Cultural Studies (now Dept. of Creative Arts) University of Lagos, Akoka, where I started professional practice under the tutelage of the late Prof Bode Osanyin, distinguished writer/cultural aficionado and artistic director of the Centre. It was an experience that complemented my childhood upbringing at Iwaya, where I grew up in an environment of ritual aesthetics symbolized by the *Egungun* Ayemowa of the Ado Ekiti cult, and the regular rehearsals by Chief Leke Ajao (Kokonsari) theatre group and those by Hubert Ogunde (Doyen of Nigerian theatre) theatre company that I watched (along with children my age) at his Noble street residence, Alagomeji, which was not far from my house. Many years later as an Associate Member of the Centre and one of the crop of performers in Osanyin's Akuro Theatre, I learnt what it truly means to be called a thespian (the first but brief taste of which I had as a student at the Federal College of Education, Osiele, Ogun State). However, although I had won a couple of awards prior to 1997, my writing career got its initial deserved international boost that year when I was invited onto the International Playwright Programme of the Royal Court Theatre, London, tagged "New Writing in Nigeria," supported by the British Council and the Genesis Foundation, UK. As a writer, I have gone ahead to collaborate with many other international theatre companies, notably, FLINN Theater, Germany in the project, POWER PLAY.

Inspired by the vision of the English Stage Company (as the Royal Court Theatre was known in 1956 when it was set up under the artistic director, George Devine) which prides itself as "the writers' theatre, and a leading force in world theatre for energetically cultivating writers [who are] undiscovered, emerging and established," and drawing from my robust experience of writing plays such as *Moremi* (Winner, NANTAP/FESTINA, 2002 Drama Award), *Oya* (University of Lagos Convocation play, 2006), *For Heroes and Scoundrels* to name a few, I began a series of experimental plays in which I appropriated Yoruba myth, ritual and aesthetics, to create a "new" genre of "adaptation" that was quite unlike what has been seen in Nigeria or elsewhere. The first set of the experiments: *Soyinka in the eye of Shakespeare*, was

read at the Play Reading Session of the National Troupe of Nigeria in 2009 after my return from London where I had gone to attend an international writers' workshop organized by the Royal Court Theatre; *Harlem Remembered!* was selected for the inaugural Atlanta Black Theatre Festival, Atlanta Georgia, USA, in 2012, while *Love and Colours in Delphi* has been performed by many professional theatre companies and students in several universities in Nigeria. These works, while being bold and daring in their characterization and themes, also reveal the potentialities of approaching familiar stories with "new" and unique tools of understanding, much of which this PhD thesis demonstrates.

Moreover, the immediate motivation for this research was my consternation on discovering that, in spite of Shakespeare's global popularity the same cannot be said of the English Bard in Nigeria. This realization came about after two incidents which I like to relate. First it was the reaction of the audience, at the reading of *Soyinka in the eye of Shakespeare* (based on Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*), who found the play "hard" to understand, if not illogical. In 2012, a similar reaction was recorded at Wole Oguntokun/Renegade Theatre audition for *Itan Oginintin*. Many of the actors found the classical Yoruba language of the play "difficult" to read, no less their obvious limited knowledge of the Yoruba precepts employed by the playwright as shown by their perception of the play which they considered "disjointed and lacking a coherent storyline," not to mention the fact that some of them had never heard of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, upon which the new one was based.

Whereas some of the themes of Shakespeare's plays resonate with our own practical experience the examples of which *Soyinka in the eye of Shakespeare* (as others that I have written after it) and *Itan Oginintin* clearly demonstrate, considering the reactions of the audience at my play's reading and the actors' at Oguntokun's audition, it was clear that Shakespeare's relevance to our society has been largely undiscovered; as it were, in Nigeria, unlike in South Africa for example, Shakespeare is only a name, among many others!

Consequently, while I came up with the idea of the textual analyses of the cultural and political relevance of African and diaspora adaptations of Shakespeare to their various societies in the PhD proposal that I submitted to the Theatre programme

of Victoria University of Wellington, I also emphasized the dramaturgical aspect bearing in mind my own experience as a writer who also has considerable knowledge of the Yoruba *Ifa* which embodies both the Yoruba epistemology and its aesthetic principles. Hence, drawing from my two decades of theatre practice more than half of which has been devoted to writing, it was a refreshing experience to be able to develop a new genre of Shakespeare adaptation which I have termed “Orisa-Shakespeare” that draws inspiration from Yoruba myth, ritual and aesthetics and the well-established postcolonial Shakespeare scholarship, in order to speak directly to our experience as a people. While my examples might not be unique in terms of using Yoruba resources, since Soyinka, Ola Rotimi *et al* have pioneered such area of dramaturgy, my approach is unique because it not only explores an area that has been overlooked in Nigeria (Shakespeare [adaptation] scholarship), it also establishes ways in which familiar ritual/aesthetic resources can be deployed for that purpose.

With this PhD research, I do hope that an opening up possibility has been identified which, while drawing from local resources of Yoruba culture and aesthetics, uses Shakespeare as a searchlight for future discoveries that would serve the society. Thus far, it has been a fairly long journey, and it still continues...I suppose.

Introduction

Tracing *Atunda*'s Path on Shakespeare's Island

"O ku tan, o d'Oosa, o d'eni a-kunle-bo"

[Having died, he became a Deity, worshipped on
bended knees]

-- Yoruba proverb --

"All roads lead to Shakespeare, or perhaps it might be
more correct to say that Shakespeare leads to all roads."

(Bentley 107).

In this thesis I aim to use Yoruba epistemology and aesthetic principles to study some selected postcolonial Shakespeare adaptations which I term Orisa-Shakespeare, in order to understand what they mean in their cultural and political contexts. While there have been several postcolonial adaptations of Shakespeare which "write back" by challenging the cultural capital that Shakespeare privileges, the Orisa-Shakespeare are different in approach and use of aesthetic resources to serve that purpose. While this body of works continues to grow steadily, no attention has been paid to them. This thesis aims to address that gap. I also intend to develop a Yoruba theory of Shakespeare adaptation based on and influenced by Yoruba worldview, aesthetic principles and politics to perform the aforementioned task, and use the insights of both the textual analyses and theory to also develop a new play that alludes to *Julius Caesar* in order to critique Nigeria's current socio-political reality.

Ile Yoruba or Yorubaland is situated in the south-western parts of Nigeria. Its territories extend to “the swamps and lagoons of the coast” down to the “woodland savannah and distant bend of the Niger” thus covering a distance that roughly equates the size of Great Britain (Smith 7). The Yoruba also boast of a strong presence in the New World where their spirituality has been re-imagined to suit their new environments (Jones 321); and lay claim to a heritage noted throughout its diasporic history for “its quiet resilience and capacity for survival in foreign languages and cultures, as well as in artistic forms and theories” (Wright 6-11). The spread by the Yoruba ensured their development of a very strong diaspora in places like the Americas, Europe, Asia, Canada, USA and the Caribbean, and has equally influenced the development and practice of religions such as *Candombles*, *Orixá*, *Santería*, *Vodun*, *Patakin* to name the most popular and widespread (Lima 33-42). The same religious knowledge/practice has influenced the literature that developed along with it, even though this body of works is mostly oral in nature. Abiola Irele explains that:

In no other area of Africa is the elaboration in literature of a continuous stream of the collective consciousness from the traditional to the modern so clearly evident, and so well marked out, as in Yoruba land [...]. *In Yoruba land we have the extraordinary situation where the vast folk literature, alive and vigorously contemporary, remains available to provide a constant support for new forms.* (Irele 175; emphasis added)

Some of the “new forms” being supported by Yoruba aesthetic resources adapt Shakespeare as a means to mediating between tradition and modernity.

When Michael Bristol declares that “Shakespeare is the name of a titular deity or cult object” (19), in America, he inadvertently describes Shakespeare like a Yoruba *orisa*, one among many of the avatars from the pantheon of spiritual/elemental forces who wield significant control over the people. Yoruba mythology locates the roots of this body of spiritual beings in the earliest beginning of the people’s cultural and political history. In the following paragraphs, I will trace the origin of the avatars and spiritual beings and their utilization in Yoruba literature in order to explain how I have come about the term, Orisa-Shakespeare. I will also explain what Orisa-Shakespeare

means, the features that distinguish them from other known adaptations of Shakespeare, the adaptive strategies that they employ and why the knowledge of Yoruba ritual and aesthetics is useful for their exploration.

In the Yoruba mythology, *Atunda*, whose name means “reinvention” is credited with bringing the *Orisa* pantheon into being. According to the story, in the earliest beginning was an Absolute god-head, *Orisa Nla* (Grand Divinity), who presided over a big farm and countless labourers/servants, one of whom was *Atunda*. While the Absolute god-head, *Orisa Nla*, rested under a big tree one day, *Atunda* pushed down a huge boulder that smashed him into countless pieces. The scattered fragments from the “original Whole” became multiple gods and goddesses. The divinities and humanity experienced grief over the separation of “essence” from “self”; famine scorched the earth, men’s semen dried up in the reproductive sac and women’s menstruation completely ceased--- human existence was threatened by chaos consequent upon *Atunda*’s daring act. At some point in time however, both the deities and humans developed a nostalgia for the earthly wholeness within which they used to live before the *Orisa Nla* bang, and decided to come together once again. The coming together of these uncountable pieces of the spark from the original Source resulted in the formation of the *Orisa* pantheon (Adeeko 15-6). In view of this act, the Yoruba universe is considered to be a shared relational and interactive space populated by human beings and their ancestry, which is represented in part by the pantheon. The Yoruba saying, “*Bi ko si eniyan, imale o si*” (The gods would not be, if humanity are not), clearly underscores this spirit-human interactive conception of the Yoruba universe.

As the centre of the Yoruba universe, the *Orisa* are believed to possess “politically and socially significant historical realities” among the people (Washington 59). They are often conceived in physical terms by the people, who believe that the *Orisa* are ever present and influence human actions. This accounts for conceiving the relationships between humans and the *Orisa* as the projection of the relations between people in the society (Barber 724). And far from being static, this relationship is continually reworked in response to the people’s actual struggles and experiences in changing historical circumstances (Barber 1988:xi), which reflects the dynamic nature of the *Orisa*, their capacity to “adapt” to new and changing situation, as they are conceived by the people.

The aesthetic conception of the *Orisa* in physical terms constitutes their archetypal signification. This conception requires the perception of the *Orisa* in human/physical essences and drawing from both their individual and collective attributes by which they are identified, in order to address social concerns. The *Orisa* share a specific pattern of signification “that enlarges the apprehension of the regulatory principles of life, within the cosmic framework of [Yoruba] terrestrial existence” (Jeyifo xiii). The *Orisa* and their attributes include, but are not limited to:

Ogun... the god of creation, the principles of assertive, restless, exploratory will, the patron god of blacksmiths, carvers, hunters, and in a technological world, of drivers and precision-tool machinists; *Obatala*, the god of creation itself, principle of spiritual purity, of patience, forbearance, and the moral necessity of suffering and ascetic self-control; *Sango*, the sky god, the medium of electrical energy and scourge of criminals and felons; *Orunmila*, the oracular god of wisdom, the presiding spirit of those capable of prescient probing into the unknown, the unanticipated; and his companion, *Esu*, the trickster god of chance and indeterminacy. (xiv)¹

Conceiving of the *Orisa* from these patterns of signification not only illustrates the creative aspect of the Yoruba mind (I mean here a people given to profound aesthetic conception as I suppose we have in other cultures) but also how the people “pose their own social questions or formulate their own moralities” from their own specific mytho-historical experiences. It also underlines how Yoruba aesthetic consideration influences and is influenced, by a multi-level experience of the spiritual and the mundane.

In Yoruba literature, the *Orisa* are given to recognizable human frailties and emotions as are the human beings over whom they superintend. In such situations, the *Orisa* are stripped of their divine properties and, in some cases, subjected to death. Yet, the dilution of the esoteric with the profane does not erode their essence: the gods

¹The list of the *Orisa* is definitely more than what Jeyifo provides here: some tradition puts the figure at 1400; and we should also note that Jeyifo’s description of *Esu* as the trickster is not an entirely correct perception of the deity but the popularly held view in the Yoruba diaspora. *Esu* is also erroneously perceived as the equivalent of the Devil/Satan in some quarters.

may “die” or change their appearance, but the essential “godness” remains (Soyinka, qtd in Priere 81). The stories of Yoruba gods and their apotheosis are always ones of heroism, of great deeds, supreme conquest and exemplary will tainted by weakness and, sometimes, remorse. For examples, the desire to surpass his grandfather’s achievement drove Sango to lengths beyond his reach resulting in his eventual suicide; Ogun’s prowess is marred by one moment of ludicrousness, while Obatala’s divine task of creation was once disrupted by a moment of “recklessness” under the influence of alcohol. The consequences of the gods’ frailties, and what brings them firmly “within the overall framework of fallibility” that are emphasized in Yoruba literature, as Soyinka contends, “are measured in human terms and such gods are placed under an eternal obligation of some form of practical penance which compensates humanity” (13). Besides, the essentiality of myth the type of which produced the *Orisa* is at once the recognition of the constant regenerative cycle of the god-human relationship and the recognition of the fact that “*the past exists now, this moment*, it is co-existent in present awareness [and] it clarifies the present and explains the future” (Soyinka 1969:19; emphasis added), while literature that uses this type of myth, strives to make society aware of its essence while articulating its reality.

Although the conception of the *Orisa* in human/physical essences in Yoruba literature often focuses on their frailties (and those frailties being human society’s measure of its own ethical standard), the aim of such aesthetic conception is not necessarily to emphasize their weakness but to use them as thematic analogy that serves the society. Above everything else, the pantheon is “a symbol of political life and of many competing, but coexisting, agendas involving order and disorder” (Soyinka 16). Thus, the motivation behind their conception as archetypes of behaviour is for human society to learn how the sensitive grasp of the *Orisa*’s forms and nature could help people live harmoniously among themselves in the society.

Consequently, when Soyinka pays homage to the Yoruba *Orisa* for “their sacrifice on the altar of literature” and seeks to “press them into further service on behalf of human society, and its explication of being,” I consider his commemoration of the deities as an example of some aspects of what the Orisa-Shakespeare entail. This last point brings up the questions: What then is Orisa-Shakespeare? What distinguishes the Orisa-Shakespeare from other types of Shakespeare adaptations? Why are they important to us to the extent that they warrant their study? These are

questions necessary to guide us through the objectives of this thesis. In the following sub-section, I will introduce the Orisa-Shakespeare.

Orisa-Shakespeare: a conceptual framework

Orisa-Shakespeare refers to a body of Shakespeare adaptations/appropriations that are written by people of Yoruba origin in Nigeria and its diaspora as well as those plays which reflect or resonate with Yoruba cultural and aesthetic principles, irrespective of the adapter's nationality or the distance in terms of space and time to the Yorubaland of Nigeria. I also use the term to denote a burgeoning body of adaptations of Shakespeare which addresses its society's concerns rather than challenge the cultural capital that Shakespeare privileges. Thus, instead of "writing back" as it were, these sets of adaptation "write forward" as an attempt to address the failings in their societies.

Among the many plays that qualify as Orisa-Shakespeare based on my description above, this thesis focuses on six including three written by African-born writers, and three authors representing the Yoruba diaspora: Femi Osofisan's *Wesoo, Hamlet!* (adaptation of *Hamlet* from Yorubaland, south-west Nigeria); Ahmed Yerima's *Otaelo* (adaptation of *Othello* from Igboland, south-east Nigeria); Welcome Msomi's *uMabatha* (Zulu adaptation of *Macbeth* from South Africa); Davlin Thomas's *Lear Ananci* (adaptation of *King Lear* from Trinidad and Tobago, English-speaking Caribbean); Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* (adaptation of *The Tempest*, from Martinique Republic, French-speaking Caribbean), and Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet* (adaptation of *Othello*, from Canada North America) respectively. These works are exemplary in their use of Yoruba epistemology and its aesthetic principles and are marked by a conscious attempt to address their societies.

In classifying these adaptations as such, I apply the knowledge from Yoruba mythology to postcolonial Shakespeare adaptation discourse by construing the *Atunda/Orisa Nla* episode as a metaphor for the adapters/Shakespeare relationship in terms of how the former use the latter to give expression to their own realities. *Atunda*, also known as "re-creator" and/or "re-creation" since act and actor are inseparable, embodies a trinity in the nature of the adaptation genre: as the source of

new creation, the process of the new creation and the creation itself. In this sense, *Atunda* functions as the spirit of the texts that I have classified as Orisa-Shakespeare. As I will show below, three key features distinguish Orisa-Shakespeare from other types of adaptations of Shakespeare: the deployment of myth, ritual imagination, and spiritual consciousness respectively. While these three features may not be *unique* to the Yoruba but exemplary of specific instances of common features of many other postcolonial Shakespearean adaptations, the cultural specificity of Orisa-Shakespeare is unique. This is because, as we shall see in my analyses later on, the Orisa-Shakespeare are examples of post-colonial theatre (and Shakespeare adaptations) that reflect and integrate indigenous epistemologies (specifically of the Yoruba provenance) and translate them into dramaturgy.

In this body of works that I term Orisa-Shakespeare, I identify an abiding interest in, and the deployment of, myth as a vehicle of narration. For the Yoruba, myth represents an “historical inner reality” often revealed in objective recognizable symbols. It also refers to a narrative “that explains, explores or attempts to resolve the primary ontological, psychological and physical contradictions that [the Yoruba] have recurrently faced” (Pribe 12). As I intend to prove through the Orisa-Shakespeare, myth is a fundamental aspect of life that helps the Yoruba to view society’s challenges and proffer solutions to its problems. Therefore, myth, as I mean it here, transcends its description as mere stories of creation by indigenous societies, it also represents a means to examine socio-political situations in order to understand them.

I also consider ritual imagination to be another feature that distinguishes the Orisa-Shakespeare from other types of Shakespeare adaptations. Ritual, either in the form of *ebo* (sacrifice), *etutu* and/or *ipese* (various forms of appeasement) and elaborate rites as recommended by the Babalawo after an *Ifa* divination session, is believed to be potent, functional and redemptive. Although I also have in mind the social relevance of ritual including its functional, potent and redemptive value, my idea of ritual imagination excludes the purely sacred and religious attempt by human beings to understand inexplicable situations. Rather, I aim to emphasize “its theatrigo-aesthetic context” (Balme 66), from the perspective of its efficacy that derives from a literary/performative reality and its therapeutic/visionary potentialities.

Given this explanation, by “ritual imagination,” I mean first and foremost a faculty of mental images that suggests a peculiar worldview, namely the Yoruba. Hope Eghagha explains that ritual imagination could mean “the socio-cultural orientation found in the micro-cosmos that is presented in a play which view all actions as transcendental phenomena” (5), some of which may proceed from the relationship between characters and the society, interpersonal relationships and the likes. In other words, ritual imagination refers to the frame of mind and unity of vision underlying the Orisa-Shakespeare as “guided by certain social, environmental and cultural currents” (6) derived from the Yoruba provenance which gives the works meaning in their cultural context. The relationship shared by the fictive characters in the plays is governed by taboos, symbolic rites and the observance of certain norms and values, and especially the interpretation of both natural and supernatural events, daily incidences and occurrences from a mystical perspective.

Although the religious atmosphere differs from one text to another, the worlds created in the Orisa-Shakespeare: *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!*, *Otaelo*, *uMabatha*, *Lear Ananci*, *A Tempest* and *Harlem Duet* are unified by an underlying deeply-ritualistic phenomenon in spite of a temporal form of existence that is equally suggested in them. Ritual imagination in these texts takes us into the human cathartic state, the deep, spiritual consciousness in which material concerns are discarded and subsumed under the transcendental and the spiritual (220). As it were, an analysis of the Orisa-Shakespeare from the Yoruba ontological perspective shows that there is a peculiarity in the narrative approach adopted by the adapters which is driven by the same aesthetic consciousness that is informed by ritual imagination.

Although I do acknowledge that the Orisa-Shakespeare have equally incorporated, utilized and even merged foreign or Western literary/theatrical tools such as language, act and scene division among others with traditional Yoruba forms which necessarily require their undergoing a “process of recoding,” of the “syncretism of culturally heterogeneous signs and code” to use Balme’s expression. While they are open to some other perspective of understanding in view of this fact, they still retain elements that make it possible to view them as products of ritual imagination as I have explained.² In this sense, they remain cultural texts which

² For example, scholars have engaged Césaire’s *A Tempest* and Sears’ *Harlem Duet* as examples of postcolonial appropriations of Shakespeare which “write back” by the means of counter-discursive metatheatre.

“retain their integrity as bearers of precisely defined cultural meaning” (Balme 5), that is projected as a consciousness and/or spiritual essence in the lives of the characters, the settings (environments) as well as objects in such environments, the cultural context of all of which is specifically the Yoruba provenance.

The spiritual consciousness that is projected in the Orisa-Shakespeare suggests that the characters’ actions are linked to, or controlled by, forces beyond the ordinary, and that their lives are overseen by a deep, or religious structures of a universe that is governed by the *Orisa*. In this case, concerns with the supernatural suggest an attachment of sacrality to actions, give coherence to their thoughts and actions, which affect our understanding of the characters’ peculiar apprehension of the cultural and social phenomena that they confront. For examples, the Igwe’s use of his *ofor* (staff of office) to give consent to his daughter’s marriage to Otaelo, the *osu*, constitutes a serious violation of sacred tradition and sets off the tragedy in *Otaelo*; a similar violation of tradition occurs when Oba Sayedero is killed by his brother who usurps his throne and marries his widow in *Wesoo, Hamlet!*, as is the murder of Dangana by Mabatha whose action plunges Zululand into turmoil and chaos in *uMabatha*.

Because sacredness is attached to the characters’ actions, the consequences of their violation form the central driving force of the plays’ plot. These characters are also shaped by a mythic consciousness that presents them as “marginal (wo)men, liminal figures who appear to be partly in this world and partly in another...a liminal condition [that] gives them potential power to shape and direct society” (Priere 5). Although the characters’ actions are symbolic or quasi-symbolic and a means to an end, they are informed by a profound sacred consciousness that proceeds from the Yoruba cosmology as presented in the texts.

No less significant is the mentality of sacredness that is also attached to symbols in the Orisa-Shakespeare: Caliban’s consciousness towards his mother, Sycorax and the contested island which Prospero has seized from him in *A Tempest*; the crossroads which Ananse occupies and the spider web he spins/ controls in *Lear Ananci*; the handkerchief, miscarried foetus and Harlem, the setting of *Harlem Duet*; the *bara* and Mask in *Wesoo, Hamlet!*, the sacred earth represented by *Ala* in *Otaelo* among others, which are symbols that convey important meanings. The sacred

universe (which also accommodates symbols) becomes the territory of “essence-ideal around whose edges [hu]man beings fearfully skirt” (Soyinka 1), where the characters in these plays negotiate the intricate balance between personal desire and social stipulations. Of much importance, however, is the fact that the vast supernatural universe that we find in the texts draws our attention to the similarity that the Yoruba world shares with Shakespeare’s literary universe.

Shakespeare’s dramaturgy is also marked by an abiding interest in ritual and the supernatural---a fact which serves as a strong point of connection between his own world and the Yoruba universe that we encounter in the Orisa-Shakespeare. The sequence of his fictive world, inhabited by forces, is balanced by sacrifices and rites the sustenance or violation of which serves as raw materials for dramatic actions. According to Wilson Knight:

Shakespeare’s dramatic world contains a variety of symbolisms; black and white, magic, stories and earthquakes, resurrections and mysterious music. [It is] a veritable fairyland of the imagination, and yet insistently close-pinned to actuality, as the rough material that his poetry, in various ways, spiritualises. (14)

As Knight rightly observes, in Shakespeare’s fictive world, we are often presented with a system of correspondence between the macro-cosmic and the micro-cosmic world of human beings in which, for example, a rebellious act against a king/throne induces disruption to the universe. The murder of Duncan by Macbeth results in the disruption to the supernatural and the “natural” order of things. In reporting the incidents of the night Duncan was murdered, the Old Man tells Ross of how the “dark night strangles the travelling lamp.../ That darkness does the face of earth entomb/When living light should kiss it” (2.4.6-7), and Duncan’s horses, “Bounteous and swift, the minions of their race,/Turn’d wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,/Contending ‘gainst obedience, as they would make/War with mankind./‘Tis said, they eat each other (2.4.14-18). In her edited volume on the works of Shakespeare, Marjorie Garber describes the deep superstitious and uncanny background of *Macbeth* and how the witches in the play have crossed the threshold from the Elizabethan society where they are sourced onto the stage (695-6). In a similar way, the concern of the Orisa-Shakespeare with the deep and religious essence and how it affects the

characters' interactions, also suggests the continued interest in the interaction of human beings and sacred forces the example of which Shakespeare has himself provided, while this feature also distinguishes the Orisa-Shakespeare from other types of Shakespeare adaptations.

Moreover, the political significance of the texts are also located in their cultural/ritual contexts. As the Orisa-Shakespeare take up a complex and ambivalent relation to the Shakespeare canon, they also subscribe to the fact that any cultural work "has to be studied in its specifics to see how political issues play out within and are affected by that work." This is more so with the knowledge that "any work of culture has a history in which its political import is repeatedly transformed" (Fischlin and Fortier 5-6). For instance, the relevance of Yerima's *Otaelo* to discussing and understanding the political implications of the ongoing agitation for Biafran Independence by the Igbo tribal group based on their perceived marginalization in Nigerian politics, and its relationship to the issue of *Osu* and its culture of ostracism among the same Igbo people, typifies the kind of political significance that a work of culture such as any of the Orisa-Shakespeare deals with.

The last point brings us to the discussion of the adaptive strategies employed by the Orisa-Shakespeare. There are usually a range of approaches adopted by adapters of the Shakespeare canon: some seek to supplant or overthrow; others borrow from Shakespeare's status to give resonance to their own efforts (Fischlin and Fortier 6). The admiration for Shakespeare by adapters that encourages a collaboration with, and the authorization of, their own work with Shakespeare's describes *Otaelo* and *uMabatha*. In the "Author's Note" to his play, Yerima mentions his admiration for Shakespeare whom he describes as a genius that is endowed with a unique writing skill so that dramatists like himself could translate his works into their own languages and cultural realities in order to better appreciate the true nature of human beings (6); Msomi admits that the idea of his own play was motivated by the admiration for Shakespeare having acted previously in *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* which he later adapted (qtd in McMurtry 311). Osofisan also mentions that *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!* dramatizes a familiar story, as an "echo of another one of many centuries ago written by Shakespeare in order to avert the tragedy that is about to happen" (8), while Thomas mentions that *Lear Ananci* is a "poignant re-interpretation of Shakespeare's play that takes a deep metaphoric journey into Caribbean politics." While these

adaptations use Shakespeare's authority to establish their own, *A Tempest* and *Harlem Duet* employ radical adaptive strategies in their approach to the Shakespeare texts that they adapt. The two plays have previously been read and studied by scholars as examples of plays of "canonical counter-discourse" (Tiffin 22), of the adaptations of Shakespeare which question the Bard's privileged canonical status. Adaptations classified into this category rework the privileged narratives of the literary and dramatic canon by "inserting their own previously absent perspectives and voices" or reimagining the earlier narratives "from different perspectives or in different places and times to stake a claim on the canon" (McKinnon 8). In this thesis however, and as Orisa-Shakespeare which draw from the Yoruba episteme and its aesthetic principles, I invert such functions accorded the two plays in postcolonial Shakespeare scholarship. Instead of being studied as adaptations which challenge the cultural capital that Shakespeare privileges, I examine both *A Tempest* and *Harlem Duet* along with the rest of the Orisa-Shakespeare with a view to uncovering their cultural and political relevance to their own specific societies.³

I aim to analyse the Orisa-Shakespeare as textual materials in order to uncover the Yoruba epistemic and aesthetic resources that have been used by the adapters, although I also recognize their potentials as theatrical adaptations. This approach is not out of place because "a printed text is more available to close reading than a "staging," and it is less daunting to consider agency of an author than to consider how it is diffused among various people who jointly create a *mise en scene*" (McKinnon 11); more so with the fact that the mythic-consciousness and ritual imagination that distinguish the Orisa-Shakespeare from other types of Shakespeare adaptations do not necessarily rely on textual/theatrical dichotomy before they could be studied and/or understood.

I also aim to write a new play that draws materials from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in order to address tribal bigotry which is currently the major threat to the continued existence of Nigeria. Of the myriads of problems facing Nigeria, none is as threatening as the one posed by tribalism. While relationship among the three main ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and Igbo) is often marked by violence and

³ I have elected to closely examine only *Harlem Duet*, but draw examples from *A Tempest* in my development of the Yoruba theory in Chapter One because of the need to balance the selection of texts that I study as examples of both Orisa-Shakespeare representing "Home" and "Diaspora." More so, considering that Césaire's text has enjoyed much more attention than the rest of the texts assembled here, I consider this choice appropriate.

extremism, the sub-groups within the larger groups are also torn apart by the same sense of “who we are” and “who we are not.” In writing the play to warn about the potential danger and possibility of disintegration that the situation portends for the country, I am encouraged by Benhabib’s notion of “the redemptive power of narrative” (169), and the example of Shakespeare who wrote *Julius Caesar* in 1599 to warn his own people about the danger of the outbreak of war over succession, having seen the deadly alliances and schemes, following the aged Queen Elizabeth’s inability to produce an heir and successor to the English throne. In doing that, Shakespeare turned to ancient Rome and dramatized the story of Caesar’s assassination as well as the consequences to the society’s continued existence and its leadership. While some might argue that Caesar’s death does not mark the fall but the rise of the Roman Empire, Nigeria may not survive her own crisis considering how badly the country has been fractured by this endemic social anomaly. As evident in the menace constituted by the Islamic fundamentalist group, Boko Haram in the northeastern parts of Nigeria; the renewed agitation for the recognition of the Republic of Biafra by some sections of the Igbo populace in the southeast of Nigeria, and the Niger Delta Avengers, a splinter group from MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta) in the South-south region of the country, the country wages a war against itself. While these uprisings are not direct results of ethnic/tribal agitation as it were, they are nonetheless intimately attached to it.

This thesis addresses a gap in the growing body of scholarship on Shakespeare adaptation which has thus far failed to recognize Yoruba adaptations as such. Interest in the appropriation of Shakespeare in several cultures across the globe has continued to grow over the years. Excellent works such as Cartelli’s *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formations, Postcolonial Appropriations* (1995); Aebischer, Esche and Wheale’s *Remaking Shakespeare: Performance across Media, Genre and Culture* (2003); Orkin’s *Local Shakespeare: Proximations and Power* (2005); Trivedi and Bartholomeusz’s *India’s Shakespeare* (2005), and Massai’s *World-Wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance* (2005) and many others, focus on the adaptive strategies and socio-cultural and political concerns that the “global Shakespeares” engage across diverse genres; some demonstrate “the global presence of Shakespeare under colonialism and imperialism, and the possibilities of postcolonial critique, interpretation and reinvention of both the

Shakespeare text and the signifier ‘Shakespeare’” (Frassineli 58). However, in spite of the claim by the editors of some of these volumes about bringing together a wide spectrum of analyses of adaptations of Shakespeare across the globe, no significant attention has been given to either the Yoruba culture or the Orisa-Shakespeare as this thesis intends to do.

For example, editors Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia claim that *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriation on a Global Stage* (2008), brings together “global” transformations of Shakespeare that draw from “local traditions, values, and languages of various communities and cultures around the world” (6), yet none of the book’s twelve essays discusses Yoruba tradition, or its utilization in the transformation of the texts analysed even though there is Aimé Césaire’s *A Tempest*, which explicitly draws from the same Yoruba culture and tradition. In his essay on *A Tempest*, Pier Paolo Frassineli only makes a passing observation about Césaire’s awareness of Yoruba myth, but focuses on what he calls the “multicultural” approach to the text which calls for a theory of transculturation (173-86), without engaging how Césaire deploys the cultural and political content of Yoruba myth and ritual. In spite of the claim by the editors of *Native Shakespeares*-- to have drawn together essays which situate Shakespeare in a range of social (and cultural) practices-- the Yoruba culture is excluded. It is this kind of omission that I aim to address in this thesis.

Although I acknowledge that the Orisa-Shakespeare come from different places and differ in many ways, they can be productively explored together through the lens of the Yoruba concept of *itan*. *Itan*, which translates variously as “tale,” “story” or “narrative” is a central aesthetic reality among the Yoruba. At the same time, the people also understand that the value of *itan* transcends the Yoruba geographical location. The essence of *itan* shows that what constitutes “Yoruba” is not only determined by locality and population, but also by the body of knowledge and cultural, spiritual and political experiences that the Yorubaland share with other peoples and cultures (Jones 321-2), either in Africa or across the globe.

I am aware of the pitfalls in applying Yoruba episteme to explain texts that are not written specifically into the Yoruba culture. I also do not assume that African cultures, or other cultures for that matter, are “an open book to each other”. In applying Yoruba knowledge as a lens to examine the texts in this thesis however, I hope to draw from the sense of an “African Literature,” one which draws resources

“from a conception of community growing out of an African metaphysics” (Appiah 108-13), that I believe the Yoruba ethos represents. Thus, in applying Yoruba culture to explore plays which reflect or resonate with Yoruba cultural and aesthetic principles, I hope that the “metaphysical examination” of the texts can yield their political purposes.

Besides, shared cultural elements and the historical connection of the Yoruba to many people and cultures in Africa and the Yoruba diaspora could serve as evidence to support the potentials of exploring the Orisa-Shakespeare through a Yoruba lens. For examples, the Ewe peoples who are composed largely of Togo, Benin, Ghana and, especially the Ga peoples of Ghana, claim that their original place of origin is Ile-Ife, the spiritual home of the Yoruba (Nukunya 68); among the list of the children of Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba race, were Oninana “who founded his kingdom in what was then known as Gold Coast (Ghana) today” and Obarada “who was driven to found latterly the kingdom of Dahomey” which is in the Republic of Benin (Akinjogbin 250-51). The connection of the Yoruba to many Black people in the New World has been adequately documented, while the influence of the Yoruba culture and rituals are still evident in most of these communities and countries today.

My objective in this thesis which is to explore the cultural and political contexts of the Orisa-Shakespeare, requires a methodology that is deeply rooted in, and draws from, the Yoruba worldview and its aesthetic principles. As both textual and theatrical adaptations, the Orisa-Shakespeare “blend rituals and myth-based material into a theatrico-aesthetic context” (Balme 66) that does not demarcate the line between theatre and ritual. Scholars of anthropology and Intercultural Performance, such as Victor Turner, Margaret Drewal, and Christopher Balme, have dealt extensively with this subject, even in relation to Yoruba ritual and performance.

Turner identifies fluidity and flexibility as characteristic features of ritualized performance in pre-scribal cultures (including the Yoruba) in which there is often a flawless combination of acoustic, kinesic, and visual sign systems. He argues that rather than being merely “obsessional repetitive acts” ritual in pre-scribal cultures embodies the presentation of complex enactments combining masks, body-paintings, dance forms with complex grammars and vocabularies of bodily movements,

gestures and various sensory codes which privilege theatricality in its widest sense (106); a combination of the esoteric and the mundane at the same time.

Drewal, in her work on the interface of ritual, theatre and performance among the Yoruba through a careful study of rites such as “*isinku*” (funeral), “*ikose w’aye* and *imori*” (“Stepping into the World” and “Knowing the Head”) and the *Agemo* masked performance, identifies how the people’s ritual performance and theatre blend into a “stability and continuity [that are] acted out and re-enacted” (102). She contends that, far from being “rigid, redundant and structurally static,” Yoruba ritual in its theatrical and performative contexts, underscores motion and transformation; it is a “repetition with critical variation,” but which cannot fully be understood and appreciated if a Western frame of reference is applied to its analysis.

Balme has also shown how “the still-vibrant and intact mythical-ritual tradition” demonstrates that theatre and ritual, rather than being mutually exclusive, are located on the same “performative continuum” (67) that does not subscribe to Western theatre dichotomizing theory. In his examination of some of Soyinka’s works, Balme discovers that “many of the constitutive cultural texts of [Yoruba] ritual...are integrated into a dramaturgical structure of meaning and action” (88-90), through a strategy of blending ritual elements with theatrical form, that could be misunderstood if approached with a different tool of analysis from the society in which the works are produced.⁴

Jane McLuskie’s description of a performance of *uMabatha* that she saw at the Sam Wanamaker’s Globe Theatre in 1997 provides the kind of challenge that one could face if the Orisa-Shakespeare are approached with a theory that does not recognize the Yoruba knowledge contained in the *Orisa* attributes and guiding principles. McLuskie’s review of the show reveals her ignorance of the cultural sensibility and the intimacy of the relationship between art, ritual, and the society which has produced it. She describes the drumming and dancing in the production as “somewhat repetitious in [their] rhythms,” and the music “deafeningly loud” (154). In Yoruba ritual context however, repetition that McLuskie considers to be a boring and

⁴ In the introduction to their edited book, *African Drama and Performance* (2004), John Conteh-Morgan and Tejumola Olaniyan also decry the tendency by Western scholarship to privilege literary drama (and its stage realization) over its oral roots, arguing specifically that “it will be simply impossible to understand major traditions of African drama and performance...without adequate attention to their...conditions of existence” (2-3).

uninteresting performative device actually emphasizes the cyclical nature of existence in terms of continuity and stability. According to Ali Mazrui, “There is something profoundly [Yoruba] about certain forms of monotony.” In this case, “the drumbeat, going on and on; the story with a persistent uniformity; the dance which culminates in an ecstatic trance, are all familiar features of [Yoruba] cultural experience” (Mazrui, 278). The cultural/aesthetic reality that Mazrui describes is fully expressed in *uMabatha*. The charged momentum of dancing, singing, and drumming are the elements which form the mainstay of the bodies in motion while the performance lasts. Needless to say, McLuskie’s assessment of the performance derives from the application of a clearly different aesthetic parameter.

Analytical tools which draws from and are based on the Yoruba culture and its aesthetics can effectively address misunderstandings as above. As Gary Taylor also suggests, the value people accord Shakespeare and his works is entangled in the values found in those works which necessarily involves looking at factors such as politics, ideology, as well as the social and material cultures of the host reception (6). This thesis will show that by exploring Shakespeare adaptation through Yoruba worldview, the exercise is not going to be just the mapping of the *Orisa*, which embody in themselves a rich “oral tradition, telling narratives and rich ethnographies” (Falola and Genova 1). The thesis will prove that *Orisa* knowledge is useful to understand what the adaptations mean in their cultural and political contexts, and can serve as another significant way of “using Shakespeare to create something new” in order to add to the existing scholarship on Shakespeare adaptation practice.

While some adaptations have emphasized the stories, others focused on the characters; and some others engaged the thematic analogy of the Shakespeare texts to their own realities. According to Walter Benjamin, adaptations have their own aura, their own “presence in time, [their] unique existence at the place [they] happen to be” (214); Julie Sanders avers that adaptation deals with the “reinterpretations of established texts in new generic contexts or, the relocation of an ‘original’ or source-text’s cultural and/or temporal setting, which may or may not involve a generic shift” (19); Conteh-Morgan and Olaniyan see “inter-cultural negotiations” in adaptations which implicate communication between two cultures and contexts (3); Linda Hutcheon reads “re-contextualising” or “transculturation” in the adaptation that makes an old text relevant in a contemporary or different cultural situation (146); and

Gbemi Adeoti submits that adaptations of Shakespeare's works are, in keeping with the Renaissance spirit, the manifestation of the "looking back on the ancients" dramaturgy which stresses continuity, alongside innovation of identified myths, folk narratives, legends and history (8-11). These are useful terms that describe the adaptations that this thesis studies.

Scholars also use the term "writing back" to describe Shakespeare adaptations. Helen Tiffin argues that in their attempt to recover their humanity battered by colonial experience, adaptations of this kind emphasize complete change in point of reference and function as part of the mechanism that challenge the privileging of narration, especially of the Western type, which Shakespeare represents. She emphasizes that these adaptations demand for an entirely new or "wholly recovered 'reality' free of all colonial taint" by challenging the nature of the coloniser and the colonised relationship with "its pandemic brutalities and cultural denigration" (17-8). In order to achieve their aim, the adapters often enter the narration from perspectives that are different to Shakespeare's, and channel its energy towards serving some other purposes, part of which is to challenge Shakespeare's canonical status. When these types of adaptations are successful, they "put enormous cultural power of Shakespeare to work in a way that undermines the way in which that power conventionally operates" (Fischlin and Fortier 17), more so to answer questions of our time and respond to the hue of our reality.

This thesis contributes to that dialogue but with the alternative intention of showing how adaptations, and particularly Shakespeare adaptation, can serve the specific need and reality of the adapters through a critique of their own society. Elsewhere, Daniel Fischlin avers that Shakespeare adaptations constitute a body of knowledge which shows the "Shakespeare of alternative strategies" that is more concerned with the "here and now" of the adapters in terms of critiquing their own societies (10). This thesis adds to that dialogue, by developing a Yoruba theory of Shakespeare adaptation, using the same to explore the cultural and political contexts of the adaptations, and developing a new adaptation of *Julius Caesar* which critiques Nigeria's present socio-political situation.

Western scholarship on adaptation has struggled with issues like fidelity and originality. Scholars have not agreed on a particular name for the genre. Fischlin and

Fortier rightly call this situation “the problem of naming” and submit that there is actually no right name for adaptations, but “mere labels with more or less currency, connection to history, and connotations both helpful and misleading” (2-3). For example, while Ruby Cohn chooses “offshoots” from a catalogue of names used by different scholars to describe the adaptations of Shakespeare (3), Naremore calls adaptation “belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior” (6), H. N Hudson describes them as “execrable pieces of demendation” (qtd in Bradley 48). The *epe* Hudson hurls at Tate and other adapters: “[w]ithered be the hand, palsied the arm, that ever dares to touch one of Shakespeare’s plays again” (Massai 247), sums up the attitude and position of “conservative Shakespeareans” towards adaptations.⁵ The following paragraphs examine how some scholars have contributed to the dialogue on fidelity and originality, and my own explanation of Yoruba attitude towards the same issue.

Linda Hutcheon, by contrast, argues that although adaptations may appear as “extended re-visitations of prior works,” it will be totally out of place to regard them as inferior by definition. She contends that in privileging fidelity, a crucial point is overlooked, which is the motivation behind adaptation. She explains that it is necessary to understand what informs the exercise in the first place; “adaptation teaches that if we cannot talk about the creative process, we cannot fully understand the urge to adapt and therefore perhaps the very process of adaptation. We need to know ‘why’” (107). More so because the same word is used for both the product and the process of adaptation, Hutcheon proposes a twofold definition of adaptation: as product and process, which she believes could be useful to replace “fidelity criticism.” Thus, her definition of “adaptation” involves two sub-categories: adaptation as “a creative and an interpretive act” by the adapter, and “an extended intertextual engagement” of the audience with the adapted work (8). She also suggests that “perhaps one way to think about unsuccessful adaptation is not in terms of infidelity to a prior text, but in terms of a lack of the creativity and skill to make the text one’s own and thus autonomous” (20-1), in its own right..

Sanders also stresses the “need to know why.” She reiterates that the fixation on fidelity reflects a static view of the world, a “linear epistemology.” According to Sanders, such a rigid position tends to reduce the relationship of the source-text and

⁵ Yoruba word for “curse” usually hurled at someone and/or something that one finds really abhorring and detestable in a fit of anger and related emotional outbursts.

its adaptation to a path that is “linear and reductive [since the adaptation] is always in the secondary, belated position, and the discussion will therefore always be, to a certain extent, about difference, lack, or loss” (12). She argues that the fixation on fidelity comes at the expense of two obvious realities that adaptation practice has firmly established: 1) the fact that adaptation is a thriving and autonomous genre, which stresses the ambivalence of Western culture towards Shakespeare at the moment; and 2) the ever-changing and dynamic nature of adaptation practice, which, unfortunately, is not always considered while applying theoretical models to discuss the variety of works of this genre. She submits that a good way to overcome this problem is to understand the “why” and “how” of recent adaptations.

Some recent adaptations of Shakespeare have however “claimed” to be more “original” and “faithful” to their sources than Shakespeare’s, even as they put a question mark on the Bard’s claim to authenticity. One good example is Michael O’Brien’s *Mad Boy Chronicle*, a retelling of *Hamlet*, which sets its plot in Denmark, circa 999 AD, recasts Shakespeare’s characters as grotesque Vikings, and substitutes Shakespeare’s tragedy with parody and low comedy. In its approach, *Mad Boy Chronicle* is able to escape Hudson’s “*epe*” and expose Shakespeare’s “infidelity” to the original Hamlet story, by being more faithful to Shakespeare’s ultimate source—an ancient Norse saga--- than Shakespeare. O’Brien’s divergences from Shakespeare’s play arouse the audience’s curiosity. According to James McKinnon “the curious relationship between *Mad Boy Chronicle* and its antecedent texts is announced by numerous paratexts that the play uses to inform its audience that it is actually based [not] only on the hypotext (Shakespeare) they recognize, but on a third, even more antecedent original text” thereby calling to question, “the assumptions about Shakespeare’s antecedence and originality” (182-5). The possibility of constant revival and re-visioning of older texts which *Mad Boy Chronicle* demonstrates, also underlines the argument that the act of constant revisions of texts precludes the validity of any text’s claim to originality. This is because while Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* may be an adaptation of *Ur-Hamlet*, the latter is itself a French novelization of a Latin translation of an ancient Norse saga, whose author is unknown.

This last point applies to Yoruba stories in which the debate over faithful rendition and/or originality is not at issue because the authors are unknown. Because the materials are collectively owned by the society, their social significance is of more

importance than the problem of nomenclature and fidelity to their sources. More so, looking at Shakespeare adaptations from a Yoruba cultural perspective allows us to sidestep the conversation about fidelity and originality. As Conteh-Morgan and Olaniyan also argue of preliterate cultures including the Yoruba, adaptations and cultural translations are as old as theatre itself; one necessarily needs to bear in mind “the epistemological fact that *every* performance is a new translation, a new recontextualization...in which dramatists borrow the theatrical idioms across traditions in space and time to simultaneously read their historical present and critically reread history” (3; emphasis in the original), in contexts that are not impeded by the concerns with fidelity.

Yoruba literature is generally classified into poetry, narrative, and performance, each identified with its specific features and mode of presentation. For examples, *iwi/esa*, *oriki*, *rara*, *ijala* are verbal/performative genres, each identified by its linguistic content/formulae and stylistic registers. These genres rely on the same source notably *Ifa*, a body of knowledge about Yoruba epistemology and its aesthetic, which also provides the most detailed and coherent information about the *Orisa* and their relationship to the people. This information includes ways in which the relationship is continually sustained and renewed through rituals and performance. As such, the groupings often merge and overlap and are thereby completely unencumbered by the debate over faithful rendition or originality.

Some Yoruba verbal arts do not easily yield to artistic manipulation because of the limitations posed by their specific formulae and religious contents. This is also because their value is located in the ritual/religious than the secular purposes they serve the people. Whereas because of their flexibility and usage in everyday conversations, other Yoruba verbal forms like *owe* (proverb), often yield to creative manipulation. Yet, the process of their creative manipulation or dialogical imperative does not account for any argument about “faithful” repetition or recitation, but the social relevance of their usage at any given time and purpose.

The Yoruba apply the same cultural attitude to the creative/visual arts. Because of the intimacy between art and spirituality, any serious creative/visual art is considered a re-enactment of the divine archetypal act of creation over which there is no problem of nomenclature or debate about fidelity. According to Babatunde Lawal,

aworan is a generic term for any artistic representations in two or three dimensions. It is mnemonic in nature, and identifies a work of art as a construct specifically crafted to appeal to the eyes, relate a representation to its subject, and convey messages that have aesthetic, social and/or spiritual significance in the society (Lawal 498-501). Elsewhere, Lawal explains that the creative process includes *imo* (mastery of time-honored conventions), to *imoose* (technical proficiency) and *ojuimo* (lit. “artistic eye”), while *ojuona* (design consciousness) or visual cognition allows for selection and processing of images/thought from daily experiences into schema or templates, and as determined by Yoruba style of creativity although the impulse which drives art-making among the Yoruba transcends the manipulation of tools in order to give meaning to a new idea (Lawal 2005:161-74). The same cultural attitude governs Yoruba literary/artistic and performative art.

Furthermore, the Yoruba attitude towards *itan* underscores the cultural sensibility that governs the creative and performative arts among the people. These stories are inherently adaptive creative endeavour, and are used as tools of socialization due to their overtly productive style of didacticism and narrative pattern. Yoruba concept of “*itan siso*” (storytelling/narrative), shows that the plenitude of their storied universe is seeded from and nurtured by a creative recycling of a limited stock of motifs. When these stories are adapted, they are utilised to address concerns which underpin some of the underlying cultural and political engagements in the society (Izevbaye x-xii). Hence, for the Yoruba, stories have the capacity to travel endlessly across the frontiers of space and time and are constantly pillaged by writers who use them as their own.

For the potentials of these stories which are derived from communally-shared values and experience to be fully realized, they are constantly refined, appropriated and retold. Through such retellings, and as determined by the artist’s level of creativity and ingenuity, originality is conferred on the stories. Hence, what is often called to question is the dexterity of the artist, in terms of her/his ability to twist familiar contents in order to make them respond to specific social and often ethical needs. The artist achieves this feat through inventiveness and skill, and the extent to which her/his fertile imagination can stretch those of the audience, and how s/he can effectively make use of the innate resources of body movement and gestures, voice modulation, and non-verbal communication skill, in order to achieve her/his purpose

(Sekoni 139; Akporobaro 3-6). Thus, what the Yoruba emphasize are the content, context and cultural impact of the pre-existing stories in the way they cohere into creativity and originality.

I believe that the Orisa-Shakespeare that I address in this thesis subscribe to the Yoruba cultural attitude about stories as I have analysed above. In content, they are influenced by Yoruba epistemology and shaped by its aesthetic principles. Because their focus is the explication of the adapters' experience rather than the need to stay as close as possible to their sources, or even challenge the cultural capital that the Shakespeare canon represents, they are unencumbered by the "fidelity criticism." Although the adapters appropriate aspects of imperial culture that Shakespeare symbolizes, and use them to articulate their own socio-cultural perception and political reality (Desmet and Sawyer 19), the texts also come across as examples of the "Shakespeare of alternative strategies" that are useful to addressing the adapters' socio-political concerns.

Research Questions

The thesis aims to understand the following: how do Yoruba epistemology and aesthetic principles contribute to and/or influence the production and reception of Shakespeare adaptations in Africa and the Yoruba global diaspora? What specific Yoruba aesthetic resources are useful to this new approach? To what extent can drawing from the knowledge of Yoruba aesthetic aid the process of analyses/exploration of the cultural and political contexts of the texts? How can synthesizing the knowledge derived from this exercise be useful to developing a new play that draws inspiration from *Julius Caesar*? With these questions in mind while engaging the texts, this thesis aims to draw from and extend current adaptation research.

For ease of reference, I will classify the Orisa-Shakespeare into two groups: the "Home" Orisa-Shakespeare which include *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!*, *uMabatha* and *Otaelo*; and the "Diaspora" Orisa-Shakespeare which are *A Tempest*, *Lear Ananci* and *Harlem Duet* respectively. I explain the methodology of conducting the research below. But first let me mention that I will structure the thesis to reflect both the

duality and tripartite structures of the Yoruba universe. As a duality, the thesis contains two distinct parts: exegesis and creative component; as a tripartite however, the thesis is broadly divided into three chapters: Chapter One; Chapter Two and Chapter Three which contains the creative component respectively.

Outline of Research

As I mentioned previously, the thesis is divided into three parts/chapters. Chapter One is entitled: “Orisa-Shakespeare: Towards a Theory of Shakespeare Adaptations.” I devote this part to developing the theory of analyses which I use to examine the Orisa-Shakespeare. Before embarking on this task however, I first of all use the sense of *itan* as a narrative in order to provide a summary of the history of the Yoruba which includes their myth, belief and religion as well as their connection to the Yoruba diaspora. I also provide an overview of the origin and development of Yoruba Theatre in Nigeria, especially the details that are relevant to my purpose in this thesis. I also trace Shakespeare’s “journey” through Africa and Yoruba land and then conclude with the discussion of *A’are Akogun (Macbeth)* and *Itan Oginintin (The Winter’s Tale)* to illustrate how Yoruba literature and adaptation utilise Yoruba epistemology and aesthetic principles in adapting Shakespeare.

Chapter Two is entitled: “Ogun vs Esu/Orunmila: The Quest for Alter/Native Tradition.” I introduce this chapter with a discussion of the particular prominent *orisa* whose attributes are clearly manifested by the central characters of the texts. I then use the theory discussed in Chapter One to examine the Orisa-Shakespeare in this chapter. I classified the texts into two groups--- “Home”: *Wesoo, Hamlet!, Otaelo* and *uMabatha*; and “Diaspora”: *ATempest, Lear Ananci* and *Harlem Duet* respectively, although I only fully engage *Wesoo, Hamlet!* and *Otaelo* in the former, and *Lear Ananci* and *Harlem Duet* in the latter. I also draw a conclusion after the discussion of each of the texts so that they represent different facets of the Orisa-Shakespeare.

Chapter Three (*Apa Keta*) contains the creative component which is my own play that draws from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. Aside from my experience as a playwright that I will bring to bear in this section, my choice of *Julius Caesar* is based on the fact that Nigeria’s present situation shares serious resemblance with the

Elizabethan society and the situation of the time Shakespeare wrote his play. More so, as a playwright I find inspiration in *Julius Caesar*'s dramatization of the political alliances of its central characters', in relation to the struggle for political power and ethnic/religious dimensions of the present situation of Nigeria.

Although I will use the data from published research on Yoruba history and culture in the textual analyses and creative practice, the materials from the oral interviews that I conducted will be given more priority. The Yoruba strongly believe in the value of the oral art forms, most especially the verbal arts associated with the *Orisa*. These oral texts are considered to be the most important aspects of their literature, since the deities are themselves part of the regulatory process of existence among the people. This knowledge of indigenous Yoruba culture is still being held by practitioners and devotees of the *Orisa* tradition, whether in Yoruba land of Nigeria or its diaspora. This means that to gain this knowledge, the practitioners must necessarily be consulted.

One of the main characteristics of adaptation is the use to which canonical texts, such as Shakespeare's oeuvre, are put in a new dispensation and in response to a new reality. The expected outcome of such adaptations, and my own adaptation in this context, is to show innovation as well as its value to the new reception.

CHAPTER ONE

Orisa-Shakespeare: Towards a Theory of Yoruba Shakespeare Adaptation

“*Ko s’ohun ti o n’itan*”

[Nothing is which lacks a story]

(Adeeko 82).

In this chapter, I develop a theory of Yoruba Shakespeare adaptation that I use to examine the Orisa-Shakespeare and to develop a new adaptation of *Julius Caesar* which critiques the present socio-political situation in Nigeria. The theory draws from Yoruba knowledge and poetics, notably *Ifa* and *itan*, and then uses evidence from the Orisa-Shakespeare to support it. As I mentioned previously, Orisa-Shakespeare is a body of Shakespeare adaptations/appropriations that are written by people of Yoruba origin in Nigeria and its diaspora as well as those plays which reflect or resonate with Yoruba cultural and aesthetic principles, irrespective of the adapter’s nationality or the distance in terms of space and time to the Yorubaland of Nigeria. However, for us to understand how the theory is formed and the way it works, it is useful to have a knowledge of the Yoruba belief system and culture as well as their aesthetic conception. In the following sub-section, I will introduce the Yoruba then move on to discuss the origin and development of their theatre, after which we will examine how the theory is developed, introduce Shakespeare in Africa and Yoruba land, and then use the theory to examine *A’are Akogun* and *Itan Oginintin*, the Yoruba adaptations of *Macbeth* and *The Winter’s Tale* respectively, to illustrate Yoruba approach to Shakespeare adaptations as examples of what I will be doing in my analyses of the Orisa-Shakespeare in the next chapter.

The Yoruba world is multidimensional. It is not restrained to only the tangible and physical plane of existence (Ibitokun 21). As Drewal, Perberton and Abiodun also

write, the Yoruba world is conceived of as a duality: the inseparable realms of *aye* (the visible and the tangible world of the living), often visited by other worldly forces, which influence existence; and *orun* (the invisible realm of spiritual forces) peopled by deities, ancestors, and spirits as well as Olodumare, the creator of all things and Yoruba idea of God (Drewal et al 14). At the same time, as Soyinka argues, the Yoruba world should be conceived in terms of a tripartite structure: the world of the dead, the world of the living, and the world of the unborn (Soyinka 1976:144), presided over by Olodumare, the *Aseda ohun gbogbo* (the Creator of all things), whose own existence transcends any idea of time. It is in this sense that Olodumare is regarded as the Supreme Deity, the giver and ultimate controller of *Ase/Ashe*, the force and/or power by which things come into existence, and are taken charge of.

The *Orisa* are next in line to Olodumare in the hierarchy that is recognized in the Yoruba cosmology. They are the “Select Heads/Deities” (Washington 17), that is, both spirits of ancestors and those of deities, who interact with the people at different times. The Yoruba term “*Orisa*” variously spelt as *Orisha* in the British-Caribbean, *Orixa* in Brazil and *Oricha* in Cuba, is both the term for the body of pantheon and the several traditions devoted exclusively for their worship (Cohen 17). Yoruba scholars have classified the *Orisa* into different groups based on their function and supposed position on the pantheon (Idowu 170; Awolalu 92; Oguntola-Laguda 47-56). As the “*eni ori sa da*” (pre-eminent beings), the *Orisa* constitute a pantheon by which Yoruba knowledge of the spiritual, and especially Olodumare, is revealed.

Yoruba belief is that the *Orisa* occupy the threshold point between *aye* and *orun*, and between nature and humanity. They are also at the centre of the people’s cosmology. They are tasked with overseeing life, the modulation of human existence and destiny, as well as interceding with God on their (human beings) behalf (Aiyejina and Gibbons 38-9). As part of their mundane manifestation and/or archetypal signification, the *Orisa* symbolize opposing attributes/personality traits: the *orisa* “*funfun/tutu*” and *orisa* “*gbigbona*” respectively. The “cool” *orisa* “tend to be gentle, calm, and reflective” in nature, whereas the “hot” *orisa* “tend to be quick-tempered, harsh, and demanding” (Thompson 3). Unlike the hot-headed *orisa* of the pantheon, especially *Ogun*, *Sango*, *Esu*, *Oya* etc, who possess ferocious temperaments, *Orunmila* (as well as *Obatala*, *Osun*, *Oba* etc) is instead an epitome of humility, gentleness and

calmness. Yoruba believe is that human beings also exhibit such emotions: the “hot” and “cool” temperaments.

The Yoruba *Ifa* provides the most detailed and coherent information about the *Orisa* and their relationship to the people including ways in which the relationship is continually sustained and renewed through devotion in the form of festivals and ritual observances. As a body of knowledge, *Ifa* could be said to have two distinguishable elements: the visual art aspect and the liturgy. While the former is represented in part by the *Opon Ifa* (divination tray) and its accessory the *Iroke* (divination tapper) both of which contain images with their own narratives about the *Orisa* including their metaphors for human relationship; the latter is a combination of *iyere* (songs) and *odu/ese* (verses) that make up *Ifa*’s oral literature about the *Orisa* and every aspects of Yoruba life. Essentially, *Ifa* also serves as the source of Yoruba aesthetics as I will show later on.

The Yoruba employ myth to make sense of this complex world as outlined above. Although there are many definitions of myth, I use Philip Wheelwright’s definition in this thesis because of how it clearly articulates the way Yoruba perceive and use myth. According to Wheelwright, myth refers to “our tribal habits of conceptualisation” which include a worldview that embraces taboo, totem, legend, initiation ceremonies, death chants, worship of gods and goddesses, all of which are used in literature as “expressive symbol” (59). The “expressive symbol” captures the essence of myth for the Yoruba, who use myth as a system of knowing and formation of belief in order to gain knowledge about the *Orisa*, and to confront their changing social reality. The Yoruba delve into myth in order “to provide answers to the question of their existence and for the socio-political organization of their society” (Ray 31); hence, the knowledge is not merely metaphysical but also existential, in so far as it helps the people to confront everyday situations and realities.

The Yoruba also align myth with historical reality because myth often “blends into history as cosmic and archetypal events bear upon local situations, and history blends into myth as local and human events become ritualized and infused with cosmic and archetypal meanings” (24). Yoruba fusion of myth with history helps them to address daily occurrences and provide practical answers to pressing questions that affect the society. By factoring into their myths very crucial and salient ingredients of

their history, including their norms and tradition, the Yoruba are able to utilize both myth and history to reflect on, and come to terms with, the ever-changing situation in their society including aspects which might otherwise have remained impenetrable. This is why they often say, “*Bi won se nse l’aye, ni won n se l’orun*” that is, earthly conducts reflect heavenly reality.

Yoruba myth is intimately subsumed in ritual. While there have also been several definitions and explanation of the relationship between myth and ritual, Wheelwright’s conceptualization is also useful to my purpose here. According to Wheelwright, while “ritual connotes a way of doing, and myth a way of envisaging, the doing and the envisaging are of a special, not of an everyday sort, and imply in their turn a belief in a penumbral reality, something extending beyond yet interpenetrating with the affairs of mortal men” (60). In other words, while myth accommodates belief, ritual deals with the expression of such belief in concrete and practical terms, although both are intimately connected so much that one cannot be separated from the other. As I mentioned earlier, while the Yoruba use myth to express a sense of community that is hinged on the interactive relationship between humans and the *Orisa*, the myth also feeds directly into the ritual of the people. Although some of these rites enact political and civic themes that are not as important as the worship of the *Orisa* and may not necessarily form part of the framework of the ritual aspects of *Orisa* worship and ceremonial observances, they should not be overlooked. This is because the core of such rites and their value are located in the intimate relationship between the *Orisa* and their devotees.

The origin and development of Yoruba theatre show how Yoruba myth and ritual are bound up with Yoruba political and social history, and serve as the basis for dramatic concepts. Thus, Yoruba theatre comes across as a specific example of rites which enact political and civic themes outside of *Orisa* worship, but nonetheless attached to it; a similar situation occurs in the Yoruba global diaspora.

In the diaspora, the Yoruba are known and called by the names of some of their *orisa* or by their spoken language. In Brazil and Haiti, they are called *Nago* or *Jeje*; *Sango/Shango* in Trinidad and Tobago, while in Cuba and in some other New World nations, they are called “Lucumi” from “*Olukumi*,” or “My friend” (Mason 2). Before the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the Yoruba practiced a very well-developed

cultural and occupational practice in which they had the *orisa* related to their professions as patron-gods. The ritual/occupational system ensured the evolvement of a thriving and sustained tradition, with elaborate ceremonies at home in Yoruba land. These devotees and guilds of trade unions were specialists in their own right, and were among those brought as prisoners to the New World (Aiyejina & Gibbons 35-6). This established system of god--human relationship through occupation, assured the perpetuity of Yoruba culture and tradition in the New World in spite of the horrors of the slave trade and the harrowing experience of the Middle Passage.

Diasporic Yoruba adapters of Shakespeare, like their counterparts in Yorubaland of Nigeria, often demonstrate the perpetuity of Yoruba culture and tradition by introducing the *orisa* as characters in their works. Césaire introduces two principal *orisa* from the Yoruba pantheon into *A Tempest*: Shango, and especially Eshu, who aid Caliban to dislodge Prospero. Césaire draws from both home and diaspora Yoruba mythology about *Sango* in this play. At home, *Sango* is regarded as the *orisa* who enforces social justice, and as a warrior who derives his power from Nature (*ile/earth*), where he aligns favourably with *Esu*, the controller of the *orita-meta* (crossroads). In the diaspora, especially in *Santeria*, *Vodou* and *Candomble*, the rites devoted to *Sango* are observed in order to draw power and self-control. Caliban also taps from this particular spiritual energy of *Sango*. Due to his own non-conformist nature however, *Esu* is recognized on the Yoruba pantheon as the *orisa* closest to *Atunda* in character. Césaire's Caliban is able to triumph over Prospero, by aligning his own energy with that of Shango and Eshu, the mirror-image of *Atunda*, the primordial freedom fighter.⁶ As Césaire demonstrates in the play, diasporic Yoruba adapters utilize the Yoruba sense of the god-human relationship to address problems shaped by time and events, which are not only “cross-cultural,” but also “cross-temporal” (Wetmore Jr. 3), especially through adapting old texts to engage contemporary social and political conditions in entirely different times, environments and cultures.

The Yoruba asserted their influence on both religious and secular practices that they met on their arrival in the New World. In order to hold onto their roots,

⁶I have retained the way Césaire writes both Shango and Eshu in his text, but among the Yoruba at home, it is *Sango* and *Esu* as I have written them. In my analysis, I will retain the spelling of any of the *orisa*'s name as it appears in a quote while using the Yoruba form of writing in other cases.

Yoruba rituals were merged with Christian and other faiths. This syncretism resulted in the emergence new religious practices. For instance, *Santeria* emerged from the “dressing of the Orisa in Christian garb in order to circumvent the prohibition of their worship under Catholic strictures in place since colonial times” (Lima 34). *Santeria* (Regla de Ocha or La Regla de Lucumi), was developed by the Yoruba in the Caribbean areas of the Spanish Empire; *Candomble* (Dance in honour of the gods) was developed in Brazil and other Portuguese areas; *Orixá/Orisha* and *Patakin* were developed in Cuba as were many others like the Umbanda and Obeah. The traces of Yoruba ritual are also noticeable in neo-African and creolized cult practices such as Rastafarianism, *Shango* worship, *vodoun*, and the African-centred Baptist church’s liturgy. The value of these rites continue in their dual roles of forging a sense of community, identity and togetherness of a shared history (Savory 244), and to express the cultural continuity and linkage between home (Yorubaland) and its diaspora.

Theatre and performance in the diaspora also relied heavily on Yoruba rituals and cultural practices. Some of the aesthetic forms or devices include storytelling, masking, possession, music and/or dance, which are drawn from the enactment of rituals that often occur within the context of religious observances, such as in Sango worship. In storytelling for example, the dramatists fall back on the oral and performative tradition, specifically Yoruba orature, which they blend with their own kind of theatre in the diaspora. This theatrical device serves as an avenue for both the performers and audience to reconnect to their past even as it is also used to politically engage the present. Possession, as a performative device, is derived from the rites of Sango called “*gun*” that is, to mount, in which the deity “enters” into the devotee in a charged and climactic moment of union between spirit and mortal that is achieved through music, chant, and invocation. The use of possession as a performative device suggests a complex relationship of the individual at home in Yorubaland of Nigeria, and of the Yoruba in the diaspora, to communally-understood symbols, similar to the way Wheelwright explains the relationship between myth and ritual. It also shows how the Yoruba can conveniently connect with spiritual powers represented by the *Orisa*. The mask suggests a sense of fluid identity and reunion of the people with their ancestors whether it is propelled by possession or not. It also helps the people to achieve multiple identity that is connected to a certain cycle of change from the physical to the metaphysical and back; music such as Calypso developed on the

plantations as songs of protest and resistance by African/Yoruba slaves, but their origin is also located in Yoruba orature, which includes all the known genres that I identify below.

These Yoruba forms are used as performative tropes in the diaspora, in order to strengthen community identity, protest against colonial intrusion and to reconnect with the ancestral from which they were broken by slave trade (Savory 245-9). Needless to say that all of these forms are syncretized with the already existing performance aesthetics in the diaspora, they also form part of what Balme describes as aesthetic materials useful to “unlocking the racial memory of a cultural group” (102), which is, in this specific instance, explicitly of the Yoruba provenance.

Origin and Development of Yoruba Drama/Theatre

As we shall see below, although the influence of Western theatre and literary conventions on contemporary Yoruba theatre/literature is clear, it has both an ancient and modern tradition: one rooted in prehistoric oral culture, and another post-colonial tradition, while the Orisa-Shakespeare reflect this dual heritage.

The origin and development of Yoruba drama/theatre is connected to rituals and poetics including *iwi/esa* (Egungun songs); *ayajo/ofo/ogede* (invocation), *ijala/iremoje* (hunters' chant), *epe/apidan/Gelede, rara* (various forms of chants); *owe* (proverb); *alo* (riddle), *ekun iyawo* (bridal chant) to mention a few. In his research into the origins of Yoruba theatre, Joel Adedeji contends that Yoruba theatre belongs to the genre of the “masque” or “mask” which originated as an entertainment form, from the religious rites of the *Egungun* or maskers known as “ghost-mummers” or more popularly referred to variously *aseegun apidan* (players of spectacle), *eegun alare* (masque players) and the *alarinjo* (travelling dance troupe). These names suggest that the development of Yoruba theatre can effectively be traced through three stages: ritual, festival and theatre (Adedeji 254-5). As discussed further below, Osofisan's *Wesoo, Hamlet!* uses several of the aesthetic elements that Adedeji identifies as aspect of the Yoruba performance. The play is presented in the form of a Mask ritual/festival---the masks are summoned from *bara* (royal mausoleum) with music, chant and ritual invocation. The play exemplify the interface of traditional and

contemporary forms of Yoruba drama/theatre from which its literary theatre derives inspiration.

In contrast to Adedeji, Soyinka contends that the *Atunda/Orisa Nla* episode which I discussed in the introduction, best explains the origin of Yoruba theatre. He explains that after *Atunda's* splinter of *OrisaNla*, the original Whole, into different bits and pieces, a void was created in the wholeness of existence, which threw the Yoruba universe into complete chaos. However, in order to bridge the gulf, Ogun stepped forward as that lone figure, and first tragic hero of Yoruba drama because his redemptive act became the dramatization of the primordial conflict that constituted the very origin of Yoruba theatre (Soyinka 1976:130-60). While Adedeji and Soyinka emphasize mythological origin of Yoruba theatre, Biodun Jeyifo focuses on historical events and uses documented materials to trace the origin and the development of Yoruba theatre. He concentrates on the *Alarinjo*, the precursor of the Yoruba professional travelling theatre, because the record of their activities constitute the only surviving evidence of traditional theatre in Yoruba land even though the people still observe the *egungun* rite. According to Jeyifo, in the *Alarinjo* performances, “the performers are [usually] masked and their theatrical fare combines dramatized satirical sketches drawn from a corpus of stock character types, instrumental and vocal music, mimetic dancing, acrobatic and visual spectacle” (34), which made their art to be more popular and widely accepted by the people. Evidently, Yoruba theatre developed by drawing extensively from myth and ritual as well as historical sources, as an interface of tradition and modernity that is also evident in the Orisa-Shakespeare.

Literary tradition into which the Orisa-Shakespeare can be classified came at the heels of the introduction of Western form of literacy and writing into Yorubaland, which led to the replacement of Yoruba orature with writing and the conversion of Yoruba oral literature into book forms, the earliest record of which was a collection of poetic utterances and songs published in 1886 (Olatunji 23-6). In the area of theatre and literature, the period also witnessed the emergence of educated dramatists (including Soyinka who returned to the country in 1960 after his study in the UK and brief work at the Royal Court Theatre, London) who wrote scripts for performances. These plays were modelled after European texts. One popular example is Ogali.O.Ogali's *Veronica, My Daughter*, which was modelled on classic literature, the Bible and Shakespeare. Although modern Yoruba plays are longer and have more

complicated plots compared to the travelling theatre performances discussed above, they maintain a strong link with ritual drama through use of songs, drumming and other related performative tropes which show the intersection of history, myth and ritual that are derived from Yoruba cosmology.

Yoruba adaptations of Shakespeare reflect Yoruba aesthetic and creative traditions that existed long before Shakespeare was introduced to Yorubaland. In order to understand how and why contemporary Yoruba playwrights cite Shakespeare in their own works, and to illustrate what is specifically “Yoruba” about what I refer to as “Orisa-Shakespeare,” we need to understand Yoruba aesthetic ideals and the social/cultural/religious constructs from which the Orisa-Shakespeare has emerged (and which it speaks back to). In the following paragraphs, then, I develop a framework for analysing such adaptations by describing art and creativity from a Yoruba point of view, focusing first on *Ifa* and the concept of *itan*. As it must have become clear by now, Yoruba poetic aesthetics and the social/cultural/religious constructs are intimately interwoven: one feeds into the other, and *Ifa* is at the centre of both constructs--- to understand the relationship shared by these constructs and how they cohere into Yoruba aesthetics, one needs the knowledge of *Ifa*.

Rather than develop the framework of analysis by discussing *Ifa* and its relationship to *itan* separately before moving on to apply it to the Orisa-Shakespeare however, I will simply show how both serve the Orisa-Shakespeare by drawing examples from the texts to support the argument. In the process, I will cover the following cultural and aesthetic tools such as (1) the representation of time, (2) *oriki* (panegyric) (3)*iran* (spectacle),(4) *iwa/omoluabi*, (5) language, (6) symbolism, and (7) archetypal characterization respectively. While these identified cultural and aesthetic constructs are intimately connected as I have mentioned, I have outlined them here for ease of reference.

Ifa occupies a central place in Yoruba epistemology and its aesthetic principles. It is the body of knowledge about the Yoruba universe. Although *Ifa* is similar to the Hebrew Kabbalah within the realm of religion through the peculiar way both seek to define the notion of the relationship between the divine and mortals, and to answer ontological questions about human existence, it also differs on the account of its aesthetic significance. Although its liturgy contains information about the *Orisa*,

Ifa also provides the ingredient for other secular aspects and the essential details of Yoruba life in general.

We always encounter two distinct, yet related, worlds in *Ifa* liturgy which are also often realized or presented in Yoruba literature and performance. These are the world of reality that is recognizable to our own experience as conceived through the fictional characters whose thoughts and actions may be aligned with recognizable historical figures; and a surreal or metaphysical world which is inhabited by characters that are shaped in the mould of the *Orisa*. The two worlds often interact fluidly in the performative space as they do in the world of the *Ifa* liturgy. Soyinka maintains that the “drama of the gods [is] a medium of communal recollection and cohesion” which functions as a “medium in the cosmic extension of [hu]man’s physical existence” (13), even beyond their religious functions in human society.

In the *Ifa* liturgy (often times referred to as corpus), there are 16 principal *odu* (verses/chapters) of varying lengths, out of which another 240 secondary *odu* are derived, which bring the total to 256 verses/chapters that address diverse subjects and cover every aspects of Yoruba life.⁷ Each of the *odu* represents the epicentre of Yoruba proverbial wisdom and religiosity, contains an enormous amount of minor verses (*ese*), and moral teachings (*kiki*) expressed through mythological, historical, and social development as seen through religious eyes (Ifa Karade 11). The *odu* are rendered by the Babalawo (diviner) during divination, as poetry that is laced with intermittent prose, which uses proverbs, metaphors, aphorism and several other stylistic features in order to address myriad of subjects.

The aesthetic significance of the *odu* is contained in their textual and performative characteristics: textual because the *odu* are “established” narratives which are “opened” and “read” by the Babalawo (diviner) based on some “esoteric” graphic marks that he inscribes on the *Opon Ifa* (Divination tray), during the process of divination; and performative because the Babalawo assumes both the role of “*Opitan*” (storyteller/”narrative-hatcher”) and the “*Olutumo*” (“unraveler” of plots) who deciphers and disseminates the significance of the “divine” lyric (*odu*/verse) through a comparison of the patterns or images that he has created on the *Opon Ifa*

⁷A particular *odu*/verse can be as short as three or four lines (a tercet/quatrain to use Western way of description) in length, fifteen to thirty or more lines depending on the subject matter.

(Adeeko 49). The Babalawo's rendition often comes in the form of dialogue or discursive prose through which he offers analysis, explanation, and justification of what can be considered to be the thesis offered in the poetic chants (Oluwole 3). At the heart of the *odu* are several fundamental concepts that are distinctive to the Yoruba worldview, even as they also provide a solid foundation for comprehending the dynamics of Yoruba orature through time and space (Drewal et al 14), as are the secular narrative forms, such as the Orisa-Shakespeare, that they inspire.

Ifa de-emphasizes temporal specificity of its narrative and stresses the thematic and social relevance. In this case, the essential characteristic and aesthetic value of the liturgy is contained in the way the audience is led outside of time referent because time, rather than being linear, operates on a cyclical frame. As I will show below, this approach to narrative is central to *itan*. Soyinka also contends that life (whether real or creatively imagined) contains “within it the manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn [which represent past, present and future] and all are vitally within the intimation and affectiveness of life” (144), beyond mere abstract conceptualisation.

Orisa-Shakespeare reflects the primacy of *Ifa* in Yoruba creative practice in this particular regard by utilizing the same approach of de-emphasizing temporal specificity in the adaptation. Liz Gunner finds similar temporal fluidity in *uMabatha* which uses “cyclical rather than calendrical time” through deep cultural forms that rely on dance and song (Gunner 260). She argues that in “making and shifting the chains of its social and historical meanings” through the none specificity of time, *uMabatha*, written in 1970, imagines the memory of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, even as its transnational and transcultural relevance is also underlined by the way it dramatizes military incursion into civilian politics on the African continent, including its attendant violence and brutality.

In *Harlem Duet* we are provided another example of a narrative that de-emphasizes temporal specificity. In a scene set in 1860 on a plantation, two characters are seen making plans to escape to Canada through the Underground Railroad. They discuss the Black slave, Cleotis and Saartjie Baartman, also known as Hottentot Venus, who was “paraded naked on a pay-per-view basis” while alive, and subjected to a more distasteful treatment after her death. Given that the story of

Baartman (1789-1816) being told in 1860 represents the past at that moment in the play (1860) and also represents the two characters' present, the introduction of the story of Emmett Till, the fourteen-year-old black boy lynched for flirting with a white lady in 1955, represents the future in that context. Baartman's remains were buried in 1994 by the South African government under Nelson Mandela. As it were, in the same way that Emmet Till's story of 1955 serves as *the* future to 1860 Harlem (whose past is 1789-1816) in that context, so could 1994 serve as the future of 1955. Place is also de-emphasized in *Harlem Duet*: there were no slaves in New York in 1860 as depicted (33-4). This scene illustrates the fact that, just as *Ifa* de-emphasizes spatial and temporal location in its liturgy but stresses thematic relevance, in Orisa-Shakespeare, socio-cultural and political relevance is much more significant than the temporal dimensions of the adaptation.

Although the experience of divination in the Yoruba context is an experience of the core essence of Yoruba philosophy and worship (Ifa Karade 13), when a Babalawo engages in divination wherein he recites an *odu* from *Ifa*, he is said to “*ki Ifa*” (praising *Ifa*), which stresses the importance of approaching Yoruba orature, artwork and literature as *oriki* because of its representation of the textual aspect of Yoruba literature (Yai 30). *Oriki*, which literally implies “head praising,” is a significant aspect/form of Yoruba oral literature which retains and expresses both the mythical, historical and political essence of Yoruba thought. *Oriki* is characterised by extolling the attributes of valour, strength, victory, wisdom and other characteristics of an individual, clan or town; and its epistemological underpinning is from the fact that “all entities, whether human, spiritual, animate and inanimate, have *oriki*” (Barber 2004:733), whether rendered as short (personal) or extended (lineage) forms.

Ifa is also central to the Orisa-Shakespeare on this specific account of the use of *oriki* as both dialogue and narrative resource. In Osofisan's *Wesoo Hamlet!*, when the protagonist, Leto returns to his village, he is greeted with both his personal and lineage *oriki* in order to praise him and celebrate his return, “Leto, omo baba, Akanni ogo” (Leto, son of our father, precious Akanni). Another character, Asipa goes into an extensive rendition of Leto's lineage *oriki* accompanied by the (*gangan*) talking drum:

<i>Omo alaso etu—se iwo ni?</i>	Son of the owners of <i>etu</i> cloth—is it you?
<i>Omo A-ji-faso aran bora!</i>	Son of those who wake to be draped in velvet!
<i>A-sun-fi sanyan boju!</i>	Son of those who sleep covered in silk!
<i>Onile opo-wo 'leke, wo- aso-nla!</i>	Whose house posts are draped in beads and rich cloth! (9)

Elsewhere, his mother, Olori chants another version of his lineage's panegyric when he arrives at the palace later that day:

<i>Aremo Orimadega</i>	First son and heir of King Orimadegun,
<i>Ariowosaye</i>	Who has enough money for merriment
<i>A figba won 'wo</i>	Whose wealth is carried in calabashes,
<i>Omo eyi o jo teekan</i>	Son of "This is unlike the previous one."
<i>Teekan o jo teyi</i>	"The previous one is unlike this one!"
(16)	

Later on in the play when Olori realizes her folly and learns the truth of how Ayibi poisoned her husband, Oba Sayedero and married her to keep the loyalty of the people, she goes to the *bara* (royal mausoleum) to summon the ghost/Mask of Sayedero with his personal *oriki* in order to beg for his forgiveness:

<i>Oba Sayedero</i>	My husband like a god
<i>Oko-o mi orisa</i>	
<i>Ololo</i>	He who stammers
<i>A ba-ni-soro-ma tan ni je!</i>	But whose counsel is never false
<i>Rogun ma te...</i>	Who is never disgraced in war... (79, 89)

Oriki also falls within the purview of *izithakazelo* (clan praise names), which are closely linked to Zulu *izibongo*, and used extensively in *uMabatha*. Dangane is first

introduced to the audience by Inbongi who uses such forms of verbal material to praise the monarch:

Oh, Mighty Mdangazeli Noqongo
You who tread upon the highest and smallest clouds
You who have conquered the highest and smallest clouds
And made the whole sky dark
Oh Mighty king
...
Grow to be even mightier than you are
Grow to be mightier than the old horn snake
Which lies with its head always erect
And strikes wherever it pleases. (168-9)

When Makhiwane is crowned king of Zululand at the end of the play, people also use related praise chants to acknowledge him:

Mntwana!
Makhiwane, son of Ndanganzeli! (187)

Just as the *oriki* used in *Wesoo, Hamlet!* draws from the flora and fauna of the society, so are those used in *uMabata*. And, as the examples from both plays show, whether rendered as a short or extended prose/narrative detailing specific incidents at some point in the past, or the mythological and /or the historical contents of an individual's personal or lineage's line of descent, *oriki* is a unique form of language and verbal aesthetic that also relies on *itan*. The *itan* at the heart of *oriki* usually draws a link to the physical, temperamental, occupational and other aspect of life, and/or qualities related to the individual or lineage being addressed. The semantic component of the various names, as well as the incidents alluded to in *oriki*, arouses this emotional response (Barber 734), and its uniqueness is stressed by the anthropomorphic nature of Yoruba belief.

According to Barber, a complex relationship exists among *Ifa*, *oriki* and *itan*, “*itan* are told to explain obscure lines of [*Ifa* and] *oriki*, while *oriki* [and *Ifa*] in turn provide the mnemonic pegs onto which extended narratives [*itan*] are hung” (Barber 2004:361). As the specific examples from *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!* also show, the *itan* of a particular lineage is entrenched in, and espoused through, the *oriki* of the individual. At the same time, *oriki* are utilized in *itan* as resources of language and vehicle of narration to advance the plot of a dramatic piece.

Itan is thus at the heart of Yoruba creative practice. *Itan* is coined from “*tan*”, that is, “to spread”; “to open”; “to illuminate”; and “to shine” which are phrases detailing its reach, scope and dialectical imperatives beyond the Yoruba specific frontiers. Both the cultural/creative and dialectical significances of *itan* derives from its polysemic nature, which integrates three fundamental dimensions, namely: its chronological aspect that deals with people and places; its territorial/geographical dimensions emphasizing links between people across and beyond their cradles; and its discursive and/or reflexive dimensions that underlines its intellectual import (Yai 30-1), even as we focus on its specifically Yoruba dimension. The saying, “*Gbogbo ohun ti a ba se loni, itan ni lola*” (All that we do today is history/narrative tomorrow), is an expression of the fact that *itan* makes the understanding of events possible because stories are the most enduring survivors of events, and that “tomorrow” in that context, is a time frame that exceeds the boundaries of thought in regard to future possibilities.

Orisa-Shakespeare also reflects the primacy of *Ifa* and *itan* in Yoruba adaptation. In the “Note to the Director” which accompanies *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!*, Osofisan mentions that his adaptation “takes place in Yorubaland, Nigeria, in a period deliberately set in a non-specific year within the last half of the 20th century [and] some of the references will recall the early 50s, and some the later part of the century” (vi). Osofisan shows how *itan* mediates the distance between the occurrence of events and their narration. We have another example from *Harlem Duet* in the scene set in present-day Harlem,⁸ between Billie and her father, Canada who tells the *itan* below:

⁸This scene is also an example of the non-specificity of time referent in Yoruba narrative that I mentioned earlier: “present-day Harlem” could mean many things---1997 when *Harlem Duet* was written, or two years earlier since

You know, an old African once told me the story of a man who was struck by an arrow. His attacker was unknown. Instead of tending to his wound, he refused to remove the arrow until the archer was found and punished. In the meantime, the wound festered, until finally the poison infected his entire body, eventually killing him...Now, who is responsible for this man's death, the archer for letting go the arrow, or the man for his foolish holding on? (83)

In the first instance, that Canada is the one telling the *itan* is compatible with Yoruba cultural understanding about elderly people being the custodians of wisdom (as ancient storytellers and griots are known). The value of the *itan* is also strengthened by another short statement that he adds that, "A drunken man can get sober but a damn fool can't ever get wise" (83), an example of what Barber describes as "*owe-onitan*" that is, proverbial *itan*/narrative, which contains the same sense, the value of learning from other people's experience, as the longer/extended one. Although the *itan* is told in Yorubaland and serves as an example of "the means by which the past is reactivated in the present" (Barber 364), its' recollection in the Yoruba diaspora also stresses *itan*'s "territorial/geographical dimensions emphasizing links between people across and beyond their cradles" as we have in *Harlem Duet*.

Secondly, Canada's *itan* shows that the moments of a particular action cannot coincide with that of its record. What this means is that time and the demand of genre (*itan*/narrative) cannot but come between the occurrence of an event and its recollection (and preservation) in stories. As Adeeko observes, *itan* shows the relationship between time and narrative, the displacement of "literal" events into narratives, the difference between events and history, and the disjuncture between historical actions and their narrative records (108-9). In the two particular cases cited above, the potential of *itan* and Yoruba adaptation to speak to the past, present and future at one and the same time is highlighted.

Itan stresses the imperative of community in Yoruba creative practice. This is essentially a major connection that *itan* shares with *Ifa*, whose liturgy embodies a

the stage direction mentions the music of Aretha Franklin being played in the background to Michael Jackson and Lisa Maris Presley's interview on ABC's "Dateline" conducted in 1995; the time frame could even be now.

wide range of *odu* (verses) that emphasize communal existence as opposed to individuality. Yoruba approach to narratives and adaptation in general is informed by the awareness of the relationship between the individual, the social and the spiritual world--- and awareness that it is “a social contract that does not produce a literature that is preoccupied with the individual as the primary source of reference (Abraham, qtd in Harrison xliii). Societies, as Ben-Amos and Goldstein (1975) also argue, are characterized by patterns of expression in the form of codes, symbols, metaphors and other performative structures that make up their worldview. *Itan*’s emphasis on the communal nature of narratives draws attention to such orthodoxies as “communal creativity” as opposed to “creative individualism” (Olaniyan 45); that is, the essence of *itan* is located in the operative of a society’s worldview, and not necessarily as the material creation of any single individual.

Orisa-Shakespeare reflect the influence of *itan* in this regard by using Shakespeare’s story but not necessarily his plot. The adapters approach Shakespeare’s texts with a sense of *itan* that claims autonomy from the Shakespearean source and is specifically addressed to the adapter’s socio-political concerns. More so, what the Orisa-Shakespeare emphasize is the story or its representation of actual events rather than emphasis on the source/Shakespeare in this particular sense, thereby making it impossible to be bothered about fidelity to that supposed source. Césaire mentions that while writing *A Tempest*, he “continually broke away from the original [and] was trying to ‘de- mythify’ [Shakespeare’s] tale” (qtd in Belhassen 176), and “When the work was done, I realised there was not much Shakespeare left” (Cesaire, “Un poete politique” 3). Thomas also emphasizes that rather than staying true to its source *Lear Ananci*, the adaptation of *King Lear*, “is a powerful, poetic and poignant interpretation of Shakespeare’s play that takes a deep metaphorical journey into Caribbean politics...in the twin island state of Trinidad & Tobago.” Sears also makes it known that in writing *Harlem Duet*, “Shakespeare was a jumping off point [and] an opportunity to look at things from another perspective...the central question was how to look at Othello from my own perspective” (qtd in Buntin). The adapters thus worked to tell a story in order to reflect the materiality of their society rather than being encumbered by fidelity to its source.

At the heart of *itan* is *iran*, a term which is synonymous to “spectacle” and/or “performance” at its simplest. According to Margaret Drewal, the essence of *iran* which derives from its root “*itan*” (the performative aspect of the oral narrative that I mentioned earlier) incorporates tropes such as, ritual, song (music) and dance, all of which are tied up to life itself. She contends that the “Yoruba often use ritual, festival, spectacle, and play interchangeably [...] so that any generic distinctions have to acknowledge that, as categories of performance, they are open and inclusive rather than close and exclusive” (12), in their realization.

Because *Ifa* liturgy and *itan* are used by the Yoruba to give tangible meaning to both the visible and spiritual presences which provide context to their daily lives and thoughts (Yai 30-4), what is often emphasized is the individual’s behaviour in relation to the taboos and norms guiding existence in the society. In this case, *itan* are told with the aim to stress socially-acceptable conducts which are subsumed under the notion of *omoluabi* and *iwa*. When people behave well in the society or demonstrate any form of socially-desirable demeanour, they are regarded as “*omoluabi*” which describes both the individual and the behaviour of such an individual. This means that *omoluabi* denotes the importance of “good behaviour as a *sine qua non* to harmony and peaceful co-existence in the society” (Dasylva 80-1). At the heart of *omoluabi* is *iwa*, which simply means behaviour. The saying “*Iwa l’ewa*” (Character is beauty) underscores the *iwulo*, or what I call the “phenomenal functionality” of *iwa*, as a requisite to qualify as *eniyani* (person), but whether one is *eniyani rere/daadaa* (good person) or *eniyani buruku* (bad/haughty person) depends on people’s assessment---an assessment that is also dependent on whether that individual has attained the state of *omoluabi*. According to Fayemi, the Yoruba often consider six qualities before concluding that an individual is an *omoluabi*, namely: *iwa*: 1) *oro siso* (spoken word), 2) *iteriba* (respect), 3) *otito* (truth), 4) *iwa* (character)⁹, 5) *akikanju* (bravery), and (6) *opolo pipe* (intelligence) respectively (Fayemi 169), although they are also aware that it is not possible for an individual to possess all of these qualities.

Because of the recognition of human frailties, *Ifa* and *itan* stress the need for people to be mindful of “*Pele*” in their relationships, either among themselves or with the environment. According to Dasylva, although “*Pele*” is both a form of greeting

⁹Note the difference in the translation of *iwa* here compared to the previous: Yoruba cultural constructs are often difficult to give a specific definition because of the fluidity in their usage.

and of warning, at another level of its socio-cultural value, it is the mechanism for checking people's excesses and ensuring society's continued peaceful and harmonious existence. He explains "*Pele*" from three related perspectives:

[*Iwa*] *Pele ko ma baa ku*—be careful or be of good conduct, so that you do not die suddenly or get hurt or harmed; that is, beware of harm due to negligence or carelessness; [*Iwa*] *Pele ko ma baa koba awon ara'yooku*—be careful that you may not cause problems for others; eschew acts that indicate that one does not have consideration for others; [*Iwa*] *Pele ko ma baa para re*, or (*para re lara*)—be careful that you do not kill yourself or bring harm upon yourself. (84-6)

Dasylyva's analysis above draws on the notion of community rather than individuality which is an essential aspect of Yoruba life. While this may not be unique to the Yoruba, the fact is that the Yoruba use taboos and conventions to foreground its relevance in their society. As Heschel observes, such an ontological imperative is "occasioned by [the people's] coming upon a conflict or contradiction between existence and expectation, between what [the people are] and what is expected [of them]" (Heschel 3). As Eliade also explains, people have an implicit belief in the fact that "life is not possible without an opening toward the transcendent; in other words, human beings [and society] cannot live in chaos. Once contact with the transcendent is lost, existence in the world ceases to be possible" (Eliade 57).

Orisa-Shakespeare also reflect the primacy of *Ifa* and *itan* in this regard by presenting characters who are enmeshed in the conflict between personal quest and communal need that is based on a corresponding ontological imperative. *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!* and *Otaelo* exemplify this disjuncture between personal and community need. In *Wesoo*...Leto is drawn into the crisis of his father's murder, the taboo that it constitutes, the personal and social implication of the violence resulting from his own vengeance against the culprit, and the effect on close associates. Otaelo's close friends and the entire society are destroyed by his personal reaction to physical and psychological oppression that the *Osu* practice constitutes in *Otaelo*. Needless to stress, the contact with "the transcendental" that Eliade envisions, deals with the essence of spiritual awareness and how it generally influences social conduct.

Whenever problems which threaten existence due to human action arise, Yoruba understanding is that the individual(s) responsible for the “cosmic disruption” has/have failed to grasp the essence of their person. As I will show later on in the thesis, these sociocultural ideals are central thematic concerns in both *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!* and *Otaelo* as it is with some of the other Orisa-Shakespeare.

Having said that, let us now consider language, symbolism and archetypal characterization, which are the aesthetic tools that the Orisa-Shakespeare often draw from *Ifa* and *itan* and the ways in which they could be applied to textual analyses. As I have been doing so far, I will explain these three aesthetic features and then draw examples from the Orisa-Shakespeare to support the explanation.

The Yoruba celebrate “*ewa ede*” (oratory), but condemn *isokuso* (vulgarity) and *ejo wewe* (loquaciousness). Yoruba literature makes use of language in terms of what Adeeko calls “the coding of language” or the expression of “histories in native idioms and literary figures of speech” (Adeeko 28). What Adeeko means is that Yoruba verbal (including written) literature is often accompanied by some form of *itan*, whether derived from myth or legend. Two examples of such forms of language are *owe* (proverb) and *aroko* (coded metaphor).¹⁰ Modern Yoruba linguistics has termed these forms of language *akanlo ede* (elevated language), more so because of the material, behavioural and the cultural connotations guiding their usage.

As a form of language, *owe* acts as “flower” and “vehicle of thoughts” by relating its subject-matter to specific social relations and by detailing truth, intellectual concepts, and exhortation etc. The Yoruba dictum, “*Owe l’esin oro, oro l’esin owe; t’oro ba s’onu, owe la fi nwa*” (Proverb is the chariot on which conversations travel) stresses the dialectics between the speaker and listener whenever *owe* is in use. *Owe* transmits ideas by utilizing common sayings in uncommon ways, and draws attention to daily habits in order to convey useful existential lessons that are drawn from the society and for the benefit of both the speaker and listener (Adeeko 29-30). Often used by elders as both a measure of their wisdom and to explain occurrences, *owe* radiates verbal brevity by comparing “[...] one thing or situation to another [and] highlighting the essential similarities that the two share”

¹⁰Although “coded metaphor” does not fully explain the meaning of *aroko*, it provides us with a sense of what is intended.

(Owomoyela 3). The Orisa-Shakespeare also reflect Yoruba cultural attitude towards language. In *Wesoo, Hamlet!* for example, obviously inflamed by Leto's insolence, Ayibi throws him into prison and plans to publicly humiliate the young prince. In pleading for Leto's life, both Asipa and Iyamode use *owe* in their conversation with the angry king:

Iyamode: He's Oba Sayedero's son; your son too.

ObaAyibi: And a citizen, like others! Subject to the laws of the land.

Iyamode: Anger, Kabiyesi! You're saying all this out of anger. And what we're begging you to do is *cool down and climb above it*.

Asipa: *You have to agree that all trees stand in the sun, but they're not all the same height.*

ObaAyibi: Ah-ha? *But it's the same rain that beats them, not so?*

Iyamode: You know the world better than us, Kabiyesi. You know we cannot punish Leto like that, without remembering who he is.

Asipa: No, Kabiyesi! You cannot punish him, without remembering who you are

...

Asipa: The young man has done wrong, no one can deny it. *But if we destroy a fowl for crowing in daylight, what will we do to the dog that barks in the moonlight?*

Iyamode: A slave can be banished forever from the household for a bad offence, but with a trueborn, we do not go further than a reprimand. As we flog him with one hand, we must caress him with the other. Otherwise the entire household will be scattered one day. (63-4; emphasis added)

In using *owe* to convey the most important aspect of their message to Ayibi as the dialogue shows, both Asipa and Iyamode also engage in recalling other aspects in

which Ayibi and Leto are connected and bound by certain traditions and values. This is what I mean by *owe* and related forms of language bearing some form of *itan*. Although there are other examples of the use of *owe* in the play, what this particular conversation underscores are the intellectual, socio-cultural and the epistemic value of *owe* as a form of language among the Yoruba. Its usage also necessarily requires understanding the relationship shared by people other than through birth, and how such relationships can either be strengthened or jeopardized by individual actions, at the ultimate detriment of small family units and the society at large.

In the same play, Sayedero uses *aroko* to communicate his objection to the plan by his brother, Ayibi, to establish a tobacco company. *Aroko* is a form of esoteric/metaphoric language that is derived from the combination of unrelated materials, and embodies a condensed form of expression whose overall meaning can only be deciphered by decoding the symbolism that it encodes. Sayedero uses an *aroko*, made from a combination of a tortoise head and the skin of a python: “a tortoise head” meaning, the journey of the tortoise ends in disgrace; and “skin of a python” meaning, the deadliest snake wears the most beautiful colours, to inform Ayibi of his decision, which causes the rift between the two brothers. Being versed in the language, Ayibi understands what the *aroko* means, and, obviously enraged by the prospect of the huge financial loss his brother’s decision would cost him, he swears to complete the project by all means even if it involves killing him (Osofisan 26). As ciphered language at the centre of which is also often a fairly elaborate *itan*/narration, *aroko* not only communicates ideas but warns of another “*itan*” that could result from a particular line of action and which might prove to be undesirable if allowed to happen. Hence, *aroko* is much more than a simple form of language because of its message, more so because of the personal and social implications of *itan* that it often contains.

Ifa’s liturgy especially the *iyere* (songs) are often accompanied by musical instrument, *agogo* (gong), just as *orin* (songs/music) are often used in *itan* both to embellish and present the story. The examples of *Ifa* and *itan* here shows how music functions as in both religious and profane settings. Besides, all the *orisa* are identified with one or two specific *Ilu* (drum) and music: *Sango* is identified with *bata* drums and *Sango pipe*; *Ogun* with *dundun* drums and *ijala/iremoje*; *Obatala* with *igbin* drums etc. As a special medium of language, *Ilu* (drum), is believed to possess

an “affecting presence”, even as it also contains both a visual and sonic dimension that brings together Yoruba aesthetics and metaphysics through its affixed signs and symbols. More so, it embodies and energizes by its form of language, a certain spiritual tradition that is associated with the *Orisa*, not to mention its value in purely mundane terms. In this regard, *Ilu* contains a special *itan* that shows the relationship between people (and the *Orisa*) in the Yoruba society; the relationship that provides access to spiritual, ontological and cultural information about the people.

As Esiaba Irobi observes, Yoruba drums and other musical instruments constitute complex communication codes of indigenous performances even as they function as “sonic/semiotic devices to preserve historical information, serve as cryptic cultural codes, and create participatory dynamism in indigenous [Yoruba] theatre” (Irobi 276). The kind of language that *Ilu* represents, is accessed through sounds, symbols and characteristic rhythms, which suggest that *Ilu* and *Ilu-lilu* (drumming) function as a bridge between the sacred and secular domain that captures both spiritual and profane experiences. Also, both the “*Onilu*” (drummer) and the *Ilu* (drum) are embodiment of *itan* in their own rights: the former is usually an experienced historian, custodian of oral tradition and performer, while the latter is her/his instrument/props, as the case may be. As essential aspects of Yoruba culture, the former acts as the human vehicle of expression for the *Orisa* at the level of ritual and worship, and aesthetic tool at the mundane level of purely ceremonial performance; while the latter is the medium that s/he uses to connect the social world of the Yoruba to the unseen world (De Silva 9-11). Other forms of meta-language apart from *Ilu* (drum) and *orin* (song/music), include *ofo/ogede* (invocation) and *oriki* which I discussed earlier on, among others.

Orisa-Shakespeare also demonstrates the aesthetic relevance of *orin* (music) in Yoruba literature and performance. In *Wesoo, Hamlet!*, Asipa is the virtuoso performer who combines poetry and dance skills effectively. He renders most of the *oriki* in the play as some form of poetic chant, and is accompanied by Oje, the drummer, who plays the drum that heightens the aesthetic and performative content of the poetic rendition. The function of *ilu* (Sangoma drums) in *uMabatha* ranges from creating mood for a scene (often mystical) to conjuring metaphysical forces (168-70; 181-2); celebration, battle and mourning are other aspects of Zulu life that are

intimately connected to *ilu-lilu* (drumming), which functions as an expressive medium that establishes the “multi-accentual nature” (Gunner 260) of the play.

Of the Orisa-Shakespeare being studied in this thesis, *Harlem Duet* uses music in the most engaging ways which also recall the the relationship between *itan* and *iran* that I discussed earlier on. Every scene is played out against the background of one form of music or the other: in the Prologue to Act One, we have “a melancholic blues”; “a blues from deep in the Mississippi delta” is set to the background of Act One, scene two, while “a funky rendition of Aretha Franklin’s ‘Spanish Harlem’” in Act Two, scene etc. Ric Knowles, in describing *Harlem Duet*, “a rhapsodic blues tragedy,” stresses that music in the play, “links tragedy with jazz, high-Western with Black culture even as its musical bridges perform blues on orchestral strings” (150). In fact, Sears’ dramaturgy is marked by an impressive use of music. For example, her solo play, *Afrika Solo* blends “everything from traditional African music, as in BaMbuti music, to contemporary African music from Africa and the diaspora, as in ‘High Life’, Rap and R&B” (Dickinson 97). John Blacking’s contention that music can neither be transmitted nor can it have meaning without the association among people because it is deeply concerned with human feelings and experiences in society (32), is true of the use of music in *Harlem Duet*. Sears shows that music is a product of the relationship between the patterns of human organizations and the patterns of sound produced as a result of organized interaction.

In *Ifa* and *itan*, *ofò* and *ogede* are other Yoruba forms of language often utilized. They refer to a group of extremely powerful poetic genre, used by only knowledgeable people in that form of verbal art. As Barber observes, in a spiritual context, these forms of language are intensely efficacious and downright dangerous, often used to realign the balance of spiritual forces by working through a system of verbal correspondence between the speaker and the intended audience/listener whom they are directed. This correspondence activates an inner relationship of necessity which, by analogy, brings about a necessary consequence—of the addressee’s hearing and obeying the speaker’s commands (362). *Wesoo, Hamlet!* dramatizes how these forms of language are utilized in Yoruba performance and Shakespeare adaptation in particular. In the final encounter between Leto and Ayibi where both engage in a mock duel as masks towards the end of the play, these verbal “arsenal” and

incantations are considered to be more efficacious to inflict the desired injury and cause havoc much more than the physical weapon:

1st Mask: *Ila tiiri!* (The okro stags too long unplucked!)

2nd Mask: *Ila gbo! Awo! Ogbon lenu mo, enu o m'eru!* (It grows over-ripe! Cult secret! Wisdom's what the mouth knows, never deceit!)

1st Mask: *Benbe o dun gudu, araba o wo jeje! Awo!* (The sound of the Benbe drum is not a whisper, the araba tree can never fall unnoticed!)

2nd Mask: *Nijo inu ba bigi, igi a ya lomi!* (The day the tree gets angry, the day it crashes on the water!)

1st Mask: *Nijo inu ba bomi, omi a gbegi lo!* (The day the water gets angry, the day it carries the tree away!)

2nd Mask: *Gbogbogbo lowo-o yo jori!* (The arm always shows itself confidently above the head!)

1st Mask: *Gbogbogbo logomo-o yo ju igi ope! Tologbo ba reku, dandan ni ko gbe mi!* (Arrogantly does the palm frond display above the palm tree! If the cat sees a rat, it must swallow it!)
(Osofisan, 85-9)

As I earlier mentioned, each of the *orisa* has its own brand of music and musical instruments. They also have specific language by which they can be “invited” to serve certain purposes: *ofò* and *ogede* function in this regard. According to Jones, in order to invoke the *orisa*, one must enlist the acoustic power of sound and the kinetic power of movement. This is because “each *orisa* has its own sonic vibration that is stimulated through word, song, prayer, and *oriki*; and its own kinetic and visual resonance that is triggered by dance and symbolic/mimetic movement [which are] designed to get the *orisa*’s attention (323-4). However, there are also a number of related types of incantation, *ayajo* for example, which is associated with *Ifa*, and “awure” used only to request blessings and good fortune (Barber 362-3). In any case,

itan is also central to any of these forms of language as is their relevance to Yoruba literature.

Although symbolism is common to all languages, a sense of ritual is usually associated with the way the Yoruba use symbols. The ritual connotations of these symbols depend largely on the association of meaning with an object or entity, wherein the symbol communicates a coherent whole by means of a part and elicits new information which the literal mind cannot perceive (Eghagha 191). *Ifa* conceptualizes the duality of the Yoruba world with a calabash: the upper and lower parts as *aye* (earth) and *orun* (heaven) respectively. The earth/heaven is also conceptualized in gender terms: the *ako a t'abo* (male/female) principles, *aye* (earth) being the female and *orun* (heaven) the male, in a relationship which presupposes a certain correspondence between the male and female gender that ensures balance in the Yoruba universe. Because human life is also conceptualized in gender terms: male represents toughness (*lile*) and the female coolness (*ero*), masculinity and/or its corresponding femininity does not recognize or support any notions of oppression and domination, but an essence that is firmly rooted in complementary relations (Olajubu 9). While the Yoruba utilize symbolism from the perspective of ritual in order to conceptualize their world and to explain supernatural phenomena that otherwise would have remained elusive, *itan* is usually the essential element that is used to offer this conceptual understanding.

Orisa-Shakespeare also draw from Yoruba conception of symbolism from this perspective. By coincidence, one important symbol that all the Orisa-Shakespeare have in common is *Ile*, the earth, which is represented by their settings. *Ile*/earth connotes different things in all the plays but what ties them together is the sense of the past and its accommodation of the present that is the new reality being dramatized. *Otaelo's Ala* (earth god) suggests the immortality of the earth and its continued relevance to human existence; the *bara* (royal mausoleum) from which the Masks emerge in *Wesoo, Hamlet!* embodies this sense of *ile* and functions as the link between the past (the dead) and the present (the living) in a shared relational arrangement as I have previously mentioned.

While the *Orisa* dimension of *Wesoo, Hamlet!* manifests most clearly in its plot construction and especially in its use of the mask, the same is achieved in

uMabatha through the symbolism of the earth. The Zulu “earthy ontology,” as Laurence Wright describes it, connects favourably with the symbolism of the earth in Yoruba belief which is termed, *Ile Ogere* (Sacred/Mother Earth) and represented in the play by the most significant introduction Welcome Msomi makes to the adaptation, the Sangomas, who replace Shakespeare’s Weird Sisters. Unlike the Weird Sisters however, the Sangomas are not witches who use *abathakathi* (power/forces of malicious and discarnate evil in Zulu cosmology), but diviners and healers. As understood in Zulu culture, the Sangomas are mortals, some of whom usually undergo *ukwethwasa*, that is, training or apprenticeship to learn their art. In *Macbeth*, the witches appear “[in] thunder, lightning, or in rain” (1.1.2) and in disappearing, “they made themselves air, into which they vanished” (1.5.2), whereas in *uMabatha*, “they became shadows of the night” (172), blending into the earth from which they emerged.

In the Yoruba cosmology, *Ile Ogere* is informed by the knowledge that the earth is female, the Sacred Mother, and explains the sense in which *uMabatha* has introduced the Sangoma (who are women) and their appearance from the earth as opposed to the air in Shakespeare’s play. References to the earth as a goddess are numerous in the *iyere* and *odu Ifa*, however, what is important to us here, is the way *uMabatha* uses the knowledge, thereby constituting its own form of ritual imagination.

Moreover, in Yoruba and Zulu belief, natural sites like trees, rivers, and especially the earth, are identified with the *Orisa* and primordial divinities or deified ancestors. Human beings who are schooled in the esoteric knowledge, such as the Sangomas, could access the cosmic energy and power that these spiritual phenomena possess to serve their purpose. The “earthy ontology” shows *uMabatha*’s implicit connection to the Yoruba belief (as in other African cultures), that humanity emerged from the earth (Laurence Wright 101). In *A Tempest*, Nature (*ile*) is regarded as a living entity, represented by the wind, storm and the flora and fauna of the contested island. Césaire emphasizes this point through Caliban’s unblemished belief in Nature and everything that is related to it, starting from his mother, Sycorax. Unlike Prospero who believes Sycorax is dead, Caliban insists that his mother, who assumes the role of Mother Earth and sacred Nature, is still very much alive, “You only think she’s dead because you think the earth itself is dead...I respect the earth, because I know that

Sycorax is alive” (18). Caliban chants Sycorax’s *oriki* which elaborates on her relationship to Nature (the island) and every other elemental forces related to it:

Sycorax. Mother.

Serpent, rain, lightning.

And I see thee everywhere!

In the eye of the stagnant pool which stares back at me/
through the rushes, in the gesture made by twisted root and
its awaiting thrust.

In the night, the all-seeing blinded night/the nostril-less all-
smelling night! (18)

Although the Yoruba also recognize a three-level spatio-spiritual formation: the world of the dead, the world of the living and the world of the unborn; they also believe that this formation is also subsumed into the duality component, the *ako a t’abo* (male/female) principles. The effect of “dismantling” this spiritual arrangement through either cultural practice or any other forms of social interaction is well demonstrated in *Otaelo* in which society is hinged on a presiding male psyche that is given to violence and oppression. In essence, public and private power structures are subsumed under the political life which not only denies awareness about femaleness in its totality as it were, but also relegates it completely to the background. The society is forced to reconceptualise its outlook after suffering a horrible tragedy that leaves the palace, which symbolizes the soul of the community, in contempt of both itself and society as a whole.

The duality of the Yoruba universe and its expression in concrete terms through the male/female binary (or what I term “the connected opposites”) also underscores the social significance of the individual’s spiritual consciousness in terms of the symbolism that is embedded in the *Ori*, by which the Yoruba show that every individual is a constituent of two entities: the physical and the spiritual being—an extension of the ritual symbolism that I mentioned earlier.

In simple terms, *Ori* means “head” but in metaphysical terms, it refers to an individual’s spiritual essence, the controlling feature of personhood. This aspect of

Yoruba belief can be viewed from its aesthetic conception wherein Yoruba sculptors produce figures with extremely large heads with small bodies, to indicate the spiritual importance of *Ori* to the other parts of the body. This artistic expression is also informed by the belief that “every living person has a spirit partner (a “look-alike”) in heaven called *enikeji* (heavenly double) who offers spiritual protection to its earthly counterpart” (Lawal 503). The supreme example of this duality or correspondence is offered by the *Orisa*, in the *Ifa* (Orunmila) and his relationship with *Esu*, as it is clearly expressed with the image on the *Opon Ifa* (Divination tray), at the apex of which is the face of *Esu*, and on the *iroke* (Divination tapper).



Fig.1. An oval-shaped *Opon Ifa* (Divination tray).

Yoruba understanding about what distinguishes human beings from, and makes them unique to, other creatures is fully expressed in the *itan* on *Ori*. The *itan* shows that human beings are also composed of a tripartite (three level) structure that is subsumed in a duality as is the Yoruba universe: a physical element called *ara* (body) that is tangible and made up of flesh, bone and blood; *emi* (soul) the spiritual/immaterial aspect which gives life to the body; and *ori-inu*, which is also spiritual and constitutes the essence of personality, and is actually what is referred to when *Ori* is mentioned. The figure (3) below explains the spiritual composition of *Ori* through the *Opon Ifa*. It represents both the map of consciousness and the Yoruba concept of the mind, that the *Ori* asserts influence on.



Fig.2. Images of the *iroke* (Divination tapper).

In another elaborate *itan* from the Yoruba mythology which suggests that people choose their *Ori* before coming into the world, the origin of that spiritual act is traced to the same *Orisa Nla* of the *Atunda* episode that I mentioned earlier in the introduction to this thesis. As the *itan* goes, *Orisa Nla* moulds the human body (*ara*) from clay, after which Olodumare gives the body life or the breath force (*emi*). Having been activated, these “human beings” proceed to *Ajala* (deity in charge of making *Ori*) where they select *Ori*, an important task which has three elements/results: it is done with free will; the *Ori* selected is irreversible and determines the life course and personality of that particular individual; and lastly, the individual is unaware of what has been chosen (Orangun 43-5; Ekanola 41-3), but actions and events in human life can provide a glimpse into the kind of *Ori* that was chosen by the individual. That is why, when an individual is lucky or unlucky, it is common for the Yoruba to say “*ose oriire*” (S/he has a “good” *Ori*) or “*ose ori buruku*” (S/he has a “bad” *Ori*) to either explain the irreversibility of fate/destiny or to find a plausible explanation for a rather perplexing situation.

To this end, Yoruba understanding is that *causality* has its place in the discussion of fate/destiny wherein human action and the people’s response to circumstance generally determine what would be considered to be their fate. Thus, at its utmost, they regard *Ori* as mere potentiality, subject to social ethics and individual response (Orangun 143-4). More so, *Ori* as mere potentiality allows us to view the ordeal of the characters whose lives we shall encounter in the analyses of the Orisa-

Shakespeare as another set of journeys given to multiplicity of interpretations, in relation to the ritual practices which underpin their interactions and relationships, within the context of a Yoruba epistemic understanding.

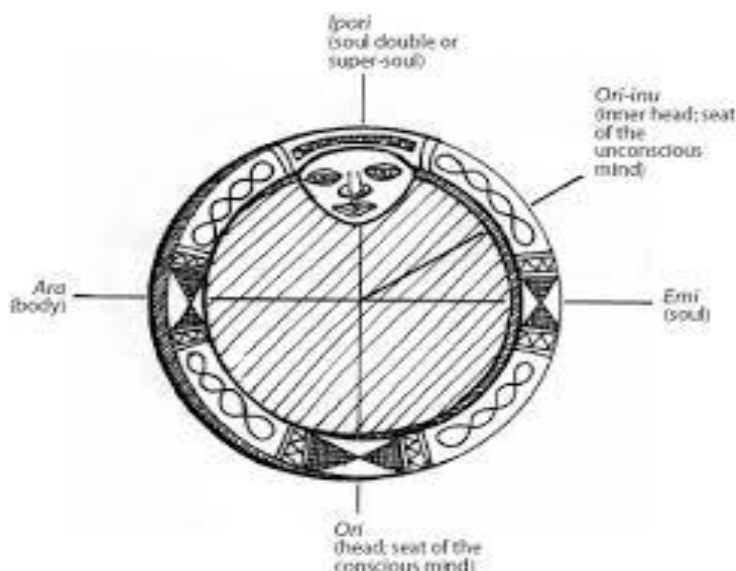


Fig.3. An artistic impression of the cardinal points of the *Opon Ifa* showing its connection to *Ori*.

The above discussion leads us to how characters are used in *itan* since the relationship among fictional characters are a reflection of the social relations among people. As I mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, the perception that life is not static informs the Yoruba's conception of the *Orisa* in physical terms in order to use their attributes as analogy for human behaviour. I refer to this aesthetic conception as archetypal characterization; again the Yoruba use *itan* to show this understanding. Archetypal images do occur and re-occur, yielding possibilities of explication, either in a narrow context or in a broad view, of the collective human experience (Eghagha 192), which suggests the relevance of myth and ritual to the issues of our times.

Yoruba *itan* and art uses *Orisa* attributes to explore how human beings strive to maintain a balance between the world of matter and the unseen; between human actions and fate/destiny; and the need to strike a balance between success and failure as a result of spiritual consciousness and objective reality. Hence, as their indigenous

counterparts (oral performers) have done, Western-educated Yoruba writers also acknowledge the “service” that the *Orisa* render among the Yoruba as “human” vehicle of narration and figures who people their *itan*. Soyinka pays homage to the *Orisa*, and thank them “for their self-sacrifice on the altar of literature, and in so doing press them into further service on behalf of human society, and its quest for the explication of being.” He recognizes their “manipulative histories” which are also used in the Yoruba global diaspora as visual contents and for dramatic actions. Soyinka mentions that the “symbols of *Yemaja* (Yemoja), *Oxosi* (*Ososi*), *Exu* (*Esu*) and *Xango* (*Sango*) not only lead a promiscuous existence with Roman catholic saints but are fused with the twentieth-century technological and revolutionary expressionism of the mural arts of Cuba, Brazil and much of the Caribbean”. Soyinka’s understanding of the “universalizing essence” of the *Orisa* stems from their metaphor and signification, as the “product of the conscious creativity of [the people]; and how such knowledge enhances [the people’s sense of] existence within the cyclic consciousness of time” (Soyinka 1976: 1-2), recognized in the Yoruba universe.

Itan, as well as the Orisa-Shakespeare under study, shows that a parallel can still be found between the ritual actions of the *Orisa* and the actions of contemporary human beings in their daily activities. Soyinka illuminates this symbiotic relationship between human beings and the *Orisa*, “The Will of man is placed beyond surrender. Without the knowing of Divinity by man, can Deity survive? O Hesitant one, Man's conceiving is fathomless; his community will rise beyond the present reaches of the mind. *Orisa* reveals Destiny as-self-destination” (Soyinka 1991: 35). Generally, the characters come across as archetypes whose experiences and interactions in the fictive world of the texts also interact within the consciousness of the audience. Archetypal characters, as we are reminded by Carter Harrison, are more “vital to public testimony than individual characters pursuing their own personal assessment of reality; they provide potent communal references that illuminate the social landscape” (xlii), especially when we recall that these archetypes are drawn from the *orisa*, who occupy the central position at the heart of the Yoruba universe. In other words, the importance of using the *Orisa* as archetypes is located in the Yoruba’s quest for “the balance of life, the very sense of human existence [which] consists in the dynamic correlation of individual responsibility and the pressure of external events and forces” so that the people can order society according to their own

circumstances and live harmoniously within themselves. As it must have become clear by now, the Yoruba universe accommodates a tradition of allegorical and symbolic literature often “set within the framework of a particular complex of cultural references, the essence of their myth [and ritual] being a comprehensive metaphor for life (Irele 181-2); and as a mechanism of “images and symbols with intense spiritual significance” (196), for the people and sustenance of their world.

Thus far, I have used *itan* in its multidimensional value to provide information about the Yoruba, with emphasis on the interconnection between their social/cultural/ritual constructs and poetic aesthetic. I have also examined this symbiotic relationship as embodied by *Ifa*, and how that relationship is central to the task of developing of a theory of Yoruba Shakespeare adaptation that is useful for exploring the cultural and political contexts of the Orisa-Shakespeare in this thesis. In the following sub-section, I will also use the sense of *itan* as history, to trace Shakespeare’s journey, arrival and reception in Africa and his encounter with Yorubaland, after which I will show example of the application of the theory by using it to examine *A’are Akogun* and *Itan Oginintin* (Yoruba adaptations of *Macbeth* and *The Winter’s Tale*) respectively.

Shakespeare’s Travels: Through the heart of Africa into Yorubaland

In this section, I will trace the arrival of Shakespeare into and travel in different parts of the African continent in order to highlight what is unique about his reception in Yorubaland.¹¹ As I will show below, while Shakespeare was embraced as a “part” of the Egyptian/Arabian life and culture in North Africa, was identified with violence and brutality in South Africa, and considered an ally to promote the indigenous languages in East Africa, he was deployed to engage socio-political concerns in Yorubaland different from the ways he was received in those other places.¹²

¹¹ By “Shakespeare,” let us have in mind the canon and not the person.

¹² The same applies here: with “Shakespeare” I have in mind Shakespeare’s works as being assimilated into Egyptian/Arabian life, his works deployed to engage socio-political concerns, as are my references to the fact that Shakespeare becomes entangled in violence in South Africa, a situation that he is unable to extricate himself from. Yet, as many scholars have argued, invoking “Shakespeare” is quite ambiguous, whether one looks at him as a “cultural deity” (Levine 53) and/or as a canon and site of contest for various ideologies. Shakespeare, as Fischlin and Fortier argue, is more than a figure of literary history that defies easy definition (9).

Specifically, the adapters use *itan* which encompasses Yoruba epistemology and its aesthetic principles to perform the task.

According to Baham and Jones, the first contact of Africa with Shakespeare's work was in 1607 with the performances of *Hamlet* and *Richard II* by some British sailors somewhere in Sierra Leone (121).¹³ Writing elsewhere, Laurence Wright mentions that *Henry IV* was also performed in 1801 by some British soldiers to open the Sir George Young's "African Theatre" on the former Hottentot's Square in Cape Town, South Africa (14). In addition to those initial performances which were followed by periodic staging of the same by missionaries, professional and amateur theatre companies which approached the works in different ways, the inclusion of the works on the school curricula of some of these African countries finally aided the spread and popularity of Shakespeare on the continent.

Egyptian writers set the pace in regard to the nature of subsequent reception accorded Shakespeare on the continent. In translating Shakespeare's texts into the Arabic language, the Egyptians approach Shakespeare with a view to reclaim him as a native Arab. Soyinka explains that the Egyptians approached Shakespeare with the consciousness of a "Shakespeare" that was of an Arabian/Egyptian origin, and claimed that his name was an anglicized version of his "original" Bedouin name, "Shayk al-Subair" while his wife's, Anne Hathaway, was also "Hanna Hathawa" (Soyinka 1988:206-9). As Khalil Mutran also writes:

In Shakespeare, there is doubtless something Arabic...between him and us there are puzzling and numerous common features. He has our audacity for metaphor and its manipulation [and] our infatuation with hyperbole which is probably used and sensed by only those writers and readers who have imaginative intensity and defiance, as it is often with Orientals and specifically Arabs. On the whole, there is in the writing of Shakespeare a Bedouin spirit which is expressed in the continuous return to innate nature. (7-8)

Regardless of the historical accuracy of these contentions, between 1899 and 1950, the Egyptians had translated and adapted more than sixteen of Shakespeare's plays

¹³ Evidence however suggests that the document upon which this claim is based might have been forged.

into Arabic, not to mention several plays that his works inspired. Of all Shakespeare's plays however, they found *Othello* to be most compelling and close to their own experience. They contended that by virtue of both his title and description in the play, Othello, the Moor, "is an Arab in Europe." According to Ferial Ghazoul, the Egyptians approached *Othello* from an Arabian historical and cultural perspective that sought to explore areas where its central character, Othello, and the story overlapped with Arabian life in general. *Othello* became for the Egyptians, a symbol of the complex process of expressing "a certain predisposition among Arabs to seek links with Shakespeare, to claim Shakespeare or to find overlapping elements with him" (Ghazoul 1-10). The Egyptians' translations and adaptations of the play transcended the urge to recreate Othello as an Arab character in an Arabian context but also demonstrated how Shakespeare is assimilated into Arabian literary consciousness and his infiltration of Arab imagination

Khalil Mutran and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra pioneered the translations of *Othello* in Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula. While Mutran utilized religious themes and performative modes from the Arabian culture and sought to present *Othello* as an "Arabization" (*ta'rib*), rather than as a translation (*tarjamah*) (Badawi 183-9), Jabra approached the Shakespeare text with an intertextual attitude rather than the oral, conscious fidelity to Shakespeare and performative concerns of his predecessor. Later generation of Egyptian translators and adapters of *Othello* continue to use the titles that Mutran suggested: *Atallah* and *Utayl*, with the same consciousness of reclaiming Shakespeare. These works ranged from a limited, superficial change in details such as title, setting and name of few characters, to radical approaches that resulted in complete rewriting of the story and/or its context as well as its themes. Some of these recontextualization of Shakespeare's texts also drew materials from Arab mythology and familiar narratives. For examples, Mahmud Jad's translation entitled *Atallah*, is told by a *hakawati* (traditional storyteller), supported by *rababah* (traditional chord instrument) and *madahin* (chorus of singers/panegyrists); 'Abd al-Karim Birshid's translation, '*Utayl wal-khayl wa-barud (Othello, Horses and Gunpowder)*' draws from diverse cultures notably the myths of Atlas, Oedipus, Jonah, and The Arabian Nights. He also uses African masks and sub-Saharan African music in his play; Ahmad Shawqi's *MasraKliyubatra* (The Fall of Cleopatra) written with the knowledge of both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, is actually based

on the Arab narrative of Majnun and Layla. The distinguishing feature in all of these translation/adaptations, remained the conscious effort to indigenize Shakespeare and reclaim him as an Arab.

“Shakespeare” was not however warmly welcomed in South Africa where he previously entered in a brutal fashion. What stands “Shakespeare of Egypt” apart from “Shakespeare of South Africa” is that while the former embraces the canon, the latter uses it to engage some violent aspects of South African life that are reminiscent of the manner in which it was introduced in the society. The 1801 premiere of *Henry IV* in the Sir George Young “African Theatre” Cape Town which I mentioned earlier was possible through the forceful displacement of South Africans from their abode. According to Laurence Wright, “to make place for the theatre, Khoesan traders were cleared from the town, in what can only be seen as a disheartening foretaste of the practice of forced removals which was to define apartheid, land and population policies in the twentieth century” (15). Since that brutal encounter, the Shakespeare canon has been cast under the shadow of ill-repute and brutality. Ironically, while both Shakespeare and the canon symbolize villainous imperialism, South Africans also use the texts to challenge both colonial and postcolonial political shenanigans.

South Africans’ interaction with the Shakespeare canon ranged from their translation into their indigenous languages, study in schools, adaptation and performances. Sol Plaatje’s *Diphoshophosho* (1930) and *Dintshontsho Tsa Bo-Juliuse Kesara* (1931), the Tswana/Zulu language translations of both *The Comedy of Errors* and *Julius Caesar* were the first set of such translations. But this early translations pale in popularity in comparison to Welcome Msomi’s 1970 adaptation entitled, *uMabatha*, a hugely commercially successful Zulu translation of *Macbeth*, which I engage as an Orisa-Shakespeare in this thesis; and Pieter-Dick Uys’s, *MacBeki: A Farcical To Be Reckoned With*, a recent adaptation of *Macbeth*, which uses farce, mimicry, humour and sarcasm to explore the ANC leadership’s internal crisis, including its broader socio-political implication for South Africa and its people. Uys does not hide the identity of the historical figures at the centre of the crisis, or his intention to ridicule them.

Shakespeare was also at the centre of a heated debate among scholars in South Africa during the early years of the development of Postcolonial theory, especially in

relation to Apartheid South Africa.¹⁴ It was a debate which tremendously aided Shakespeare reception in South Africa compared to the other parts of the African continent. In spite of the conflict of interest, the impact of Shakespeare is obvious as he remains an important part of South African life as much as he does in other parts of the African continent.

Unlike in Egypt where the Shakespeare canon (especially *Othello*) enjoyed tremendous patronage in the Arabian Peninsula, in South Africa where the premiere of his works and their subsequent reception have been tied to violence and brutality, East Africans embraced the canon seeking instead the inherent value in order to promote their indigenous languages. Julius Nyerere's Swahili translation of *Julius Kaisari/Julius Caesar* (1963) and *Mabepari wa Venisi/The Merchant of Venice* (1969) represent the kind of enthusiasm with which Shakespeare canon was received. Nyerere's translations are particularly important because of the popularity and debate they engendered. While Ali Mazrui sees an ideological leaning in these translations that were inspired as it were, "by [Nyerere's] shift towards *Ujamaa*" and a commitment to creative literature beyond the constraints of a certain sensibility and reaction of Africa against the West that was represented by Shakespeare (Mazrui 1996), Jane Plastow argues that Nyerere's translations were motivated by cultural legitimacy, "as a way of disarming detractors of Swahili language who said it could not be the vehicle of science and high culture, and who were opposed to its adoption as a national language" and more importantly with the aim to "assist the meteoric rise of Swahili to its status as a national literature today" (88). Elsewhere in that same region, the Ethiopian writer, Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin also translated into Amharic language both *Othello* and *Hamlet* in the 1980s; Sony Lab'ou Tansi translated *Romeo and Juliet* in 1990. There are other Kiswahili translations, *Mabruk/Macbeth* (1970) and *Mlariba/The Merchant of Venice* (1971) in Kenya; *Hadithi za Kiingereza/Tales from Shakespeare* (1940) in Tanzanian, and *Hadithi Ingereza*, a compilation of the translations of *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens*; S.S. Mushi's *Makbeth/Macbeth* (1968) and *Tufani/The Tempest* (1969) respectively.

¹⁴ For examples, Martin Orkin argues for the need to engage Shakespeare in ways that no longer subtly encourage a passive acceptance of the apartheid system but rather in ways that promote more active awareness of the possibility of alternatives to it" (1991:11), David Johnson maintains that Shakespeare symbolizes the colonial cultural capital and economic aggression by playing a "deeply compromised role in larger histories of imperial violence" (214).

The Mauritian playwright, Dev Virahsawmy has built on Nyerere's earlier example. Virahsawmy remains the most prolific translator and adapter of Shakespeare on the African continent at the moment, hence he deserves more attention here. The "transcreation" and/or "translation-adaptation", as he prefers to call them, are experiments that cross the "borders of culture, language, continents and genre and embrace a variety of texts and productions." In his most popular play till date, *Toufann*, subtitled "A Mauritian Fantasy" and based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Virahswamy demonstrates both his abiding interest in, and the intention to use, Shakespeare to "build bridges across cultures"; "across linguistic and geographical borders" and to "enhance the prestige of [his Morisien Kreol] language" (Wilkinson 109-13). He has worked consistently using his adaptations of Shakespeare to address a myriad of subjects in Mauritius.

At present, a list of Virahsawmy's adaptations of Shakespeare *Enn ta Senn dan Vid/Much Ado About Nothing*, 1995; *Zeneral Macbef/Macbeth*, 1981; *Sir Toby/Twelfth Night*, 1998; *Zil Sezar/Julius Caesar*, 1999; *Trazedji Macbess/Macbeth*, 1997. There are also *Dernie Vol (The Last Flight*, 2003), a translation-adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which a guilt-ridden, blind Antwann meets an aged Kleopatra (a sex worker in her past) at an airport; *Prezidan Otelò (President Othello*, 2003), portrays Othello as a homosexual President, Iago as the Prime Minister and Desdemona, Othello's closest friend, as Vice-Prime Minister. He replaces Othello's handkerchief with a book of poems by Khalid Gibran. In *Tabisman Lir (Lir's Estate*, 2003), translation of *King Lear*, he presents Kordelia as a victim of the HIV virus, banished from her father's estate. In *Dokter Hamlet (Doctor Hamlet*, 1996) his adaptation of *Hamlet*, he treats issues of marriage, abortion and euthanasia. In the play, Hamlet is the brother of Mrs Ermionn Kapilet (Hermione Capulet) and Ziliet (Juliet) is his niece; in *Ramdeo ek so Ziliet (Ramdeo and her Juliet*, 2012), another version of *Romeo and Juliet*, he uses an idea from *The Winter's Tale*, with the statues of Ramdeo, Ziliet and their baby returning to life (Beesoondial 98-9). As it is evident, key changes that Virahsawmy makes to Shakespeare's play are in the area of title, character and the thematic preoccupation.

Most of these translators also work strong political statements into their translations, even as they envisioned their works to be part of the efforts to promote their traditional languages. In achieving their aim, they use indigenous aesthetic

resources, draw inspiration from the flora and fauna of their environments, and deliberately insert some words from their indigenous languages into the translated texts without translating them. They use this style of narration to celebrate Shakespeare and move the works beyond mere translation into cultural re-creation at the same time (Banham and Jones 121-3). These authors also use the adaptive strategies to emphasize the possibility of transforming their indigenous languages into a globally accepted mode of communication, like the English language, while drawing from Shakespeare's authority.¹⁵

In Yorubaland of Nigeria however, Shakespeare reception does not focus on promoting the Yoruba language as a global means of communication but to specifically address the people's socio-political concerns. E. T. Johnson's translation of *Julius Caesar* (1930) is the first recorded Yoruba version of Shakespeare, whereas as far back as 1842 to 1882, a standard orthography had been established for the Yoruba language; Samuel Crowther an ex-slave and Yoruba man had compiled the *Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* (1843) and the *Yoruba Primer* (1849) which assisted greatly in subsequent publications of newspapers in Yoruba language (Olatunji 23-4). As it were, by the time Shakespeare arrived in Yorubaland, there was already in existence a flourishing oral tradition which would later support the written genre. As Barber also contends, "Yoruba literary culture is one of the few in Africa to be supported by an extensive, and sophisticated local critical scholarship in the same language as the literature itself" (357). At the moment, there are only five Nigerian adaptations of Shakespeare: Yerima's *Otaelo/Othello* (2002); Osofisan's *Wesoo, Hamlet!/Hamlet* (2012) and *Love's Unlike Lading/Love's Labour's Lost* (2012); Wale Ogunyemi's Yoruba/English bilingual adaptation, *A'are Akogun/Macbeth* (1968); and Tade Ipadeola's *Itan Oginintin/The Winter's Tale* (2012), performed by Renegade Theatre, Lagos, at the Globe to Globe Shakespeare Festival in the summer of 2012 in London. I will devote the rest of this chapter to discussing *A'are Akogun* and *Itan Oginintin* in order to highlight how they use some of the key traits that distinguish the Orisa-Shakespeare. These include the use of: 1) characters' names for dramatic

¹⁵The Sierra Leonean playwright, Thomas Decker, envisions his translation of *Julius Caesar* into Krio language in 1964 and *Udat Di Kiap Fit/As You Like It* much later, to perform similar functions. Decker hopes that his translation can prove that the Krio language is useful to discuss "the most serious things" and to make it possible for his people to "taste of the excellence of [Shakespeare] by seeing [some] of his popular plays staged in their own language" (qtd in Banham and Jones 134).

purposes, 2) archetypal characters drawn from the *Orisa*, 3) myth and ritual as narrative tool, and 4) music and *akanlo ede* (elevated language) respectively.

Ogunyemi is an ardent believer in Yoruba culture and its worldview. Reflecting his exposure to a wide variety of Yoruba rituals, ceremonies and masquerade performances, Ogunyemi's literary output is marked by "a penchant for plays with a ritual and ceremonial axis, even as they cut across historical, mythical and cultural boundaries." In *A'are Akogun*, Ogunyemi recreates Shakespeare "in the light of Yoruba aesthetics and metaphysics" (Adelugba 202-5), while hybridizing Yoruba and English in the dialogue.

A'are Akogun, subtitled "a Nigerian tragedy of the supernatural, based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*" illustrates Ogunyemi's abiding belief in the social relevance of myth and ritual. The play examines the violence associated with military coups in Nigeria and Africa and the civilian perpetration which encouraged military incursion into politics. At the time the play was written and performed in 1968 several countries in Africa had gained independence from colonial rule but this new-found freedom was quickly interrupted by military coups. Nigeria was embroiled in a civil war which started in 1967 and caused mainly by the disagreement in the rank and file of the military class, following two bloody military coups in which some members of the ruling civilian class were assassinated in 1966. Although Ogunyemi uses the play to condemn the "vaulting ambition" of the military class in Nigeria, it is also apparent that its theme is applicable to Africa's postcolonial era of civilian maladministration. He shows how the failure of civilian politics and the disillusionment which accompanied it, paved the way for military incursion into Nigeria/African politics.

The play centres on A'are Akogun and his wife, Olawumi (the Macbeths'), as they manipulate their way to power through the support of Osowole (Hecate) and the three witches. Jagun (Banquo), another military leader and the Oba's son, Daodu (Malcolm), watch with grave concern as A'are Akogun is praised for his valour in battle and elevated to the rank of Aare Ona Kakanfo (Field Marshall) by the old king (Oba). Shortly after his elevation A'are Akogun, with the support of his wife whom the witches have put under control through ritual manipulation, murders the Oba and takes the crown. Daodu flees the land pursued by Osowole, who is much more involved in the actions of this adaptation than in Shakespeare's play.

Ogunyemi uses character names to indicate key points of difference between his adaptation and Shakespeare's text. Each character's name suggests something important about their role and temperament in the play. For examples, he replaces Lady Macbeth with Olawumi (translated as "I desire affluence and power"), and Malcolm with Daodu (which literally means "successor") Daodu also replaces Banquo at the banquet scene, except that he is not killed. Hecate (goddess of witchcraft) is replaced by Osowole ("Oso" that is wizard, being the male equivalent of a witch in Yoruba culture), a powerful and supernatural being whose name translates as "Wizard enters the home" suggesting some kind of invasion. A'are Akogun is killed by Jagun and Daodu right after seeing the corpse of his wife being brought in by Osowole and the three witches. In addition, the scenes involving the supernatural characters take place against a background of Yoruba ritual and music.

Through the vehicle of myth and ritual, Ogunyemi transfers Shakespeare's play into a Yoruba environment that recognizes the role of the supernatural in the affairs of human beings. In the scene in *A'are Akogun* that replaces Shakespeare's Porter's scene, the three witches settle down to a game of *ayo*, an indigenous Yoruba form of indoor game similar to chess. The sound being made as the seeds of the *ayo* are dropped into the hollow on the rectangular-shaped board, represents the persistent loud knocking on the door, accompanied by an exchange between the witches. In another sense, the *ayo* board symbolizes the *Opon Ifa*, the witches represent the diviners who predict A'are Akogun's tragic future. The language of exchange here is also a mixture of proverbial riddles and *ayajo* (incantations):

Witch 1: knock, knock, knock. Wait!

Witch 2: knock, knock, knock. Speak on.

The mounds on your chest/ Are things of inheritance

Witch 1: knock, knock.

Tell me, has anyone seen a bird fly/ And he crashes into a tree?

Witch 2: knock, knock, knock.

A bird never flies and crashes into a tree. Never!

Witch 1: knock, knock.

That never happens where we are---in hell/But it happens daily
in the world/ When a drunkard drinks his senses with wine/ His
path becomes darkened/He dies, not knowing when he runs into
his doom...

Witch2: knock, knock.

We find satisfaction in human distress and sufferings/We eat
human livers with impunity. (qtd in Banham and Jones 125)

Ogunyemi also introduces a combination of music and choric dialogue, especially *ofò/ogede* that are peculiar features of Yoruba ritual and language, which he uses effectively to accentuate the presence of the supernatural. The murder scene is a good example in this regard. As A'are Akogun prepares to enter the chamber where the Oba sleeps and kill him, he is supported and urged on with choric chant rendered by Olawunmi and Awon Aje (the witches):

Olawunmi: *Ijo omode ba dari koruru Laa ruku ee wale.* (The
day a child plays with death, is the day her/his corpse is brought
home from the farm)

Awon Aje: *Paa!* (Kill him!)

Olawunmi: *Idojude laa hahun.* (The tortoise is discovered face
downward)

Awon Aje: *Paa!* (Kill him!)

Olawunmi: *Ifaya lale laa hegbin.* (The snail is found crawling
on the ground)

Awon Aje: *Paa!* (Kill him!)

Olawunmi: *Paa!* (Kill him!)

Awon Aje: *Paa!* (Kill him!) (qtd in Banham and Jones 127)

Ogunyemi's use of myth and ritual is significant for a number of reasons. Aside from demonstrating how a universal meaning of an already familiar Shakespeare text can co-exist alongside a specifically cultural translation, his choice also points at how ritual imagination and aesthetics can be deployed for political purposes (Banham and

Jones 135). Although it is presented through the Yoruba culture and its aesthetics, the play's operative mode of presentation also illustrates the dynamism of fusing foreign and local forms together.

Itan Oginintin also utilizes Yoruba myth and aesthetics effectively by re-imagining Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* as a drama involving some of the principal deities from the *Orisa* pantheon. It is written by Ayantade Ipadeola, a Yoruba traditional chief, award-winning poet, drummer and performance-artist. The classical Oyo Yoruba language used in the play is comparable to Shakespeare's Elizabethan English both in structure and syntax; and the play is unique in that it is the only Shakespeare adaptation that is entirely in the Yoruba language.

The play relocates the conflict between King Leontes of Sicilia and his childhood friend, King Polixenes of Bohemia to old Oyo and Ire, two ancient Yoruba communities, and transfers the conflict between King Leontes and King Polixenes, to the duel between Ogun and Sango, two of the principal *orisa* of the Yoruba pantheon. The two *orisa*, both of whom are also identified with Ire and Oyo in Yoruba mythology, symbolize the rivalry that has characterized Yoruba politics in general. Hence, the adaptation reinterprets Shakespeare from a specifically Yoruba historical and mythological context, which re-enacts the tensions at the time the play was set.

Itan Oginintin begins with the events Shakespeare places in the middle of Act Three. A boat transports the exhausted and hungry Antigonus and Oluola (Perdita) into Ire, Ogun (Polixenes)'s kingdom. This scene is immediately followed by a series of flashbacks to the discovery of baby Oluola by Darandaran (Old Shepherd), and her courtship with Ogun's son, Folawewo (Florizel). The story then shifts to Ogun's refusal to bless his son's union with Oluola. Angry and confused, Folawewo acts on Adeagbo (Camilla)'s advice and elopes with Oluola to Sango (Leontes)'s palace and kingdom in Oyo, which brings us to what seems to be the present. Not long afterwards, Ogun traces his son to Sango's palace, unknown to him at that time, to convince the angry lover to come home and not get married to a commoner's daughter. It was here that he meets Sango and their age-long feud is rekindled.

In another narrative sequence in the form of a flashback, Igba (Time) the storyteller, reveals to the audience that Sango's wife, Oya (Hermione), is the cause of the quarrel between the two hero-gods. Believing that Ogun had an affair with his

wife that resulted in the conception and birth of the “bastard” child (Oluola), Sango quarrelled with Ogun. He also ordered the child to be killed but the sentence was modified into banishment by Antigonus, and since kings are not allowed to see corpses according to Yoruba custom, there was no way Sango could have known that Oluola was not killed. Consequently, Oya became ill and soon “died” of grief, but she transported into the world of the ancestors, in line with her mythical personality as a member of the *Orisa* pantheon. At the end of the play, Adeagbo reveals the truth surrounding Oluola’s identity, the two hero-gods are reconciled, while Oya descends (wheeled in on a pedestal) to bless the union of Folawewo and her daughter before transiting back into the ancestral realm.

Itan Oginintin is told with a mixture of chant, poetry and music by a character, Igba, whose name also translates as “Time.” According to Adesola Adeyemi, by adopting this narrative technique, *Itan Oginintin* succeeds in “manipulating the story-telling culture of the Yoruba to relate it to the creativity of Shakespeare and to reintroduce Yoruba myths to the wider world” (58). In using the narrative technique, the linear sense of time is discarded. This non-linear, disjunctive narrative structure also reflects a Yoruba conception of time, in which the past is linked to the future through the present.

This sense of time is symbolized by Igba, who also represents the human life cycle. Igba exemplifies how Yoruba narrative collapses the boundaries of space and time and which, while “structured to entertain [it also] marries the pedigree of Shakespeare with the tradition of the Yoruba performance culture” (59). While Igba stands for time and its endless relevance to human conception of Self and existence, the identity of the Clown who replaces Autolycus in the play, is merged with that of *Esu*, who “travels in time” and stands for the past and the present that determine the future. Essentially, both Igba and *Esu* are ancient, yet modern; past and present at one and the same time, even as they both occupy a crucial place and boundary between the sublime Yoruba reality of the play’s universe.

The aspect of visual aesthetics attached to the *itan* is represented by the Yoruba mask, known as *Igunnuko*. On one hand, the *Igunnuko* illustrates the continued relationship between the people and the *Orisa*; the constant interaction between the dead, the living, and the unborn. The *Igunnuko* also embodies the combination of ritual, memory and visual aesthetics; tall, imposing and often

aesthetically-attired in many layers of clothing. It is associated with Sango in Yoruba mythology, hence its appearance in the last scene during Folawewo and Oluola's wedding in Sango's palace is in order. On the other hand, the *Igunnuko* illustrates Yoruba utilization of myth and history in their narrative and performance. Introduced as a masking cult into Yorubaland originally by Nupe immigrants, the *Igunnuko* performance was staged strictly as part of funeral rites of a deceased elder (Drewal 45), but it acquired other mundane roles as time progressed.

Another aesthetic element in the play is the metaphysical significance and/or symbolism of the settings, namely; Oyo and Ire respectively. Symbolism of this type, as Eliade reminds us, deals with the "reality that is strictly metaphysical [and] can be approached in no other way than through myths and symbols" (Eliade 136). The symbolism of place/setting through the replacement of Sicily and Bohemia with Ire and Oyo is also extended to characterization with Ogun and Sango both of whom are identified with the two Yoruba historical cities which are still in existence today. While the symbolism illustrates how Yoruba adaptations blend history, myth and rituals that serve as the people's mechanisms of knowing, the conflict between the two hero-gods also reflects the rivalry that characterizes Yoruba politics.

This aesthetic mechanism is also connected to Yoruba belief in death and immortality as demonstrated through the "death" and "resurrection" of Oya, who replaces Hermione. A blend of the "death" trope with Shakespeare's idea of restoring the statue of Hermione back to life in *The Winter's Tale*, is a clear demonstration of how Yoruba adaptations merge indigenous resources with foreign ones. It also shows the power and penetrating influence of Shakespeare on cultures with which he has made contact and how such cultures and the adapters' have been able to transform and use him to serve their own purposes. As Fischlin and Fortier argue, Shakespeare has "become a complex network of discursive, cultural, and historical practices, [that are] not all necessarily literary" (9). Prior to the opening of the Globe to Globe festival where *Itan Oginintin* was performed by the Wole Oguntokun-led Lagos-based Renegade Theatre, Julie Sanders observes that a number of keynotes of conventional British theatre would be joyously set aside and turned on their heads. This claim was clearly demonstrated during the play's performance. In her review, Sanders describes the performance as a refraction of the Shakespearean story of oracles and animated statues from a Yoruba cosmology through dance, drumming and song. She notes that

the highlight of the play is “the compelling experience of hearing Shakespeare delivered in [an]other language on a London stage” (“Blogging Shakespeare”). In his own review, Adeyemi explains that the adaptation “has several new twists that present a fresh interpretation of the relationship between these gods while also subverting the original context and content of Shakespeare’s play.” He contends that through its choice of setting and characterization, *Itan Oginintin* is “imbued with mythical and ritual aesthetic resources despite the apparent effort to engage its new reality through a Western theatrical convention” (52) that is represented by the ambience of the Globe theatre.

As distinctly Yoruba adaptations of Shakespeare, *A’are Akogun* and *Itan Oginintin* provide us with clear examples of ways in which the Orisa-Shakespeare operate. Although both plays rely on Shakespeare and make use of several aspects of his plays that they have adapted specifically in the area of characterization and storyline, they also differ from Shakespeare at the same time through recourse to Yoruba epistemological and aesthetic resources. Often as signalled by the choices of characters’ names, the characters in the Orisa-Shakespeare are a mixture of the fictional and mythical, and are essentially archetypal. Because characters of Yoruba narration are mere analogies for the human society, Yoruba Shakespeare adaptations are not compelled to use or involve characters with Shakespearean names even though they use his story. As Eghagha reminds us, “archetypal images do occur and re-occur [in Yoruba *itan*/theatre] yielding possibilities of explication, either in a narrow context or in the broad view of the collective human experience” (192). In *A’are Akogun* for example, while the Shakespeare characters are re-introduced, others like Osowole (re-imagined from Shakespeare’s Hecate) represents Yoruba belief in the spiritual/metaphysical influence over human beings; Aare Akogun represents historical figures, the military personality (dictator and civilian tyrant) whose rude entrance into Yoruba/African life in the 1960s continues to pose a serious challenge to politics and leadership on the continent. In *Itan Oginintin*, Shakespeare’s characters are re-imagined as mythical characters drawn from the Orisa pantheon, especially two of the “hot” *orisa* identified with brutality and violence, Ogun and Sango, as a reminder of the instability, violence and uncertainty of socio-political situations among the Yoruba of Nigeria and much of the rest of the African continent.

Both plays show that Yoruba adaptations of Shakespeare often utilize only the essential details of Shakespeare's storyline which they rework to suit their own purpose. As I have demonstrated, *Ifa* and *itan* provide adequate examples for these two Yoruba adaptations in this regard. *A'are Akogun* discards Banquo/murderers scene but retains the Banquet scene which it also reworks; recreates Macbeth's encounter with the witches by bringing them into Aare Akogun's house and getting Osowole (Hecate) more involved in the actions; retains some of Shakespeare's characters but also introduces new ones, and changes the nature of some completely, especially the Witches. *Itan Oginintin* also rearranges Shakespeare's storyline and chooses to start its own *itan* from where Shakespeare makes his own Act three; the entire story is presented as a series of flashbacks, adopting a cyclical rather than a linear plot structure, which is synonymous to Yoruba traditional oral narrative being told by a storyteller (Igba in this specific case).

Both plays also use Yoruba symbolism in their setting and objects. In the aspect of setting, Oyo and Ire in *Itan Oginintin* derives from the sense contained in *ile ogere* (Sacred earth) which stresses the ritual/spiritual properties of Nature and the connection between people and their environment. This sense of awareness about the environment results from the animist conception of the Yoruba universe; of a continued relationship between human being and the cosmic, which is represented by the earth. In the aspect of object, the palace in *A'are Akogun* is a sacred ground, while the murder of the Oba is the violation of that sacred entity in a strictly religious sense. Mask is the other symbolic object in both plays: *Igunnuko* in *Itan Oginintin* clearly shows the connection between humans and their ancestry; while masks are used in *A'are Akogun* to hide identity: Osowole uses a mask when he appears as the murderer, but retains his personality unmasked.

Both plays use drum language, chants and invocation as aesthetic embellishment that is reminiscent of the *Alarinjo*, the Yoruba travelling theatre. Music which serves as medium of conversation in Yoruba ritual is also used effectively in the two plays to create a sense of the mystical/supernatural. While *Itan Oginintin* uses a combination of *iwi* (*egungun* poetry), and *ewi* (poetry), *ijala* (hunters' chants) laced with *fújì* beats (Adeyemi 56-7), *A'are Akogun* is presented as a mixture of dialogue and music, in the form of Yoruba folk opera that "thrives on the cultural adjuncts of myth, legend, and the lore of the Yoruba community" in which aesthetics and message

are handled effectively through the use of consciously repeated cultural codes (Obafemi 34). In blending these oral/verbal and performative resources together with historical and mythical materials, the plays show that “Shakespeare is, here, now, always, what is currently being made of him” (Holderness xvi). Thus far, I have argued that although Orisa-Shakespeare often borrow from Shakespeare’s story and characters, they do not necessarily use his plot or repeat the themes of his works. What is also evident is that Yoruba theory and creative practice is integral to what could be described as Orisa-Shakespeare. This set of Shakespeare adaptations are based on, and influenced by, Yoruba worldview, aesthetic principles and politics. In so doing, they respond to their past and present realities while suggesting ideas to address future occurrences rather than challenging the Western culture that Shakespeare privileges.

In this chapter also, I have introduced the Yoruba, their belief, myth and ritual. I have traced the origin and development of Yoruba drama and theatre and then went ahead to develop a Yoruba theory of Shakespeare adaptation, which draws from the Yoruba epistemology and its aesthetic principles at the centre of which is *Ifa*, the body of esoteric knowledge. I emphasized the centrality of *itan* to *Ifa* and the development of the theory, and used its conception as story/narrative/history to provide a succinct information about Shakespeare reception and scholarship in Africa and Yorubaland which the Orisa-Shakespeare speaks to. I concluded by using the theory to examine *A’are Akogun* and *Itan Oginintin*, the Yoruba adaptations of *Macbeth* and *The Winter’s Tale* respectively, with particular emphasis on how they use Shakespeare to “make something new” and to address their “here and now.” In the next chapter of the thesis, I will explore the cultural and political contexts of the Orisa-Shakespeare which I have classified into “Home” (*Wesoo*, *Hamlet!*, *Otaelo*, *uMabatha*) and “Diaspora” (*A Tempest*, *Lear Ananci*, *Harlem Duet*) respectively, in order to show how Yoruba adaptations engage their society by using Shakespeare as their canvas.

CHAPTER TWO

Introduction: *Ogun vs Esu/Orunmila*: the Quest for an Alter/Native Tradition¹⁶

In this chapter, I aim to explore what the Orisa-Shakespeare mean in their cultural and political context by applying the framework of analysis that I developed in the previous chapter, and not to address what the texts are saying in relation to Shakespeare's texts that they have adapted, or drawn materials from. Earlier on, I classified the adaptations into "Home" (*Wesoo*, *Hamlet!*, *Otaelo* and *uMabatha*) and "Diaspora" (*A Tempest*, *Lear Ananci*, and *Harlem Duet*) for ease of reference. In the first group, I will engage *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!* and *Otaelo*; and in the other group, I will examine *Lear Ananci* and *Harlem Duet*. In each text, I will draw conclusions so that, together, they will represent different facets of the Orisa-Shakespeare.

The Orisa-Shakespeare in the "Home" group dramatize Nigeria's recurring socio-political failures. *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!* addresses the shenanigan of civilian rule, political/civil unrests and the absurdity of postcolonial tribal politics and economic policies in Nigeria; *Otaelo* addresses the violence associated with marginalization and ostracism. Although these adaptations focus specifically at each of the adapter's immediate society, the issues they engage cut across the African continent. Although these adaptations recognize Shakespeare's complicity with oppression because of his representation of "colonial and imperial imperatives" (Fischlin 5), they still use his works by adapting them to address the socio-political failures in their societies. In some specific ways, *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!* revives "Shakespeare" and his characters: Hamlet, Ophelia and Claudius as part of its characters and involves them in the Nigerian/African situation that it dramatizes. *Otaelo* also draws inspiration from *Titus Andronicus* and *The Merchant of Venice* and thus comes across as a kind of revenge tragedy. In *uMabatha*, the heavy presence of and reliance on Shakespeare is evident through the strong echoes of his play in spite of the adaptation's Zulu cultural milieu. These adaptations recognize how Shakespeare's works "teeter between their putative

¹⁶ I have borrowed the idea of "Alter/Native" from Aiyejina.

civilizing effects and their alien potentiality” (Fisclin 7), by investing them with new meanings, fashioned out as it were, from the template of Yoruba esoteric rituals, metaphysics and aesthetic principles.

The adapters utilize the attributes and political significations of the *Orisa* for this purpose. They combine *Orisa* attributes with those of historical political figures, to connect their remote mythical/historical past with recent political situations. The deployment of the attributes of the *Orisa* for a broader socio-political discourse stems from the Yoruba consciousness about the convergence of forces and energies that the *Orisa* pantheon represents. According to Soyinka, “when ritual archetypes acquire new aesthetic characteristics, we may expect the re-adjustments of the moral imperatives that brought them into existence, at the centre of [hu]man effort to reorder the universe” (25). In this case, the adapters of the Orisa-Shakespeare in the above group demonstrate a disposition towards *Ogun*, who exhibits two sides: the benevolent/positive and unpredictable/destructive attributes.

Ogun, according to Sandra Barnes, “conventionally presents two images: one is a terrifying spectre; a violent warrior, fully armed and laden with frightening charms and medicines to kill his foes. The other is society’s ideal male; a leader known for his sexual prowess, who nurtures, protects, and relentlessly pursues truth, equity, and justice” (2). In these set of Orisa-Shakespeare, we encounter protagonists that are invested with the *Ogun* attributes as described by Barnes. In *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!*, Leto is a Western-educated Yoruba prince, a bold and courageous young man of any woman’s dream; in *uMabatha*, Mabatha is a courageous and decorated soldier, while Otaelo is both a distinguished warrior and lover in *Otaelo*. Through these characters, the adaptations draw audience’s attention to the social menace of violence. As Barnes writes, *Ogun* “embodies a profound and compelling observation of human nature” especially in terms of its accommodating certain “strengths and weaknesses that are universal to the human condition” (3). In spite of the fine qualities that the protagonists of the Orisa-Shakespeare possess, like *Ogun*, they are also flawed.

In spite of *Ogun*’s mythological beginnings as the “saviour” of mankind after *Atunda*’s rebellious act of smashing *Orisa Nla* (Wholeness) into pieces and risking total annihilation (Soyinka 130-45; Adeeko 15-6), the deity has come to be identified with bloodshed, violence and vicious/destructive temperament. In one popular *ijala*

(the poetic genre devoted to the deity's veneration), *Ogun's* identification with violence is explicitly emphasized:

Where does one meet him?

One meets him in the place of battle:

One meets him in the place of wrangling;

One meets him in the place where torrents of blood

Fill with longing, as a cup of water does the thirsty (Idowu 89).

Moreover, most Yoruba words associated with military activities, violence and terror are either prefixed or suffixed with *Ogun*: as “ogun” is both the linguistic term for the god and battle, “‘ounogun’ (weapons), ‘ologun’ (brave warrior), ‘olori ogun’ (general of the army), ‘egbe omo ogun’ (army), ‘ohun elo ogun’ (arms), ‘opa ogun’ (war staff), ‘ija ogun’ (fight or battle), and ‘Balogun’ (war chief)” (Adu-Gyamfi 79). Of yet another significance is the adaptations’ demonstration of the Yoruba’s recognition that *Ogun* embodies creation and destruction which are “two aspects of a unity that cannot be broken into opposing parts.” By drawing attention to the deity’s destructive aspect however, the adaptations show clearly that *Ogun* is also “the recognition of human frailty and a metaphoric representation that people create the means to destroy themselves” (Barnes 17). Although what the adapters present is a gloomy picture of unwholesome tragedy, their real intention is the need for change. The works stress this alternative reality by drawing attention to the problems and ways in which they impact on the lives of the people.

The adapters of the Orisa-Shakespeare in the “Diaspora” group also recognize the significance of using the *Orisa* as a metaphor to understand the socio-political situation in their new environment. Soyinka mentions the “capability of the drama (or ritual) of the gods to travel as aesthetically and passionately as the gods themselves have, across the Atlantic” (7). The Orisa-Shakespeare in this group juxtapose the *Ogun* destructive reality of the “Home” Orisa-Shakespeare with the more useful *Esu/Orunmila* principle of “dialectic self-examination” by which genuine change can be effected through dialogue, understanding, self-criticism and purposeful leadership. While *Esu* represents the principle of free choice and revolution, *Orunmila* represents

wisdom that is distilled from chaos; harmony that is wrought from disjunction, and prophecy that replaces uncertainty.

According to Toyin Falola, *Esu* holds the Yoruba cosmic system together in partnership with *Orunmila*, the failure of which it would collapse. Across the Atlantic, *Esu* has become part of the transatlantic history, of the tension between relocation and history, “between the violence that led to the forced migrations of people and the long healing process of reconciliation with living in strange lands that later became new homelands”; *Esu* is the deity who assumes “the role of a signifier that is used to talk about memory, loss, suffering, remembering, resistance, merging of ideas with time and space, and of using the memory of the past to speak to the present” (3). In continuation of that service, of using the past to “speak to the present”, the “Diaspora” Orisa-Shakespeare use *Esu*, who plays more than a supporting role, along with Shakespeare, to engage issues dealing with “the trauma of relocation, the experience of creating a new identity, engagement with [despotic] power structures, and the reinvention of the older ideas” (21). The two groups of Orisa-Shakespeare demonstrate how adaptations take “a possibility and transmute it into new creative outcomes”; the “possibility” being Shakespeare, “transmuted” in order for him to function as part of a process of self-evaluation and criticism.

Femi Osofisan's *Wesoo, Hamlet!*

Myth, ritual, performance and the (un)becoming of history

“There’s matter in these sighs, these profound heavens/You must
translate/’Tis fit we understand them”

(Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 5.1.1-3)

“*E gba mii, kaa ma kan?*”

[Oh dear, what is this?]

(Osofisan 10).

Femi Osofisan is arguably the most distinguished Nigerian playwright after Soyinka. As Olu Obafemi observes, Osofisan is articulate in his use “of the subversive potential of the theatre to shape his audience’s perceptive awareness of the social revolution which they find inevitable in their country.” His dramatic techniques combine “traditional [Yoruba] theatre heritage and oral arts of Soyinka, and European dramatic models, most notably Brecht” (Obafemi 174-5). Osofisan approaches Yoruba myth and aesthetic tradition with a revisionist agenda. According to Dan Izevbaye, Osofisan uses Yoruba myth and ritual as a “form of narration which enables the dramatist to present two similar incidents simultaneously: one mythical or historical and therefore traditional, the other contemporary but idealized by the playwright’s political desire” (Izevbaye 9). This last statement captures what he does in *Wesoo, Hamlet!* (2012), his adaptation of *Hamlet*: how he uses Shakespeare and his own ideology in the play, to address Nigeria’s socio-political concerns.

Set in Ilaje-Ijebu, *Wesoo, Hamlet!* tells the story of Leto, who returns from England where he had gone to study, after receiving the news of his father, Oba Sayedero’s death. On getting home, Leto learns that his mother, Olori, has married his

father's brother and new king, Ayibi. With the help of Iyamode who summons the Ghost of his father from the *bara* (royal mausoleum), he learns how Ayibi killed his father with a poison over the disagreement they had regarding the establishment of a tobacco company in Ilaje-Ijebu, which the late king, Sayedero rejected because of his concern about the danger that tobacco poses to the community. This story from Sayedero's ghost transforms Leto's grief into rage, both towards his mother and towards his uncle, the new king. Acting upon the request of his father's ghost, he decides to pursue vengeance. Leto's obsession with vengeance discourages his girlfriend, Tundun, who has waited patiently for his return in order for them to consummate their love. In order to win his heart, Tundun decides to undertake some serious risks.

At this juncture, Osofisan introduces both Hamlet and Ophelia from Shakespeare's story, who warn the young couple, separately at first and together later on, to be mindful of how they approach the precarious situation at hand. They specifically advise Leto and Tundun to learn from their own mistakes: the tragedy that results from Hamlet's unquenchable thirst for vengeance against his uncle, Claudius, and Ophelia's obsession for Hamlet which drives her mad and into subsequent suicide. However, Leto and Tundun refuse to heed the advice of either their literary antecedents or close friends, who urge caution. Events take a dramatic turn when Tundun attempts to burn down the tobacco company but gets mortally injured in the process; Olori also goes into the *bara* to seek Sayedero's forgiveness after which she poisons herself and dies. These tragedies impel Leto to confront his uncle, Ayibi, who in turn orders Leto's arrest and detention, although Iyamode and Asipa later beg for his release by presenting Ayibi with two *aroko*, which contain messages that he could not overlook. For his part, Ayibi too is visited by his Shakespearean counterpart, Claudius who advises him to manipulate Leto by appointing him the Aremo (Crown Prince) which would amount to exile since the Aremo is not supposed to live in Ilaje-Ijebu. When this plan fails, Claudius also advises Ayibi to accept Leto's proposed mock-fight in the *bara*. A disguised Iyamode fights Leto instead of Ayibi, the fake weapons that they are meant to use are replaced with real knives, and although Leto sees through the deception, the play ends in essentially the same way as *Hamlet*, with all the principal characters dead.

The tobacco company which causes the conflict between Sayedero and Ayibi can be read as one of the ways Osofisan invites us to view the play as a commentary on contemporary Nigeria. Specifically, the continued violence in the Niger-Delta regions where oil exploration by the multinational companies, Shell Oil and Chevron, has destroyed many lives and properties. Sayedero argues that environmental pollution and health hazard such as cancer that will result from tobacco far outweighs its economic gains. In this sense, he decries the debilitating effects of slow violence on his people.

Slow violence, as Rob Nixon writes, is a kind of violence “that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing across a range of temporal scales” (2) resulting in, among other tragic conditions, the people’s “displacement without moving caused by environmental degradation, pollution and violence...in the name of development” (19). Despite huge earnings and wealth being made from crude oil that is extracted from the Niger-Delta, the people still live in pathetic conditions. The “slow violence” of oil exploration in the Niger-Delta shows the “impact of corrosive transnational forces, including petro-imperialism, and the mega-dam industry, out-sourced toxicity...and the militarization of commerce, forces that disproportionately jeopardize the livelihoods, prospects, and memory banks of the... poor” (5). In a moment of rage, Leto clearly articulates the impact of the situation on the society:

Leto: So much poverty, so much unhappiness still everywhere!
Not even my father has been able to purge his chiefs of
corruption and greed. And as for our people, see, too many
superstitions hold us down.

Tundun: Yes, you’ve said all this before.

Leto: The signs of rot are already there, already spreading! Look
at the misguided life our youths live, the rise of mindless
violence on our streets, our gradual loss of faith in
ourselves...Something has to be done! But what? We must feed
from fresh waters...but how?

Tundun: I don’t know... (57)

Wesoo, Hamlet!'s dramatization of the impact of the violence associated with oil exploration in Nigeria through the tobacco company also underscores how "transnationals in the extraction business...operate with maximum impunity" (117), with the support of successive Nigerian leadership. Instead of wealth and good condition of living, what obtains in the society are squalor, diseases and violence which destroy the masses. While oil-spillage remains one aspect of the danger to the lives of the people in the Niger-Delta, military action and violence constitutes the other. For more than twenty years, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) has been at the forefront of radical action against the Nigerian government. Its leaders, notably Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others, were executed by the military government of Nigeria in 1995 (Pilkington "Shell pays out..."). Undeterred, other radical groups, notably, the Movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), has resuscitated the fight against the Nigerian government. In the last one year, a break-away faction from MEND, the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), has destroyed several oil-pipelines and installations in the region, thereby compelling the Nigerian government to use force against them (Holodny "Africa's largest oil producer..."). While these recent activities underscore the point raised in *Wesoo, Hamlet!* about the senselessness of violence, they also raised the fact that societies that are unable to resolve their problems without violence run the risk of war and collapse.

As it should be clear by now, Osofisan utilizes one of the key aspects of Yoruba *itan* and adaptive strategy which is the blend of local and foreign elements in order to address social concerns: in this case, the use of both Shakespeare and Yoruba together. Although the title of the play, *Wesoo, Hamlet!*, shows that he pays homage to Shakespeare ("*Wesoo*", being an Ijebu-Yoruba word for "greetings"), he also departs from Shakespeare's play at the same time through the theme of his play. In order to indigenize Shakespeare's story and to show how he uses and differs from Shakespeare at the same time, Osofisan employs Yoruba ritual and its aesthetics, symbolized by the Masks, sent by *Orunmila* (the human vehicle of *Ifa*) to interact with each other and the people.

Osofisan brings "Shakespeare" and the other Masks into the fictive world of the play at the annual Dance of Ancestral Masks through expressive drumming and music, as "a swirling mass of dancing Masks, of different shapes and colours, all in an atmosphere of merriment" (8). Drums often convey paralinguistic information by

acting as non-verbal language. Yoruba ‘talking drum’ (*Iya Ilu/gangan*), as Balme rightly observes, “is capable of imitating the tonal patterns of the language and thus communicates iconically as well as symbolically subtle and differentiated messages” (215). When *orin* (music) as well as drumming accompanies masking in a ritual evocative and/or performative situation in the way *Wesoo, Hamlet!* uses it, we are presented with kinaesthetic signs and semiotic codes different from everyday language, but nonetheless expressive in their own rights. The mask-characters are ushered into the fictive world of the story with *orin* (music) and drumming as Yoruba Masks which are summoned “to reunite with their human offspring” (8), while the actions that follow the Messenger’s introduction quickly move forward as soon as the Masks have been “assigned” their tasks. At the same, the Masks embody some form of esoteric language that expresses the cosmic dimension of the Yoruba universe and its aesthetics.

As a visual aspect of Yoruba performance, mask(ing) conveys the essential symbol of ritual. Among the Ijebu from whom Osofisan (who is also Ijebu) draws inspiration for the mask-characters, *Agemo* is a mask ritual. The highlight of the mask performance is its ability to shrink in size at will, in a way that suggests that it occupies “the transitional state between life and death, as a representation of the visual suspension of death” (Balme 83). In his research on ritual performances in preliterate cultures, Turner also identifies what he calls the “betwixt-and-between” state, or what has come to be identified as his idea of liminality, a kind of “interim space or period outside of the bounds of normal social practice and structures” (qtd in Balme 77). In this specific case however, *Wesoo, Hamlet!* uses the Masks to show that “dying and living are different stations on the track that connects the humans to their ancestors” (Adeeko 14), and this task does not exclude Shakespeare.

Wesoo, Hamlet! clearly illustrates Shakespeare’s role both in the symbolism and the expressive language of the mask in the play. In the prologue, the Messenger (Narrator) mentions that Shakespeare is summoned by *Orunmila* to participate in a play that he once wrote and has become famous, “to participate again in its recurrence in Yorubaland” (8), not in his old self, but something much older, as a mask. Aside from representing a significant aspect of Yoruba adaptation strategy, of merging the foreign with the local, *Wesoo, Hamlet!*’s use of Shakespeare as a Yoruba mask, as a semiotic code of ritual expression, recalls Garber’s opinion that “Shakespeare’s

classic or transcendent status, and the increasing expansion of or dilation into the realm of politics and cultures...is a return with a difference” (32). The language that the play makes the masks speak, represents some part of the “difference” even as it constitutes an aspect of the play’s ritual imagination, as much as it brings a world that once appeared remote from contemporary experience with all its fixed rules for moral and social conduct closer to its new reception.

Although “Shakespeare” is addressed by the Messenger (as a mask) he does not speak. We do not see him again after this introduction except by implication through his characters: Hamlet, Ophelia and Claudius. The introduction of “Shakespeare” works on at least three levels as a narrative strategy: first, it links *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!* explicitly to *Hamlet* as the Messenger already informs us “The story that you [Shakespeare] once put into a play that has become famous” (8), even though we come to understand that the story is the same as *Hamlet* but the plot is not; second, it shows repetition in terms of the same story in different spatial and temporal reality; and third, it shows how *itan* is used to engage rupture in terms of the new play’s concern with social dislocation, which is a central concern in Yoruba drama/theatre as an art form, “concern[ed] with the achievement of socio-cosmic harmony” (Obafemi 17), as much as it is that of the Orisa-Shakespeare in their abiding concern with social balance and peace in a changing world.

As Edde Iji contends, the creation of characters in this way stresses “the potentialities of transforming myths to realities, of the reincarnation of mythology to materiality” (437), and the effectiveness of using the gods to address human affairs. The appearance of the Masks also suggests the interaction between the *Orisa* and human beings and the supposed deification of Shakespeare including his fictive characters as *orisa* within the universe of the play. Moreover, because Osofisan derives his creative impetus from “the regenerative dynamics of myths” (439), the adaptation subscribes to his vision of using myths to provide new meanings to old tales, in order for them “to function in a social rather than religious manner as a form of language, for social communication rather than ritual communion” (Izevbaye 10), even as they are used to address his society’s concerns.

The “old tales” here refers to two things. Firstly, it refers to Shakespeare’s story and characters, namely, Hamlet, Ophelia and Claudius. In this case, we have a

sense that *Hamlet* “provides a resonant cultural echo [of character and philosophical ideas] that seems to pre-exist any single experience of the play, and at the same time to be disseminated from it” (Garber 466). Secondly, it refers to the myth regarding the origin of Yoruba mask which both the *bara* (royal mausoleum) and, a character in the play, Iyamode, represent. According to the story, when the third monarch of the ancient Oyo/Yoruba Empire, Alaafin Sango, attempted to reinter the remains of his grandfather, Oranyan, he failed because Oranyan did not die, but turned into a stone obelisk, which still stands in Ile Ife today. Sango thus devised another means of honouring Oranyan. At a special ceremony, Oranyan’s re-incarnated spirit costumed as “masquerade” (then called ‘*baba*’ or father) was brought to the outskirts of Oyo where the *bara* was set up for his worship. Iyamode, the old woman of the palace, was placed in charge of the mystery. Sango looked upon this woman with reverence and prostrated before her each time he came to worship his “father’s” spirit (Adedeji 255).¹⁷ In *Wesoo, Hamlet!*, Osofisan recalls that aspect of Yoruba mythology: Iyamode is the one who summons the Masks from the *bara* where they all emerge. At Leto’s return to Ilaje-Ijebu, Hamlet and Ophelia tell him to meet with his father and that only Iyamode can facilitate the meeting:

Hamlet: In the *bara*, the royal burial house, where he lies with the other kings of the past. That’s where he’ll meet you.

Leto: But---the *bara*! It’s forbidden to go there.

Ophelia: Not if Iyamode allows it. As the keeper of the shrine, she alone can take you there. (21)

Osofisan also uses characterization to dramatize the fluidity of time that is characteristic of Yoruba poetics and philosophy. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Ifa* and *itan* are not typically preoccupied with the chronological sense of time: time is less important than the social relevance of the *itan*. In the adaptation, Osofisan links the sense of mythical time with the historical. He demonstrates this linkage through a sense of time that is dislocated through mythical characters (Masks) and another sense of time that is definite and historical through specificity of time to which he hopes his

¹⁷ Aside from the fact that this particular event accounts for the origin of *Egungun*/ancestral worship in Yorubaland, the act became entrenched in Yoruba rituals not so much because of the symbolic value that the effigy embodies, but more so because of Sango’s veneration of it. This is because, since it is recognized in Yoruba tradition that the king must not genuflect for anyone/anything, Sango’s prostration publicly conferred on the *Egungun*, a certain authority and sacredness that has remained today.

play could be related to. He states categorically in the “Note to the Director” that the play takes place in Yorubaland, Nigeria in the last half of the 20th century, with particular reference to the early 1950s (Osofisan vi). Secondly, the setting in Ijebu is strategic because the subjugation of what later became known as Nigeria by the British colonial government, began with Ijebu, whose territories had never been invaded. The fall of Ijebu coincided with the spate of civil wars among the Yoruba tribes and the collapse of the Yoruba Empire. The defeat of Ijebu made it clear that the other Yoruba territories were soon to experience a similar fate. Osofisan recalls the colonial encounter, both in his choice of setting and by “reviving” Shakespeare and his characters in his own adaptation.

Osofisan’s references to the 1950s also suggests that *Wesoo, Hamlet!* dramatizes the violence associated with Yoruba politics in the Western region of Nigeria that dated back to a decade earlier. At the centre of the conflict were two prominent Yoruba politicians: Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his lieutenant, Chief Ladoke Akintola. The conflict would have a far-reaching effect on both the Western region and the country, degenerating into violence, arson and bloodbath. Osofisan’s Sayedero represents Awolowo who was preferred by the Yoruba for his charisma and exemplary leadership qualities, his political party’s commitment to and success in providing the people with social amenities which ensured the far greater development of the region compared to other parts of the country. Ayibi represents Akintola who was tacitly supported by the Hausa/Fulani led government of Nigeria, while Awolowo languished in prison, the consequence of which was the escalation of violence that engulfed the Western region and Yorubaland (Abegunrin 334-52; Afolayan 297-315), and which has continued to characterize not only Yoruba but also Nigerian politics.

In a general sense, *Wesoo, Hamlet!* dramatizes the confrontation between “conscienceless power” represented by Ayibi, and “powerless conscience” represented by Leto. Ayibi, driven by greed and virulent pride, believes that people who challenge his thoughts and plans are “mere agitators, whom the Police can deal with if they dare raise their voice!” (27); while Leto driven by idealism, “to discover new tributaries, new outlets of renewal,” dream of creating a “new” society free from the rot and decay of corruption (57). With these two characters, the play dramatizes the eternal confrontation between agents of corruption and those of change; or more specifically, those who see change as corruption and those who see it as renewal of

some sort in the society; however, the play uses Shakespeare to address the need to be cautious, as Hamlet tells Leto that “the future does not have to be built on the crimes of the past” (49), although he also recognized the need for social change.

Because *Wesoo, Hamlet!* is essentially the tragedy of Leto, I will focus attention on this character in order to address the socio-cultural relevance of the play. Because of the sporadic deaths which occur at the end of the play, caused mainly by Leto’s action, I will look at the epistemic value of *opolo pipe* and *pele* in regard to his action and how it affects other characters in the play. In addition, a key cultural knowledge is emphasized here regarding Yoruba understanding about the repetitive cycle of events, considered to be the failure of an individual to apply *opolo pipe* (discerning thought) to tackle an issue. In such a circumstance, Yoruba understanding is that a problem is not really *a* problem, until it keeps happening over and again. “*Ina esisi kii jo’ni lee meji*” (One does not fall on the same spot twice), readily applies in such a circumstance where failure/tragedy of the past re-occurs over and again. Thus when the Messenger, in the prologue, informs us that *Orunmila* has sent “Shakespeare” and the other Masks to prevent a situation “brewing somewhere in Yorubaland, which echoes another one of many centuries ago” (8), it is to utilize one major functional kernel of *itan*, which is its use of the past to address the present. The essence is however located in the psycho-social imperative of *opolo pipe* which the people are expected to use in order to claim the thematic relevance of *itan*.

In this play, Leto fails in this regard especially when we also consider that he has Hamlet and Ophelia who represent that past to learn from. As I mentioned in the previous chapter while developing the Yoruba--Shakespeare theory, *Ifa* usually tells *itan* of past people and situations for those in the present to learn so that they can effectively tackle their own problems. Shakespeare’s characters, Hamlet and Ophelia, represent that past Leto should have learnt from. At their first meeting with him, Hamlet and Ophelia explain why they have returned from the past:

Leto: You said Orunmila sent you?

Ophelia: Yes. But don’t ask us why, we’ve forgotten.

Hamlet: Just as it was planned that we should.

Ophelia: All we know is that we can help you, if you let us.

Leto: I see. What was it you said again?

Hamlet: I said, it wounds, doesn't it? To return like that, with the intention of mourning your father. But only to discover that your mother has already married again!

Leto: I don't see how that is a business of yours.

Hamlet: But it is. Remember, we've gone through it all, before you (*Leto turns away*). At first, it's shock and disbelief that you feel. Then anger. And finally, a terrible sense of loss. (19-20)

Instead of taking advantage of his meeting with these two characters from the past, Leto concentrates on his task. His decision however proves fatal to him and people around him, especially his girlfriend, Tundun.

Leto reacts in contrast to his mother, Olori who demonstrates how to use *opolo pipe* by critically assessing situation and learning from other people's experience before acting. Although in some ways Olori is like Gertrude of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, she is also markedly different in this regard. She tells Leto how Sayedero doted on her to the extent that she failed to realize that nothing lasts forever. She tells Leto about his father's other wives, who had been "more calculating, less reckless and less foolish" and had saved some money for such an occasion as their husband's sudden demise. When Sayedero's relatives and other wives disrespect her after his death, she realizes that "not only does a dead man have no friends, but his widow(s) too inherit(s) nothing but a battle with parasites" (39), without any support.

However, having realized her mistake after her husband's death she promptly grabs the opportunity when Ayibi offers to marry her, if only "to have a shelter on [her] head, to keep [her] clothes on her back and to give [Leto] a home" (40). Olori reckons that as long as she remains the queen of Ilaje-Ijebu, she can move on with her life and position herself properly in order to save the throne for her son. She understands that even though Sayedero demonstrated *inurere* (goodwill) and *otito* (truth), he failed to make use of *opolo pipe* that is needed to fully utilize the other essential principles of living. She warns Leto not to behave like his father, Sayedero, who trusted his brother, Ayibi, so much that he never prepared in advance for betrayal and deceit. As Sayedero's ghost also tells Leto when they meet in the *bara*, "Hard to

believe...a man I lavished my love and affection on! Who knew all my secrets, shared my table, and entered my bedroom at any time of day or night! How could I have known he would betray me?" (26). It is apparent from this statement that Sayedero learns rather too late that there is a thin line between love and hate.

Leto's inability to use *opolo pipe* to confront the precarious situation that he meets on his return to Ilaje-Ijebu must be viewed from the "Pele" psyche point of view. In this specific case, the "*Pele ko ma baa ku*" (Be careful or be of good conduct, so that you do not die suddenly or get hurt or harmed) applies to Leto who dies, because he failed to weigh the risk involved in his decision to avenge his father's death, against his own ability to successfully accomplish the task. Instead of heeding his mother, Olori's advice to, "be careful about the politics here" (41), that is, in Ilaje-Ijebu, he blames her for not observing the "*Opo*" rite, the customary period of mourning after the death of a woman's husband, before getting married to Ayibi. Although Olori's marriage to Ayibi does not contravene "*Opo-sisu*" (the custom of leviration) which allows the younger brother of a deceased to marry his widow, the circumstance of Sayedero's death complicates the marriage, which means that if "*Opo-sisu*" allows Ayibi to marry Olori, there still remains the sacrilege and terrible violation of sacred rites and institution that Ayibi's crime constitutes.

Noticing that Leto's rage has blinded him to their advice, Hamlet and Ophelia try again to warn him:

Hamlet: Don't break yet, Leto. You're going to need all your courage soon.

Leto: What do you mean?

Ophelia: The worst is still to come. You are going to need a lot of compassion

Leto: Compassion?

Hamlet: Or anger. Whichever way you choose to play it. But your life will not be the same again after this. (21)

Leto's refusal to listen to Hamlet and Ophelia's advice also has its own cultural significance although the two Shakespearean characters mean well. In a Yoruba

community, family pride sometimes takes precedence over personal pride and/or even determines it. Leto's failure to address the circumstance of his father's death and the seeming betrayal and the "shame" brought on his father (family) name by his mother's marriage to the suspected murderer would be regarded as Leto's abject failure. "*Iku ya ju esin*" (Death is more honourable than disgrace) applies to Leto in this circumstance, and it could be interpreted in two ways: that Sayedero's death is not actually as tragic as the shame of giving birth to a son who cannot stand up for him; or that in spite of everything, Leto is after all a poor image of his father. Hence, although Hamlet wants to help, Leto will not listen to him because of the socio-cultural attitude surrounding the situation.

Leto's action should also be viewed in light of "*Pele ko ma baa ko ba ara yoku*" (Be careful so that you may not cause problem to others) in the way he literally drags Tundun into his own tragic self-immolation. Out of desperation, he tells her "Can you wait? Is your commitment strong enough?", while struggling to remove "the chains around [my] hands" (57-9), Tundun swears to stand by him, "Only say you're still mine, and I'll get you out of these chains, whatever it takes! I swear it to you!" (61). Inadvertently, Leto drags Tundun into the above "*Pele*" condition.

Tundun commits a similar error to Leto's by not learning from her own father's counsel and Ophelia's mistake. Although Tundun recalls a particular *itan* that her father told her about how some trees survive unfriendly season and weather by learning to bend to the force of the wind, she thinks her own resolve is stronger. She tells Ophelia, "I cannot be like my father, you see. I cannot bend like the reeds to survive" (44). When Ophelia advises her against ruining herself because of her love for Leto, Tundun misinterprets this message. She believes that Leto's reluctance to see her after his return to Ilaje-Ijebu is because of his mother's perceived infidelity. She wants to prove to him that she can be trusted. She also wants to be a part of his revenge mission. But, Ophelia considers Tundun's stand differently, with experience as her own guiding principle. She tells Tundun that "men have no kindness, they use us and dump us. But without them, we'll shrivel, and die" (44); in dealing with men, *opolo pipe* is necessary to strike a balance between devotion and sheer stupidity. When Ophelia asks, "You love Leto that much?" Tundun responds, "I can't help it" (44). Ophelia, feeling disappointed that Tundun does not want to learn from her own

failure, tells her, “You’re doomed, my friend. Like me” (44). Tundun’s failure (or is it refusal?) to grasp the significance of either Ophelia’s concerns or her father’s metaphors ultimately has grave consequences; in choosing feelings over wisdom, Tundun puts herself in harm’s way.

From the foregoing, the advice given to both Leto and Tundun by Hamlet, Ophelia and Olori to learn from their own experience, constitutes the *Ifa* notion of “*Ogbon die, were die*” (Much wisdom, little foolishness). When *Ifa* insists that “*Ogbon lo so ‘le aye ro*” that is, wisdom is the anchor which holds the world in place, the concern is for people to be mindful of their actions and approach things sensibly. This epistemological imperative is also captured in a Yoruba proverb, “*Af’ogbon ologbon sogbon ni kii je ka pe agba ni were*” that is, learning from other people’s mistake, is a sign of maturity and wisdom; it stresses the social value of taking advantage of other people’s experience and acting on them. In their failure to learn from other people’s experience and use *opolo pipe* to handle their problems, both Leto and Tundun show a serious lack in their character. This lack disqualifies them from being considered to be *omoluabi*.

Beyond exploring *opolo pipe* through Leto’s personal tragedy however, *Wesoo, Hamlet!* demonstrates the capacity of the Orisa-Shakespeare to engage society rather than challenge Shakespeare’s cultural capital. To this end, Leto’s tragedy can be viewed from at least three different perspectives: the destructive potential of violence; how the rich take advantage of the poor in the society; and the colonial factor in Yoruba/Nigerian tragedy respectively. *Wesoo, Hamlet!* articulates its condemnation of violence in many instances. In the scene where Asipa and Iyamode meet with Ayibi to plead on Leto’s behalf, Asipa tells Ayibi, “I’ve been to war Kabiyesi. It’s not a pleasant experience at all [even] to own a gun” (63). Asipa also wonders, using an apt proverb, that “if we destroy a fowl for crowing in daylight, what will we do to the dog that barks in the moonlight” (65), which underlines the undesirability of violence to address issues in the society. Elsewhere in the play, the Shakespeare characters are also used to underline the thematic concern regarding violence. Hamlet urges Leto to reconsider his mission to avenge his father and extend the streak of bloodshed in the process:

Hamlet: History doesn’t have to follow the same pattern.

Leto: You are asking me to abandon my father then?

Hamlet: No. He can also be rescued by your generosity.

Leto: But what are you saying! That I should turn my back on his murder?

Hamlet: I mean that restitution can come in other forms than that of vengeance....if there is a genuine repentance. (49)

In another scene, Hamlet and Ophelia confront Claudius who has been supporting Ayibi in creating tension and disorder in Ilaje-Ijebu. In this scene, the play highlights the need to change the course of history that has favoured violence and Shakespeare's role in the task of renewal:

Ophelia: I can't believe this! How vile! You mean, all these centuries, death has not changed you a bit!

Hamlet: What will you say, when we get back? How will you explain to Orunmila?

Claudius: He knows. He must know the anguish of living in perpetual blemish among the ancestors.

Ophelia: And that's why he gave us this chance to come back, isn't it? To allow us to redeem ourselves. But not by sowing further discord among our successors.

Hamlet: What shall we do? You know Orunmila will not intervene.

Ophelia: I've tried my best, I know. If only men would not insist on repeating our errors! (84)

The interaction between the Shakespearean characters who are "sent" by *Orunmila* (*Ifa*) to intervene and prevent the human repetitive cycle of violence that is depicted in the adaptation, represents aspects of Yoruba dramaturgy (especially *itan*) that dislocates timeframe but emphasizes social relevance.

Osofisan recognizes *Ifa's* significant role in society hence he adopts the *Esu/Orunmila* motif in place of the *Ogun* ideal which favours violent change.

Although Osofisan also recognizes how in Yoruba mythology, *Ogun* and his mythic drama “are placed at the centre of primordial expression of tragedy”; although *Ogun* rescued the Yoruba universe from perpetual chaos caused by *Atunda*’s daring act, the same *Ogun* destroys friends and foe alike under the influence of alcohol. With this adaptation, Osofisan argues that the *Ogun* ideal has lost its appeal and value in contemporary socio-political situation, “Isn’t there in fact, in that story of *Ogun*’s final misadventure in *Ire*, a signal omen for us, of the potential danger of the annihilation of an entire nation through the tyrant’s hubris?” (Osofisan 2001:129), whereas for society’s continued safety and existence, there is the need for an alternative tradition.

Osofisan finds that alternative tradition in the *Esu/Orunmila* combination which he adopts. He maintains that, “there is always a need to subject all categories and all relationships to the flame of constant questioning, constant revision; most especially the hierarchies of power, which are the most susceptible to sclerosis. Without such continual rituals of dissent, society will die in the embrace of terror” (141-2). In adopting the relationship between *Esu* and *Orunmila*, Osofisan emphasizes self-criticism and reflection that are useful for social engineering.

Because tragedy among the Yoruba is communal, Osofisan also subscribes to collective heroism by which people in a society come together to tackle their problems collectively instead of leaving them to the lone-hero, Leto as its best example in *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!* This is exactly what Hamlet also tells Leto that, “The world does not stand still. Nor can you...” (49). Osofisan considers the lone-hero as a representation of “the sacrificial agent in society’s recurrent ritual of regeneration” represented in Yoruba mythology by *Ogun*, as well as his dialectics regarding the use of violence to effect change in human society. He recognizes that, although when a society is thrown into crisis that is caused by an individual such as what Ayibi has done by killing a king who represents the soul of the community, a set of sacrifice either as symbolic ritual or act of cleansing is required to rectify the error. However, he argues that when power is vested in an individual, such an individual can become intoxicated and corrupted so much that s/he could “spread the poison of violence and corruption in the ventricles of public life” (129). In the play, Leto shows the tendency to become as tyrannical and brutal as Ayibi. It is glaring in this conversation between him and Hamlet:

Hamlet: Will you kill [Ayibi] now?

Leto: Hamlet, there's no doubt any more, he's the murderer!

Hamlet: You will kill him?

Leto: I must. Will you help me?

Hamlet: Me!

Leto: I've never killed before.

Hamlet: But must you?

Leto: My father---

Hamlet: Is dead. The obligations he's demanding, should they be stronger than those you owe the living?

Leto: That was your problem, wasn't it? Your cowardice?

Hamlet: Conscience sometimes looks like cowardice

Leto: You're trying to weaken my will, you my friend? (48-9)

Osofisan shows that in encouraging the lone-hero, society stands the risk of producing tyrants who would eventually destroy it.

In dramatizing Leto's tragedy, *Wesoo, Hamlet!* also shows how the rich destroy the poor in the society. Tundun falls in love with Leto despite the difference in their social status. As she recounts, "They said we're oil and water, and can never mix... But I did not listen. Because my heart was beating wildly every time I saw you. Fluttering foolishly like a butterfly every time I heard your voice, felt your touch. Poor me, all my fences fell down..." (56). Instead of giving her love, Leto wants her to join his crusade for vengeance which eventually becomes an enormous task for her. Although Tundun realizes the danger surrounding her relationship with Leto, she chooses to ignore it because of her emotional state of mind, as she confesses "It was you who came fishing in the muddy pond where I sat like a toad among my people, pulled me into strange waters, and gave me fins. Since that moment my life has been like a dream" (58), Ophelia do understands the danger in such a relationship having gone through similar experience in the past. She tells Leto:

Ophelia: Have you stopped to consider that she too, has her own right to happiness?

Leto: Happiness!

Ophelia: Plus the right to take it wherever she finds it? (20)

Lastly, *Wesoo, Hamlet!* also dramatizes the role being played by the West in the tragedy occurring in Nigeria and in most postcolonial nations. This is one of the value of the Orisa-Shakespeare in terms of engaging both individuals and systems which cause “society’s disequilibrium and mediating between the forces of attrition and life” (Awodiya 145). The tobacco company which causes the conflict between Sayedero and Ayibi is a good example in this regard.

Clearly, *Wesoo, Hamlet!* does not just dramatize the continued involvement of the West in the impoverishment of former colonies, it also alludes to the role Shakespeare plays in this situation. Shakespeare’s role in the violence in Nigeria and other African nations is dramatized through the interaction between Ayibi and Claudius in the play. Claudius is Ayibi’s advisor. He provides Ayibi with the plans to deal with Leto’s troubles, that instead of punishing Leto and making a hero out of him, Ayibi should make it appear that he intends to “re-channel his youthful energy to some useful work” (67). In this case, he should “Grant [Leto] amnesty, and watch everybody hail you for your kindness, your magnanimity. Then you announce that, out of love for his mother and your departed brother, you pronounce him your Aremo, and crown him. Then you send him away!” (69). Claudius also suggests to Ayibi the best ways to ensure continued flow of profit from the tobacco company that he established in Ilaje-Ijebu after Sayedero’s death. The following conversation between Ayibi and Claudius stresses how Shakespeare collaborates in the violence and underdevelopment of former colonies and my earlier argument that the rich often destroy the poor:

Oba Ayibi: Oh of course! I forget it was under you that those adventurers came here, tricked our people, and negotiated the treaties that turned us into slaves in our own homeland.

Claudius: Are you complaining? The tobacco company that’s keeping your cheeks fat and gleaming, Kabiyesi, what difference is there between that, and the slave ships we used to

send here? We take what we have to take, even if some people call that exploitation. And we pay those among you willing to co-operate!

Oba Ayibi: Oh come, you know it's different now! Now we make these sacrifices for progress!

Claudius: Sacrifices! Is that what you call your bank account in Switzerland! Those slave dealers of old, what else do you think they called the mirrors and beads and guns and whisky that we brought them? Yes, those second-hand shirts and waistcoats? Were they not items of civilisation", just like your tobacco factory!

Oba Ayibi: Be cynical if you wish.

Claudius: Not in the strategies of survival. In that, we are brothers. This Aremo solution was all invented by your predecessors, don't forget, to get rid of impatient sons!

Oba Ayibi: Well, I am glad they did. (69-70)

Apparently, Osofisan does not indict only Shakespeare (and former colonialists) in the tragedy and violence being experienced in former colonies, he also underlines how leaders of these poor countries collaborate with external forces to undermine their own people. While recent events underscore the point raised in *Wesoo, Hamlet!* about the senselessness of violence, they also underline the fact that societies that are unable to resolve their problems without resorting to violence run the risk of war and collapse.

In this section of the thesis, I examined *Wesoo, Hamlet!* as a commentary on the continued violence in Nigeria's socio-political life which dates back to more than a century ago. I emphasized how the play uses the combination of myth (represented by the masks) and history (represented by the conflict over the tobacco company which recalls the continued violence over oil-spillage and neglect in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria) to dramatize its society's "repetitive cycle of violence" and to call for an alternative perception. The masks are particularly useful to link the play's fictive characters and characters from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that it adapts. I also

emphasized how the play suggests that Shakespeare is himself one of the masks by which it aims to foreground the fact of using Shakespeare to create something new. As Awodiya observes, Osofisan's deployment of myth and history through the masks is to show how "characters can be made to depict life as a dialectical process, the eruption of the real into the fictive realm [and] as the symbols of the possibility of progressive change" (19), in the nature of the Orisa-Shakespeare which addresses its society's concerns.

Ahmed Yerima's *Otaelo*

Throes of symbolic presences and metaphoric absences

“O, who hath done this deed?/Nobody; I myself”

(Shakespeare, *Othello*, 5.2.124-5).

“*Onye ajulu ana ju onwe ya?*”

[When others reject or abandon you, do you also abandon yourself?]

--- Igbo proverb ---

This section of the thesis does two things: 1) examines how *Otaelo* dramatizes the violence associated with the *Osu* cultural practice in Igboland of south-east Nigeria, in relation to the belief in *chi/ori* versus human action that falls under the scope of *omoluabi*; 2) examines the play's political relevance to the ongoing agitation for the “Republic of Biafra” by the Igbo people in Nigeria. Although they are based in the south-eastern parts, the Igbos' original home is located on both the banks of *Orimili* called the “great river” and the River Niger, from which Nigeria got her name. They are one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria (the other two being the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani).

Otaelo draws materials from history and condemns what the Igbo call *Osu*. Although Yerima uses historical materials judging from the account of the origin of the *Osu* caste system at the centre of the *itan* that his play condemns, he entered the same history from the perspective of the brutalized and the marginalized. Yerima explains that, “The relationship between history and drama is one in which the playwright attempts through his play to offer explanation to a historical event even while forcing on the historical event her/his thematic preoccupation... history is an

integral part of the soul of the community” (Yerima 2003:61). In addition to serving as a direct critique of the ongoing *Osu* system, the play can be read retroactively as offering a powerful warning against the Igbo people’s present renewed agitation for the “Republic of Biafra” in Nigeria.

Biafra is the secessionist state created by the leadership of the Igbo people as a consequence of the 1966 military coups that claimed the lives of over three million Igbo people. Although separationist agitation in Nigeria dated back to 1914, Biafra is unique because it was the first major threat to the country’s existence (Ademoyega 1988; Tamuno 563-84). While there have been several separatist groups agitating for Biafra in the past, this present agitation is being powerfully pushed by members of the Igbo diaspora from outside of the country. This renewed call echoes the history of colonialism, but, rather than Igbo people at home being colonized by foreigners, it is their own people, the “the been-tos” and foreigners that are aspiring to do the job.¹⁸ Because the agitation for the resuscitation of Biafra already marred by violence (since the last ten years more than two thousand Igbo protesters have been killed by the police) is hinged on the Igbos’ perceived marginalization from mainstream politics in Nigeria--a central issue in the *Osu* that they also practice--*Otaelo* may also be considered Yerima’s own way of warning contemporary Igbos of horrendous violence that is likely to result from their demand. In the following paragraphs, I will introduce the *Osu* cultural system, and then go ahead to examine how *Otaelo* dramatizes the violence and brutality associated with the practice in relation to the perception that it is determined by *chi/ori* (fate/destiny) in relation to human action that falls under *omoluabi*.

The *Osu* cultural practice in Igboland, similar to the caste system in India, is a system of social stratification that is sanctioned by age-long tradition. It can be described as a precolonial cultural system of domination and oppression. *Osu* started as a form of religious devotion long before British colonization and survives today under several names, including *Adu-Ebo* in Nzam in Onitsha; in the Nsukka area it is referred to as *Oruma*, while in Agwu area, it is called *Nwani* or *Ohualusi* (Dike 2). At its earliest beginning, anyone could dedicate themselves as *osu* regardless of gender

¹⁸“Been-tos” is a term which describes Igbo people who have travelled abroad; a popular social perception is for these people to view those at home and who have not travelled abroad as “backward” while, in some cases, those at home actually see the former as “westernized” even if not “more enlightened” than they are; hence, it is easy for the former to manipulate the latter.

or clan/tribal affiliation within the larger Igbo society.¹⁹ By dedicating herself or himself to serve the gods of the land, the individual gained respect and certain social privileges, such as the status of a “priest” or “saint”.

However, these privileges, including immunity from prosecution or torture of any kind, exemption from tax payment and all forms of communal labour, came at a price: having become an *osu*, such an individual was automatically ostracised from the rest of the society. An *osu* no longer has friends, and can only marry other *osu*; they lived in isolation, except within their own very small and limited class. In spite of this cost, the protection and benefits accorded to the *osu* made it an attractive prospect to criminals, and especially perpetrators of those crimes that were regarded as the most heinous; namely, murder and incest. The abuse worked both ways: just as criminals were eager to afford themselves of protection from prosecution, Igbo society at large came to regard *Osu* as a means of purging criminal elements and remaining peaceful. Over time, *Osu* began to lose its value and even became dangerous and loathed because some began to take advantage of the gains it offered them rather than the motivation to serve the religious needs of the society (Idika 23-4). There were many ways of becoming an *osu*, which included devotion by choice, and the picking of *Nzu* leaves heaped in front of a shrine in order to avoid molestation or death after committing a grievous crime, among several others.

Yerima chose as the subject for *Otaelo* the form of “*Osu* becoming” in which a person can become an *osu* by crossing the inner sanctuary of a shrine as the subject for *Otaelo*. He then links it with the social reality of the *Osu* origin that is already marred by degeneration and abuse, and then uses Shakespeare (*Othello*) as a canvas to paint the violence that the *Osu* practice represents. In the back story to the play, the central character, Otaelo, becomes an *osu* when his mother runs into the shrine of the earth-god, *Ala*, for protection, after killing her husband in self-defence. In the first instance, she has committed murder, which is a crime punishable by death. Secondly, it is forbidden for a pregnant woman to enter into the shrine and/or the inner sanctuary of *Ala* under any circumstance. She is executed for the first crime after giving birth to Otaelo, who also becomes an *osu* on account of his mother’s second crime. As it is apparent, while criminals decided to become *osu* in order to escape punishment for

¹⁹ I use *osu* to refer to the individual, and *Osu* for the socio-cultural practice.

their crime in the early beginning of the *Osu* practice, Yerima's adaptation focuses on Otaelo, who is criminalized by the society with the tacit support of *Ala*, for an offence that he did not commit.

Although Yerima sets *Otaelo* in Igboland the Yoruba culture thoroughly permeates his outlook and craft, which makes it possible to examine the play as an Orisa-Shakespeare. Yerima admits that he learnt playwriting from Soyinka, a Yoruba man and, most of his (over forty) plays are set in Yoruba land, or address Yoruba issues, and/or utilise Yoruba culture and ritual. Yerima also acknowledges the profound influence of two other Yoruba teachers on his works: Prof Oyin Ogunba and Prof Oloruntimehin; at the time he wrote *Otaelo* in 2002, he was the Artistic Director of the National Troupe of Nigeria, founded originally by Hubert Ogunde, the doyen of Nigerian theatre and a Yoruba man.

The clear influence of Yoruba culture on *Otaelo* is underlined by Yerima's use of proverbs, some of which are of Yoruba origin. For examples, when a character in the play, Ekekwe, says, "When a clay effigy wants to shame itself, it demands to be put in the rain" and another character Obidigbo says "like a snail and its shell, we shall be where he is tonight" (17), the statements are both direct translations of the Yoruba proverbs, "*Sigidi fe sere ete, o ni ki won gbe ohun lodo lo we*" and "*Bi'igbin fa, ikarahun a te le*". Elsewhere when both characters also say, "If I promised that my masquerade will dance and then discover the floor is thorny it is no crime to change my mind" and "you leave leprous sickness and discuss pimples" (26), the statements are also modifications of the Yoruba proverbs, "*Ta ba l'eegun eni ma jo bi o de tun jo mo, akii mu ni si*" and "*E fi etee le, e npa lapalapa*." Moreover, even though the Igbo are a different tribal group from the Yoruba, their worldviews are quite similar. Because Yerima identifies with the Yoruba epistemic outlook, *Otaelo* contains explicit references to Yoruba cultural practice, hence the play can be interpreted through the lens of the Yoruba culture as an Orisa-Shakespeare that addresses its own realities.

Although Yerima introduces many cultural elements into *Otaelo*, the story is still familiar as Shakespeare's *Othello*. Like the real Igbo society, the setting of the play, Umuagu, boasts of a closely-knit family structure; it's also an environment of taboos, social ethics and conventions. Desdemona's handkerchief is also replaced

with a set of waistline beads, *jigida*, which is crucial to the tragedy that the play dramatizes. These cultural elements reflect the play's ritual environment---and the playwright's ritual imagination--- which is achieved through the merging of both the Igbo and Yoruba worldviews, including cosmology, naming and its spiritual/social implication, symbolism of object and place, archetypal characterization and language. These are elements which explicitly make it possible to read the play as an Orisa-Shakespeare.

Yerima openly acknowledges the role of Shakespeare in his attempt to address the failings in his society. In the "Author's Note" to the play, Yerima describes his adaptation as the fulfilment of a dream, an obsession with "the genius called William Shakespeare"; that he has re-interpreted Shakespeare's play, *Othello*, to his "own language, cultural reality, and human, social, and religious sensibility" (6). Elsewhere, Yerima also mentions how he has used Shakespeare "to make something new":

My adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Othello*, which I titled *Otaelo* is based only on Shakespeare's theme of jealousy and intrigue. The adaptation is based on the Igbo osu tradition, and the characters, names change, the situation changes, the sensibilities change, but the 'jigida' which is the new symbol of love which represents the handkerchief of Shakespeare's original play still serves as the destructive metaphor in the adaption. (Yerima 2003:124)

In my analysis, I will explore the cultural and political significance of those "changing situations and sensibilities," first by providing a concise explanation of Igbo cultural concepts and their Yoruba equivalents where necessary, and then using specific examples from the play to develop the arguments.

In Yerima's adaptation, *Otaelo* returns from battle as a hero into his village, Umuagu, having saved the life of the paramount ruler, Igwe, who promotes him in rank as a soldier and makes him head of Abaniekpo, the most important of the lands that they have just conquered. In appreciation both for saving his life and the exceptional conduct which made it possible for them to win the battle, Igwe decides to accord *Otaelo* respect: "I grant you life. I grant you a higher role than *Otaelo*" (16). *Otaelo* is thus presented with the prospect of marrying his secret lover and

Igwe's daughter, Princess Chinyere. Chinyere is less troubled by the social uproar caused by her decision to marry an *osu*, than she is about the threat from *Osimiri*, the river goddess whose offer of service she has turned down for marriage. As she tells her grandmother, Nene, "They said that *Osimiri* had chosen me for her priestess, and if I failed to accept her choice, I would either go mad or die [but] I want to have children like other women of my age" (11). Meanwhile, the most senior warrior, Agbo, feels both jealous and humiliated by the attention being given to Otaelo by the Igwe, "I killed more men than Otaelo. I am the head of the army, if anyone is to be made the Igwe of Abaniekpo, it should have been me" (29). Agbo's sentiment is based on Umuagu's belief that nobody becomes an *osu* unless it is the handiwork of their *chi* (fate/destiny). When he says, "An *Osu* is no man...but food for the gods. So I was brought up to know" (35), he refers to the epistemic knowledge of *Osu* being products of fate/destiny, rather than the cultural practice. "Brought up to know" being a certain cultural notion held by everyone which he uses to advance his own aims.

Agbo decides to destroy Otaelo under the pretext of saving tradition. In a conversation with another character, Ezeugo, Agbo insists that to accord Otaelo, the *osu*, any respect whatsoever is "the enthronement of abomination. The glorification of *Osu*, the death of agelong tradition"; and that he is challenging that seeming violation of tradition, "not for my sake, but for the sake of my people" (29-30). He devises a deadly plan to achieve his aim. He persuades his wife and Chinyere's friend, Obiageli to bring the princess's *jigida* (waistline bead), given to her by Otaelo after his return from battle as a sign of their undying love (36-7). Agbo collects the *jigida* from Obiageli, who thinks that he plans to give it to a stringer to produce a replica for her as he promised. Instead, Agbo gives the *jigida* to Ichiagu who had earlier been accused of cowardice and relieved of his duties by Otaelo. He advises Ichiagu to return the *jigida* to Chinyere who might be able to help her beg for Otaelo's forgiveness, "I think if you gave the *jigida* to her, it would melt and gladden her heart. You will then be able to curry back the favour of our great hero" (46). As soon as Ichiagu exits, he also informs Otaelo that he suspects Chinyere is having an affair with Ichiagu, and can prove it with the *jigida* in Ichiagu's possession. On hearing this news, Otaelo confronts Ichiagu, finds the *jigida* on him and kills him in anger (49). He also questions Chinyere who insists she is not having an affair with

Ichiagu but is unable to produce the *jigida* on demand. Unconvinced, Otaelo strangles her with the *jigida*. He realizes his error when Obiageli arrives to tell him that she was the one who took the *jigida* at Agbo's request. Otaelo turns on Agbo and kills him, then himself. The Igwe loses his mind, and Umuagu is thrown into confusion, silence and mourning.

Essentially, two things stand out from both the history of the *Osu* practice and Otaelo's marginalized position in the world of the play: 1) the status of *osu* can be the result of one's free choice (sincere or otherwise), or it can be imposed; 2) in either case it is irrevocable. Otaelo challenges this custom when he queries his adoptive father, Ebuka in the play, "What did I do wrong? Did I ask to be born by [my mother]? Does blood not flow in my veins? Do I not cry, laugh or feel the pangs of pain like anybody?" (34-5). Otaelo questions both the *Osu* cultural practice which takes advantage of the flawed justice system and the patriarchal sensibility of his society. *Otaelo* thus focuses on a character who challenges the physical, psychological and emotional violence of the *Osu* practice through a violent means. *Otaelo* has elements of plays that Victor Cahn describes as revenge tragedies that are "marked by sensationalist violence; with plot often focusing on a single figure who pursues a path of revenge that proves not only more destructive than the initial violence that provoked it, but also brings about the revenger's downfall" (5); Otaelo's revenge mission against his society ends in a spate of deaths including his own.

In the discussion below, I will address the following issues in the discussion of *Otaelo*: 1) the destructive potentials of the *Osu* practice, 2) the dichotomy between human action and *chi/ori* (fate/destiny), and the danger in society's perpetuation of marginalization. I will consider both the role of Shakespeare and the ritual connotation of the play in relation to each other. The ritual ambience of Umuagu must necessarily affect the way the play is interpreted. In order to avail ourselves of the knowledge of this cultural reality, we need to understand the Igbo universe. Like the Yoruba world, the Igbo world is conceived as both a duality (*orun* & *aye* [heaven & earth]) and a tripartite (world of the living; world of the dead, and world of the unborn). The sense of duality of the Igbo universe is captured by the proverbs, "*Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya*" that is, "Wherever Something stands, Something Else will stand by it; nothing is absolute"; and "*Ife belu n'oke ka dibia n'agwo*" which means, "The healer can cure only something within bounds" (Okafor 113-4). The Igbo world

equally accommodates a tripartite structure, an “integrated entity accommodating all levels: the dead, living and the unborn” (Uchendu 11-2). *Otaelo* makes effective use of this epistemological knowledge. Umuagu is ruled by an animist consciousness in which actions and objects are looked upon with an air of sacrality. Related to this, the names of the setting (Umuagu) and the central character, Otaelo, provide the background that help us to understand the unfolding tragedy.

Umuagu lives up to the expectations of its name. “*Oruko nro ni, apeja a maa roo yan*” that is, “names influence actions; so does an alias” clearly works well in the case of Umuagu, which means “Children of Lions.” We are told in the play how Umuagu conquers its neighbours in battlefield and expands its boundaries and territorial control (14-5). In living up to the expectations of its name however, Umuagu also violates the simplest, and most important, of the laws governing its existence: the male/female principle upon which a stable society is built. The principle of male and female essence is so important that it is reflected in the tradition of male-focused kindred unit, the *Umunna*, and *Umunne*, its female counterpart (Uwasomba 20). In Umuagu however, the male/female principle is replaced by patriarchal dominance. The community celebrates masculinity and success in life is measured in terms of bravery and honour won mainly at the battlefield. The same rule applies in private lives: men are privileged over women. In essentializing machismo as implied by both its judicial system and *Osu* cultural practice, Umuagu smothers the “womanist venture,” which is the female essence of the gender complementary, by which violence and chaos are balanced with order and harmony. According to Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi:

In that womanist venture, four principles, call them the four
C’s—conciliation, collaboration, consensus, and
complementarity between men and women—predominate...
Once this mutual endeavor cancels out obnoxious machismo by
factoring in respect to include men and women...The womanist
ideal can be realized, and we can tackle outside oppression
together. (126)

On a spiritual plane, we are also presented with a dominant patriarchal consciousness and outlook that are fully expressed in the relationship between the two most

important deities who govern Umuagu and the people; on one hand is an aggressive and vengeful god, *Ala* (the masculine manifestation of *Ani*, the earth goddess, in the larger Igbo society); on the other hand is a female deity, *Osimiri*, the river goddess.

Ala's presence pervades the world of Umuagu. The earth-god controls all human actions therein, dispenses justice at will though in favour of the men. As the story of Otaelo's mother shows, *Ala* does not sanction a husband (Otaelo's father) who brutalizes his wife but punishes the wife for fighting back, sentences her to death and condemns her child to a life of ostracism and shame---the life of an *osu*. In a nutshell, if indeed *Ala* is the earth-god and protector of the people, he acts totally in contrast to his name and role in both the case of Otaelo and his mother. On her own part, *Osimiri* enforces obedience, and demands devotion, with the threat of insanity and/or death. She also threatens only the female members of the society. As relayed by her spokesperson, Osimiri demands Chinyere's devotion as her priestess accompanied by a threat including a time limit to accept the request, "Chinyere...Osimiri wants you as her priestess. There is no escape from the gaze of Osimiri. Three days...that is all you have or else, Osimiri will avenge her shame of rejection" (12). As it were, in living up to its name both at the physical and spiritual levels and failing to avail itself of the potentials inherent in the female principle, Umuagu creates the enabling environment for tragedy.

Otaelo's name reflects the circumstances of his birth and especially the tragic story of his mother. In conversation with his adoptive father, Ebuka, Otaelo mentions his awareness of this fact about his life, "Oh old man unburden my heart with my mother's load of sin. I was not even born yet...it was her in order to run from the punishment of death, ran to the shrine of *Ala* for protection. There she became an *osu*..." (34). Otaelo's recognition of his mother's role in his own name reflects Igbo (and Yoruba) beliefs about a mother's influence on her child (ren)'s life right from birth, a spiritual connection with social implications. As Okonjo-Ogunyemi writes:

Women's power is predicated on the belief that, openly acknowledged or not, a feminine force determines the important phases of each individual's life. This gives rise to the worship of and dependence on the mother, the most loyal female that one can have. On the personal level, the relationship with the mother

extends into the concept of *Chi/Ori* [...]; the mother within---a treasure, always beautiful, always precious, always dependable, always already there. (35-6)²⁰

From this perspective, feminine strength derives from the connection between womanhood, motherhood and the female principle and the influence that these spiritual elements exert on an individual's destiny. In the play, Ebuka warns Otaelo not to forget "the mother within" more so at that time in Umuagu when he is being feted in spite of his *osu* status, "Caution my son. Or else you will slip lower than who and what you think you are" (34). He also uses familiar animal imagery that Otaelo understands to explain to him that, no matter his level of success, Umuagu does not seem to be ready to accept him or any other *osu* for that matter, hence, he (Otaelo) must not forget where he truly belongs, "A dog is still a dog, and a hyena, a hyena, even though their faces bear a semblance" (33). Otaelo fails to heed the old man's advice and, invoking Shakespeare's ostracized Jew, Shylock, from *The Merchant of Venice*, he asks Ebuka, "Does blood not flow in my veins? Do I not cry, laugh or feel the pangs of pain like anybody... Why must I lose everything? Why can I not just be a man?" (34-5). Although Otaelo acknowledges the "mother within," or more specifically, the "womanist venture," since at least this is suggested by the importance that he attaches to the *jigida* given to him by his mother (which is the material representation of that acknowledgement) as I will show later on, he rejects the *osu* status her action imposed on him, including its remotest connection to his *chi/ori* (fate/destiny).

Osu status in Umuagu, in other words, the "Osu becoming" is considered to be determined by *chi*. The Igbo proverb, "*Ofu nne n'amu, ma ofu chi adeke*" that is, "one mother gives birth, different *chi* creates" explains this aspect of the belief. As discussed while developing the Yoruba-Shakespeare theory that *Ori* ("head" in simple term) constitutes the spiritual aspect and essence of the human personality and fate/destiny for the Yoruba; its equivalent is *chi* in Igbo culture. Chinua Achebe explains that, "in a general way we may visualize a person's *chi* as his other identity in the spirit land; his/her spirit-being complementing the terrestrial human being"

²⁰ This spiritual relationship as well as its manifestation is fully demonstrated in the Yoruba rites of "*ikose w'aye*" and "*imori*" ("Stepping into the World" and "Knowing the Head") respectively, in which a child's connection to the mother is the most significant requirement during the divination process.

(93). In Igbo society, success in life is considered to be determined by what s/he has chosen before coming to the world, a choice that is presided over by *chi*, “the Igbo believe that a (wo)man receives her/his gifts or talents, her/his character, indeed her/his life generally before coming into the world...and that the *chi* presides over the bargain” (96). New-born children are named with similar expectation of the role that *chi* would play in the fulfilment of their destiny, as determined by social circumstance. Igbo names such as Chika (*chi* is supreme), Chibuzo (*chi* is in front/leads), Nebechi (Look to *chi*), Chinwubo (*chi* aids increase and prosperity), Chiebonam (May *chi* not accuse me) and Chikadibia (*chi* is greater than medicine), among several others explicate this belief (Achebe 97); the assumption of the role of *chi* in these aforementioned names also underscores the perception in Umuagu that Otaelo’s *osu* status is the result of his fate/destiny.

Chinyere is also explicitly connected to *chi* in this regard. As her name interprets, “God gave,” it is clear which “God” gave in the context of the play. But, in choosing Otaelo, it is apparent that her supposed fate/destiny is tied to Otaelo’s. By her own admission while discussing with her friend Obiageli, “If I were to swing on the pendulum of fate, I will swing into the longing arms of Otaelo,” Chinyere adds what turns out to be prophetic in her doomed relationship with Otaelo, “if [Otaelo] is to take a knife to my throat and slit it...the way I feel, I will dance to my death joyfully” (19-20). Considering also that the only “God” in Umuagu (as her name interprets) is *Ala*, and knowing that her father is acting against *Ala* by celebrating Otaelo who has also not only recently turned his back on *Ala* but slandered the deity, her decision to marry Otaelo also suggests that their fates are entwined.

The hatred that accompanies the construction of the *osu* as outcasts, and “the Other” in Umuagu, is vividly presented when Otaelo arrives with the Igwe’s army from the battlefield. The stage directions indicate that, while some of the warriors sit and others dance and drink, Otaelo is completely ignored, left out of the celebration of a victory that he played a very significant part in winning, “*Otaelo does not sit [but] watches, standing behind the throne*” (14-5). Elsewhere, I argue that this scene suggests that Otaelo appears not to exist, at least as far as the other characters onstage are concerned (Balogun 2014: 81-92) Otaelo is clearly presented as a character confined to the margin or periphery of existence in his own society by his *chi*.

The uproar among the elders and the community at large caused by the Igwe's plan to honour Otaelo is thus understandable. For a start, Agbo accuses the elders of complicity in destroying the land through their silence while the Igwe fetes Otaelo, "an osu runs wild in the land, you elders do nothing about it. The soldiers murmur, and the youths are restless. The elders must be careful in this matter" (29). But the elders are not actually in support of the Igwe's decision. The most senior elder in the land, Ezeugo, tells the Igwe in clear terms, "The land rejects your intended action, the people reject your intended action", while another elder, Obiajulu, states, "Let us call Otaelo, and tell him...go to your people, pick a girl, and the palace will pay the bride price. Even that gesture is an abomination," to which Ekekwe also adds firmly, "Let the osu return to his people" (26), whom, unfortunately, Otaelo himself has turned his back on after returning from battle.

It is clear that the Igwe's efforts to welcome Otaelo into the social circle by elevating him in rank and his decision to bless his (Otaelo)'s marriage to his daughter are not only kicked against openly but also decried as sacrilegious. Hence, failing to receive the elders' support, the Igwe invites the diviner, Okaramuo, to seek the gods' consent. However, he is handed an inflexible sanction by the gods should Otaelo's marriage to his daughter be contracted:

Both the osu and his wife must never set foot on the soil of
Umuagu again after they are married. No celebration must be
made, only the handmaidens of six must dance at the wedding.
No child from the marriage must be allowed to come to
Umuagu. Before they leave, [the Igwe] must kill a white goat to
cleans the land. And [he] must never set eyes on [his] daughter
again until the day of [his] death. (28)

Any aspiration by Otaelo beyond his limited boundaries is regarded as an attempt to overreach himself. Ebuka also expresses deep shock and disbelief over Otaelo's insistence to marry Chinyere in spite of both social reaction and the sanctions by the gods, "What are you doing here amongst vultures waiting for you to fall...they treat you like a leper and yet call you a king?" (33). Indifferent, Otaelo insists on the marriage, "But can't I aspire, protected still by Ala, the great earth god, to become somebody else?" (34). When Ebuka tells him that *Ala* has already defined where he

(Otaelo) belongs, “Come to us your people”, Otaelo is infuriated, boasts of his prowess and slights *Ala* in the process, “I said yes and my chi bellowed in agreement. I am greater than *Ala*. I am greater than all men. Through my bravery I turn my black blood red...I hold my *chi* in my hands, and not even *Ala* can stop me now” (33-5). As his adoptive father and under whose care he grew up, Ebuka is troubled by the young man’s insistence on pursuing an agenda that seems to lead down the path of destruction, “Otaelo, I feel your hurt, but come with me, before the earth swallows you” (35). Ebuka’s concern is based on his thorough understanding of Umuagu’s rigid attitude toward the *osu* who are believed to have been confined to the life of misery and ostracism by fate/destiny.

Otaelo hopes to overcome his marginalized position in Umuagu. When Chinyere arrives at the scene shortly after the old man’s exit, he reiterates the fact, “I ponder at the turn of my luck. How well the gods smile on me. How well does an *osu*...” (36). The lovers renew their pledge of love to each other and seal it with an oath, after which Otaelo gives her a set of beads, *jigida*, which was the only specific object that his mother left him (36-7). Unknown to him however, Chinyere’s arrival marks a turning point in what he earlier thought to be positive change in his life; rather than being the object of love as intended, the *jigida* becomes a tool of destruction.

The importance that Otaelo attaches to the *jigida* brings us to the use of symbolism in *Otaelo*. As I mentioned earlier, a consciousness of sacrality is attached to certain objects in the play. For us to understand the cultural value of the *jigida* and why it is so important that Otaelo destroys three lives including his own because of it, we need to first examine the importance of the Igwe’s *ofor* (staff of office), which operates as a symbol linking the ancestors (*Ala* specifically) through the Igwe to Otaelo, and the *jigida* at the end.

Although *Otaelo* doesn’t draw much attention to it, the *ofor* symbolizes authority, manliness and strength. It is one of the three instruments that define a king’s physical and spiritual essence; the others are the crown and the royal stool/throne. Also called *opa ase* by the Yoruba, pronouncements made with the *ofor* corresponds to divine injunction. But the Igwe’s use of his *ofor* to make a proclamation elevating the status of an *osu* amounts to a misappropriation of that

authority, at least according to the elders who are present at the scene. They describe the Igwe's action as some sort of insanity, or "madness in the air" (17); to them it represents a sign of the disconnection between the Igwe and his ancestors. In using his *oforto* to elevate the *osu*, in defiance of tradition, the Igwe's life becomes tied to the *osu*.

Similarly, the cultural expectations embedded in the *jigida* are inverted as the action progresses. Although it is a common practice for lovers to exchange gifts as signs of love, a ritual dimension is added to the *jigida* through the blood-oath which accompanies its exchange, in which it acquires a new meaning based on the *imule* (oath). Among the Yoruba, *imule* (oath) is a ritual act which involves a binding spiritual accord with severe consequences for whoever violates it. This is because the exchange is accompanied by another cultural element called *gbolohun*, or tone of finality and metaphysical correspondence. While giving Chinyere the *jigida* as a sign of love, Otaelo's tone carries with it the entirety of the expectation of what it should serve, including a certain correspondence to finality, which she also affirms by her own utterance:

Otaelo: *Now I have you in me, and me in you. By our blood now mixed, I shall never love another. I shall never leave you.*

Chinyere: *By the gods this blood like mine, tastes so sweet and real with the ingredients of love. To this oath, I give my life. (36; emphasis added)*

Otaelo, in putting the *jigida* round her waist which is both her region of sexual union with a man and the passage of life for a new child, proclaims the intention of being in her, and she in him. With that oath, they seal the vow that intertwines their lives and fate/*chi*--- a fact that she ironically alludes to earlier while telling her friend, Obiageli, how much she loves him, "if I were to swing on the pendulum of fate, I will swing into the arms of Otaelo" (20). In her own words after the oath, "To this oath, I give my life"; and in his own words, her love is "more than life. For in you I have the freedom of heart. Not because you are a princess, but because, you control the air that I breathe" (36), they both confirm the potency of the *imule* (oath) by sealing it with their lives.

While oaths are frequently made and broken, this particular *imule* (oath) is unique in many ways. Not only because of the blood exchange that strengthens it beyond any casual attempt to revoke later on but more so because of the involvement of *Ogun* whose weapon, a razor, is used to pierce the lovers' skin. In "inviting" *Ogun* to sanctify the act as it were, a deadly imperative is added to the bargain. While certain forms of *imule* can be revoked if the parties involved decide it is necessary to do so, the invoking of *Ogun* makes this particular nullification process impossible: even if they can revoke words spoken it is impossible to recall blood already mixed. As Barnes explains:

Ogun...stands for humans' collective attempts to govern, not what is out of control in nature, but what is out of control in culture. He represents not so much what is inexplicable, unseen, or unknown, as what is known but not under control...a symbolic recognition of human limitations---human frailty. (17)

The involvement of not only *Ogun* but *Ala*, who represents *ile ogere*, "earth force" upon which the lovers' make their oath, also makes it effectively impossible to nullify the *imule*. Like its female counterpart, *Ani*, in the larger Igbo society, *Ala* retains his duties of supervising the moral codes and laws which govern both public and private conduct in *Otaelo*, yet in this play, *Ala* does not represent moral rectitude so much as revenge. *Ala* is complicit in the flawed justice handed Otaelo's mother over the death of her husband, and has also punished her for running into his inner sanctuary, thereby leading to Otaelo's *osu* status. Besides, Otaelo has had a bad history with *Ala*, beginning with the condition of his birth, not to mention his insulting retort to Ebuka, "Caution, son. You anger the god, Ala, and he retaliates"; Otaelo responds, "Let him. Retaliates! Which god? I am greater than the god, Ala" (34). It is highly unlikely that *Ala* would help the couple to revoke the oath.

Another dangerous dimension to the oath is the reason why the lovers took it in the first place. While Chinyere uses the oath to assure herself of Otaelo's protection and to bolster her confidence towards *Osimiri*, who threatens her with death or insanity for refusing to serve as her priestess, Otaelo needs the oath to assure himself of Chinyere's love and loyalty, and to convince himself that he is a human being after all and thus capable of loving and being loved, considering Agbo's remark that "the

Osu is worse than the lowest animals” (38). Given that a gift remains what it is—a gift, so long as the giver and receiver both understand the basis upon which such a gift exchanged hands in the first place--- the same cannot be said of this particular gift of love, or the intention behind its exchange by both lovers. In light of the fact that the *jigida* was a gift from Otaelo’s mother whose trust was betrayed by his father, Chinyere’s inability to produce the *jigida* on demand later in the play leads to his distrust of her action and unthinkable tragedy

We should also keep in mind that Otaelo initiated the idea of the oath for a special reason: “to put my wild heart at rest” (36). With this statement, Otaelo admits that he recognizes his own irascible nature, which he later demonstrates when, in jealousy, he kills his most loyal and trustworthy lieutenant, Ichiagu. His statement also suggests his recognition of the failings of his father; the brutality of lust and power that best describes how his father treated his mother---a failing that he hopes not to repeat. In this sense, the *jigida* becomes a ritual material that draws attention to both the failure of the past and the hope of the future. Unfortunately, Otaelo is unable to reconcile the fact that the *jigida* he gave Chinyere in secret has found its way into Ichiagu’s hand; the only plausible explanation being her infidelity, which is exactly what Agbo wants him to believe:

Otaelo: The beads, my loving wife, the beads, where are they?

Chinyere: (*Tearful*) Gone. Someone stole them.

Otaelo: (*Gives a wild laugh*) Gone? To where? A *jigida* remains where your husband puts them, and by the gods they do not move or leave the waist unless another [hand] removes them. (54)

It is logical to view Otaelo’s rash reaction to the issue of the *jigida* as the result of his mental and psychological destruction by his society. Even though he claims to trust Chinyere while putting the *jigida* round her waist, “Now I have you in me, and me in you...I shall never leave you and I shall never doubt you. Ala is our witness” (36), the way he handles the accusation of infidelity clearly shows that he doesn’t. In the conversation below where he openly accuses Chinyere of infidelity, we see a man whose present action is being influenced by the past:

Otaelo: Woman you play games with me?

Chinyere: Games? With you?

Otaelo: Yes with me. For you saw that I was an Osu when you confessed your love, now afraid that you and I must leave Umuagu and never return, you begin to cringe at the thought of my person.

Chinyere: Otaelo, why do you say all these things? I love you.

Otaelo: Child, you do not even know the meaning of the word. This is not the prittle and prattle of the princess and her playmates at play. This is life.

Chinyere: Then teach me. Otaelo teach me. By the gods, I swear.

Otaelo: Leave the gods out of this for you anger me more, and my blood boils when you turn the gods to playthings.

Chinyere: Let it boil, because up till now you accuse me of nothing. (52-3)

Ostracism makes Otaelo paranoid and on the alert for the prospect of betrayal; unfortunately, it is the paranoia that destroys him. Chinyere senses that the situation is bad when he confronts her and she tries to avoid making it worse:

Chinyere: Your eyes are filled with fire, and they scare me.

Otaelo: Then let me put out the embers that make my eyes burn. Don't push me, for in putting out the light in my eyes, I may snuff out the light of my heart.

Chinyere: (*Confused*): Your anger overboils. I think it is best that I avoid trouble and sleep in my mother's room tonight. (53)

But Otaelo refuses to hear her side of the story. Chinyere tries to convince him of her innocence by drawing attention to the oath, "That I love you, and took an oath to love you to death is not enough?", but Otaelo is far too angry to reason with her. Instead, he considers her plea as a childish ploy, "a game, a childish game to make the fool happy" for he thinks her supposed infidelity not only, "debases him" but also "makes

the gods fools along with him” (54). In a moment of virulent anger, he strangles her to death with the *jigida*, only to learn from Obiageli who arrives at the scene shortly afterward, that it was Agbo who orchestrated the whole troubling scenario.

When the Igwe arrives at the scene with Agbo and finds his daughter’s body on the ground, his first impulse is to turn to Agbo, “As you said it Ogbuefi Agbo the animal has done it” which confirms Obiageli’s claim that Agbo orchestrated the whole plan. When the Igwe also turns to Otaelo and cries, “Why have you decided to pay my good deeds with pain? My only child lies dead because of a set of beads” (55-6), Otaelo becomes aware of a number of significant facts: the extent of the hatred that Agbo, who personifies the society, has towards him; that the *osu* is condemned to a life of ostracism by his *chi*; that whoever supports the *osu*’s attempt to transit from that marginal position to the mainstream (the Igwe in this case) violates sacred tradition; the depth of love that the Igwe had for him despite the social attitude towards him and the *osu* class, at the risk of his own happiness and position. But this realization comes rather too late. In order to save himself a long period of trial that would eventually end in his execution, Otaelo decides to end his life, but also take Agbo along with him. He stabs Agbo in the back with his dagger while screaming in anger, “Now die by the hands of me whom you hate so much. As I spill your blood, our shame is complete, for there is no way they will tell your story without a mention of how an untouchable put you to death. In hating me, our lives have become entwined” (56). In the end, it is not only Otaelo the *osu* who dies, but also Princess Chinyere and Agbo, while Umuagu is also thrown into misery and melancholy.

Thus far, I have discussed the destructive potentials of the *Osu* practice. In this discussion, I examined its ritual connotation in relation to the dichotomy between human action and *chi/ori* (fate/destiny) which the people of Umuagu believe to be responsible for the *Osu* practice, the role of *Ala* in its perpetuation, and the *jigida* factor in the tragedy that accompanied the social reaction of the characters towards the *Osu* practice and the society. While the *Osu* practice and those classified as *osu* are considered unfortunate victims of fate/destiny in Umuagu, it is also necessary for us to examine some other aspects of the play which suggest that such a claim is not entirely true. In order for us to do this, we shall look at how Yerima uses archetypal characterization and language to present the tragedy that the play dramatizes and the alternative perspective represented by *omoluabi* in relation to *chi*.

Otaelo brings all the major characters together in the last scene in a strategic way. *Ogun*'s overriding attribute of violent destruction is at the centre of the relationship that we have among these characters. In the characters' dealings, they demonstrate *Ogun*'s metaphor for human beings unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the opposites that govern their lives.

Otaelo embodies *Ogun*'s dual personality. While one side of him suggests a universal character trait, the other side functions specifically within the context of Yoruba mythology. From the perspective of the former, *Otaelo/Ogun* is an "everyman" of some sort whose struggles and suffering are a reflection of the suffering by some people, within the purview of an endemic practice of human violation. From the perspective of Yoruba mythology however, *Otaelo* is the archetypal *Ogun*, the "suffering deity" (Soyinka 145) and the "essence of anguish" (150); and the overriding attribute of the deity that he displays is the destructive aspect, in response to his ostracism and marginalization in Umuagu through the *Osù* practice.

In many of the stories drawn from the Yoruba mythology about *Ogun*, one which stands out and clearly connects with *Otaelo*'s life is the deity's withdrawal into solitude and eternal isolation in remorse for killing his people under the influence of alcohol, while the same story claims he actually committed suicide (Barnes 17). In reverse, *Otaelo* comes out of ostracism imposed by society, attains renown and fame through military prowess like *Ogun* and, at the height of his fame, he commits suicide like the deity. In another of his numerous *ijala* (praise poetry of *Ogun*), the deity is hailed by the Yoruba as "Him, of Seven Paths, who to right a wrong, emptied reservoirs of blood in heaven" (Soyinka 1976b:22). The world created in *Otaelo* is torn apart by *Otaelo* who, although not drunk as *Ogun* but jealous and deceived, unleashes violence on his society in the attempt to correct the error of his birth (especially the circumstance that defines his *osu* status), and the shame that accompanies the denigration of his person and the other *osu* like him.

From the foregoing, at least two things stand out from *Otaelo*'s story: Umuagu's creation of the enabling environment for tragedy and his own failure to live a life that could make him qualify as an *omoluabi* (the principle of good character), judging from his relationship with Ichiagu and Chinyere. In looking at

Otaelo from these two perspectives, it will become clear that his initial denigration as an *osu*, and the subsequent tragedy that results from his effort to change that situation, have nothing to do with *chi*/fate. Considering that Chinyere whose name explicitly shows a connection to *chi* is not ostracised or condemned, it is clear that Otaelo's parent's social status actually determined the type of social reaction that led to his own ostracism as an *osu* in Umuagu. It is also the same social status that Agbo, acting under the pretext of safeguarding culture and tradition, tries to maintain. At least this point is clear when he insists that he deserves more recognition and accolades than Otaelo.

Umuagu neither recognizes respect and human dignity nor mutual sympathy as the guiding principle of human conduct within its borders, as the *Osu* practice clearly shows. Hence, Umuagu can neither claim to be an environment where sanity and order are celebrated virtues, nor can its failures be ascribed to *chi*/fate, just as Otaelo's tragedy cannot be ascribed to the inescapable force of destiny. In this case, Otaelo's tragedy must be examined from two perspectives: society and his own personal failure as an *omoluabi*.

The first point can be explained from the perspective of an *olori buruku* (ill-fated person) who gets destroyed by society (*aye*) where he is badly nurtured. According to the Yoruba, as I suppose in other parts of the world, the society plays a very crucial role in moulding the *iwa* (character) of an individual, failure of which the same society can neither exonerate itself, nor be protected from the possible adversity that may arise from that individual's misdemeanour. As Sophie Oluwole reminds us, an *omoluabi* would be:

<i>Omo-ti o ni'wa bi</i>	A person who behaves like...
<i>Eni ti a ko</i>	Someone properly nurtured,
<i>Ti o si gba eko</i>	And who behaves accordingly (Oluwole 2007:13).

From another perspective through which society is culpable in Otaelo's failure to behave in tandem with acceptable standard of social behaviour, we should consider the type of model that his parents are. The Yoruba expressions, "*Iya ni Tisha*" (Mother is the first teacher) and "*Baba la'wo ko se*" (Father is the ideal role model), are nullified by his parents' history of violence and brutality, which determined the

circumstance and nature of Otaelo's birth and subsequent classification/ostracism as an *osu*.

Secondly, Otaelo's tragedy should be seen in light of his failure to qualify as an *omoluabi* and this is where human action must be considered as a factor of failure. Here, I am talking about his own inability to "rename" himself when the opportunity presented itself. Yoruba understanding highlighted by the saying, "*Bibii re ko see f'owo ra; ki a bi'ni ko to ka tun 'ra eni bi*" (Financial/social freedom does not necessarily determine the circumstance of birth; to be born is not as important as finding one's feet in life) suggests that circumstance of birth may be faulty, but with good behaviour and a commitment to change an awry beginning through renaming, the past could be re-written. This is what Geetha Ganapathy-Dore calls "autogenesis," which centres on the relationship between the "inheritance and significance of names, the destinies they carry, the burden of a name and the association of name and fame" as well as the "relationship between name and life and between name and self, loss of name and self, the aliases and guises that put the sense of the self to test" and, most especially, the "retrieval of name and self and the sense of renaissance that accompany it" (13). In other words, what happened to Otaelo at birth is the result of circumstances beyond his control, and which he has had to live with. But, the opportunity the Igwe presents to him to transition from social abhorrence and seclusion to love and companionship (at least what his marriage to Chinyere could have provided him) should ordinarily have constituted part of his own process of "unnaming and renaming", which is tantamount to "*ti tun 'ra eni bi*" as explained above.

Otaelo fails to take advantage of the opportunity to "rename" himself because of pride and impetuosity. Having been informed of his elevation and planned marriage to Chinyere and, by extension, into royalty, he becomes arrogant: he sacks his most trusted lieutenant, Ichiagu, who loves and respects him in spite of his *osu* status, "why do you want a coward and a hero to dine on the same plate...I want to excel not to be brought down by a weeping bull...now leave me!" (32); he dismisses Ebuka and considers himself better than the rest of the *osu* in the land, "Go to your people. Tell them that I have left them. Tell them that I raise my head above their shame" (35); he insults *Ala*, and reacts rashly towards Chinyere over the missing *jigida*. His actions end in the destruction of his loved ones and himself.

In this case, the “*Pele*” principle of caution in human behaviour applies to Otaelo. “*Pele ko ma baa parae*” (Be careful so that you will not kill yourself) suggests that, in failing to exhibit restraint in his behaviour, Otaelo creates the opportunity for society in both its macro (Umuagu) and micro (Agbo) levels to destroy him; while “*Pele ko ma baa ko ba ‘ra yoku*” (Be careful so that you do not cause harm to others) also applies in the way he destroys both Chinyere and Ichiagu in the process. Yoruba explanation for his tragedy in this circumstance would be that it is caused by *afowofa* (self-causation), which is due to a defect in his *iwa* (character). *Ifa*, in one of its short *odu* (verses) admonishes people about good character:

Iwa nikan lo soro o Character is all that is requisite

Iwa nikan lo soro Character is all that is requisite

Ori kan kii buru lotu Ife There is no destiny to be called
unhappy in [life]

Iwa nikan lo soro o Character is all that is requisite

(qtd in Ekanola 49).

Otaelo uses the death of Otaelo and especially Chinyere’s and Agbo’s, to force a reflection about the senselessness in how people maltreat themselves based on class and social status. Yoruba understanding is that, irrespective of rank and status, what all human beings share in common is a life that amounts to nothing at the point of death. When the gods, through Ezugo, delivers the message, “As for the Princess and Ogbuefi Agbo, take them to the big bush, and leave them there for their bodies have been defiled. No one should mourn them, and [their] hut must be burnt down as if no one ever stepped in here” (57), it is clear that death has dismantled class and status. This is the exact point that Ebuka articulates on seeing Otaelo’s and the other corpses on the ground. Ebuka stresses:

Oh death how well you level the freeborn and the Osu.
For as the same blood flows in our veins, so do you take
us on equal terms. Sleep good prince for maybe, your
next coming might be better. Sleep in death, now
knowing who you are. (57)

Although Ebuka's statement is remorseful, it also contains many points of significance, one of which is the fact that in death, Otaelo seems to finally achieve the "freedom" that he sacrificed his life struggling for. Ebuka calls Otaelo a "prince" which he would have become if he consummated his marriage to Chinyere irrespective of the sanction that banishes them. Ebuka also talks about "next coming" that is, reincarnation, which is a significant cultural belief in most parts of Africa, and especially among the Yoruba and which I will come to very shortly. Ebuka suggests that Otaelo is now free, that he discovers himself and his true potentials, in spite of anything else. Even though Ebuka laments Otaelo's death, he takes solace in the fact that he (Otaelo) finally returns to the *osu* fold that he had rejected, "He returns, though complete but not whole" (57) which also derives from the same cultural sensibility of reincarnation that I earlier pointed out.

Although "completeness" may not translate as being "whole" its essence stresses the significance attached to after-life (reincarnation) among the Yoruba, and which Ebuka means by "next coming." The import of this cultural concept is located in the *atubotan* (essence of life).²¹ By *atubotan*, the Yoruba stress the need for people to live a life worthy of emulation and strive to do good at all times. Ebuka makes a recourse to *atubotan* by first acknowledging the fact that Otaelo is a liminal figure [an *osu*] "who undergoes separation or alienation from his society and initiation into another realm of experience, followed by return to his own world with the fruits of his journey"; that is, in spite of the initial negative social reaction towards him, Otaelo regains his denied humanity in death. By linking his death to Chinyere and Agbo, it becomes imperative for the same society that denigrated him in life to practically beg his (*osu*) people to have the others buried. This is more so important because, while their death is considered a shameful thing, not being buried is seen to be worse and potentially dangerous to the community's wellbeing. Thus, as a liminal figure, Otaelo is both "an outcast and a potential healer of the society's malaise" (Barber, xii). Hence, while *atubotan* stresses the metaphysical reality of the value inherent in human life irrespective of status, it also underscores the fact that human worth is much more determined by the level of positive impact that an individual has on its society even in death.

²¹Although this is not actually a perfect explanation of what *atubotan* means, it gives us a sense of what is intended.

Barnes' statement that "destruction is creative and creation is destructive" (17) in her description of the opposing sides of *Ogun*, describes Agbo and the Igwe who demonstrate the two *Ogun* opposites in their own actions. While the former represents the destructive aspect, the latter stands for the positive. Between the two characters, we are clearly reminded of the unending tension marked by the paradox of *Ogun*'s two sides, that is: Agbo's mission to destroy Otaelo and the Igwe's redemptive effort in the tragedy that the play dramatizes.

With regard to the former, Agbo represents everything that is wrong with Umuagu. Blinded by rage and jealousy towards Otaelo, he refuses to heed Ezeugo's warning, "Do not push the gods or they may trip you...do not look into the eyes of the gods when they blink." Rather, he is driven by the desire to exact revenge on Otaelo "The gods take too long. I am a soldier, I pray to the gods, then push them with my songs and fiery nature to accept my prayers" (30). Agbo doesn't believe that Otaelo is a better warrior compared to himself, or that the young man deserves to live as a free citizen, unencumbered by the obsolete *Osu* tradition. Agbo could be described as the typical "*ajegbogbo ti nwe'ni kun 'ra*" (The haughty fellow desperately in search of company), who is misguided by his own sense of superiority and vain glory. While he considers Otaelo to be "an abomination as it were", and the Igwe who is "caught up in his fight with his father's ghost" from which he must be rescued, Agbo thinks of himself as the saviour of the land who "shall not sit still and watch an untouchable defile the shrines" (38). In the end, his actions underline part of the lessons in *itan* about *Ogun*'s signification of the "paradoxical truth of destructiveness" and how human beings trap themselves in their own folly.

In contrast, the Igwe sacrifices his life and happiness in order to force his society to re-examine its values and social perception in regard to the *Osu* practice. In demonstrating the positive aspect of *Ogun* on one hand, the Igwe shows how he also stresses the deity's "profoundly satisfying symbolic expression of a human dilemma of how to balance the need for constraint against the need for freedom" (Barnes 19). This is in terms of weighing the gains of an effort against its liability. However, the Igwe shows that he is aware of the problems associated with his "romance" with Otaelo at a meeting with his council of chiefs, "This is my case, for tonight, I am the accused, and the carrier of the burden of guilt" (26). In this sense, he also occupies the threshold as a liminal figure and a hero as Otaelo. Although the elders believe that he

is insane, Igwe is actually “a source of social regeneration” who, with his action, proves that “it is the society and not the hero that is mad” (Barber xii). In his effort, Igwe demonstrates that human limitations can be surmounted if people set their minds to such a purpose even if they suffer in the process.

Chinyere is however the Igwe’s “price” for defying tradition and attempting to alleviate the social condition of the *osu*. Like her father, she also believes in the dignity of the human person beyond social constraints posed by laws and tradition, judging from her conversation with her friend, Obiageli (18-22). Moreover, she also dares to assert her right in a society where male chauvinism is glorified. Although she dies at the end in the hands of Otaelo who realizes too late the depth of her innocence and love for him, as “the spirit of his own life” (54), her sacrifice is not for nothing.

These points bring us to how the play uses language to foreground its theme. In this case, I refer to how the play uses *owe* (proverb). *Otaelo* uses *owe* to show the epistemological and moral ethos which govern Umuagu. *Owe* is also utilized to highlight specific situations in order to foreground the theme of the play including its broader social relevance. As a result, the audience is invited to re-examine the issue of discrimination both in the lives of the characters in the text and in the larger human (Nigerian) society that we live in today, especially with regards to the ongoing Igbo people’s agitation for Biafra.

In the opening scene, the old woman Nene says “To kill a chicken, you must first kill the mother-hen” (12), which is a proverb she uses to allay Chinyere’s fear about *Osimiri*’s threat to the young woman’s life. Aside from its relevance to the situation in which it is used, the proverb also summarizes the moral character of Umuagu in other ways. Though Nene uses the proverb to stress her resolve to ensure that her granddaughter lives a life of her own choosing without being coerced into serving as a priestess to a river goddess, the proverb also underlines the social attitude towards Otaelo’s mother. While Umuagu does not punish her husband for humiliating and brutalizing her, it comes down heavily on her for defending herself. Hence, apart from highlighting gender imbalance in the community, the proverb also shows that Otaelo became a victim of his mother’s brutal treatment through its flawed judicial system.

The relevance of proverbs as vehicles of discourse in a cultural context is also demonstrated in *Otaelo*. Obidigbo uses the proverb, “leave the leprous sickness to

discuss pimples” (26), to describe the frenzy among the elders over Igwe’s intention to allow Otaelo marry his daughter. The elders condemn the Igwe’s seeming humane acts, and are angry that he does not seem perturbed by the danger his decision portends for the society; namely: taking Otaelo the *osu* to the battlefield against tradition prohibiting such interaction between an *osu* and other members of the society, and his consent to the *osu*’s marriage to his daughter when the tradition states explicitly that the *osu* cannot marry any freeborn Igbo.

It is instructive that the proverb combines two words associated with sickness to drive home the point that is emphasized in this scene. While this particular proverb functions as a metaphoric expression of the moral sickness that the community suffers due to the execrable *Osu* caste system, it also stresses that the cultural practice is a chronic disease, which ought to have been cured. However, the irony which the proverb states very well is expressed by Ezeugo who asks, “I do not understand the last speaker. Who is the leprous person? The Igwe or the *Osu*?” (27). According to the other elders, it is either the Igwe is sick for entertaining the *osu*, or Otaelo the *osu* is sick for aspiring to marry the princess, or both of them are sick for imagining that they can circumvent the tradition of the land. Through this device, the play as a whole can be seen to ask whether it is the *Osu* practice that is horrific, or the people who practice it, or both. But, rather than condemning the *Osu* practice which is a far more dangerous social problem, the elders find the Igwe’s redeeming actions greatly disturbing.

In this particular circumstance, the philosophical imperative of Yoruba proverbs in their function to acquiring *ogbon* (wisdom) and *oye* (understanding), which are sine qua non to harmonious co-existence in a given society, is lost on the elders who argue and condemn the Igwe’s action. On one hand, the proverb shows that the land is sick because it is being guided by a defective moral principle that is validated by tradition and is binding on the people. On the other hand, it also shows that a society driven by such an ethos that discountenances people based on descent rather than common humanity suffers from a terrible sickness which is tantamount to treating pimples on the face while the whole body is ravaged by leprosy. As such, the proverb hints at the consequences of ostracism and psychological destruction of humanity that the *Osu* caste system represents including its far-reaching tragic implication compared to the violation of tradition that the Igwe’s actions appear to

constitute. This is a fact that becomes apparent when it is too late to do anything about it.

While the proverb summarizes the central point of the play, it also draws our attention to the (ir)relevance of the ongoing agitation by the Igbo for the Republic of Biafra which I mentioned earlier. While the recent Igbo quest is based on their own perceived marginalization in Nigeria, it is ironic that they also practise the *Osu* culture which promotes discrimination and marginalization. One wonders if the Igbo would rather tolerate being marginalized by their own people than having others do it for/to them. Considering also that *Otaelo* ends with a spate of sporadic deaths and melancholy (the Igbo agitation has also claimed more than two thousand lives), one may say categorically that *Otaelo* draws attention to rash reactions that do not take into account the tragic history of the past.

Earlier on, I interpreted the Igbo saying, “Wherever Something stands, Something Else will stand by it,” as the Igbo people’s recognition of the duality of their worldview. Explaining the same concept elsewhere, Achebe mentions that “It means that there is no one way to anything. The Ibo people who made that proverb are very insistent on this---there is no absolute anything. They are against excess---their world is a world of dualities. It is good to be brave, they say, but also remember that the coward survives (qtd in Moyers 333).²² Simply put, Achebe identifies two things that are related to Yoruba approach to life and relevant to our discussion of *Otaelo* here: the Igbo recognize the fact that there are no absolutes and frown at excess in anything—both of which Umuagu and *Otaelo* represent in their totality. Although as Obioma Nnaemeka argues, while a fictional setting like Umuagu and *Otaelo* may not be true representatives of real-life Igbo society where paradoxes are expected and are allowed to coexist--individuals’ personal achievements which are admired and impatience, violence and extremism that they abhor--considering that the *Osu* caste system is still being practised today suggests otherwise. While it is also true that the Igbo worldview (as the Yorubas’) is informed by balance and the spirit of “live and let live” or what the Igbo proverb “*egbe belu ugo belu*” means,²³ as Nnaemeka further argues (99), the same is called to question by the continued practice of the *Osu* caste

²² Although Achebe makes this statement/clarification in relation to Okonkwo, the central character of his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, and Umuofia, the fictional Igbo society in which the story is set, the sense is applicable to *Otaelo* and Umuagu in *Otaelo*.

²³ Achebe explains the same proverb as “let the kite perch and let the eagle perch.”

system, which is based on clearly-defined system of segregation and marginalization of people of certain birth and status in the aforementioned communities in present-day Igbo society.

In this section of the thesis, I examined *Otaelo* from the perspective of the Yoruba belief in *ori* (fate/destiny), and concluded that the conditions of the marginalized and the minority group, either in Nigeria or elsewhere across the globe, cannot be read as *ori*. It is not the fate/destiny of the marginalized (the *Osu* are actually a minority group in Igboland), to be pushed to the margin of existence in their country. I also alluded to the Igbo people's ongoing agitation for the Republic of Biafra in Nigeria, and emphasized the danger in such an agitation; of creating artificial boundaries where none exists and making enemies of people who are friends and neighbours, and concluded that the Igbo at home are either being deceived or not been told the whole truth by the Igbos in the diaspora who are spearheading the agitation. In making this conclusion, I do not hope to question the justification of the agitation for a new "nation" out of Nigeria, but to draw attention to the most difficult aspect of it, which is making it to work, coupled with the horrific violence that will accompany its actualization, as we have already witnessed in the last few years.

Davlin Thomas's *Lear Ananci*

*Laalu gb'ode!: Esu, politics, and the aesthetics of transformation*²⁴

“Who is it that can tell me who I am?”

(Shakespeare, *Lear*, 1.4.230).

“I am king here, for there is none worse here than I”

(Thomas 12).

Lear Ananci adds a new dimension to this discussion of Orisa-Shakespeare by its creative blend of folktale with history in order to use Shakespeare to address the socio-political failures in its society. Unlike the other texts that I have analysed in this thesis, *Lear Ananci* explicitly shows that the Yoruba storytelling tradition is still relevant to address contemporary issues.²⁵ This folkloric tradition focuses on the activities of the trickster figure, “one god whose activities encompass both the divine and the secular spheres, and the other an animal, who operates in the mundane and fanciful world of the imagination” (Owomoyela 1989:166).²⁶ Written by Davlin Thomas and first performed at the University of West Indies in 2000, *Lear Ananci* won the Cacique Award for “the Most Original Script” from the National Drama Association of Trinidad and Tobago the same year. However, not much has been written about the play since its publication in 2010. As at the time of writing this

²⁴ *Laalu gb'ode!* (*Esu is on rampage!*). “Esu Laalu ogiri oko” is one of the numerous *oriki* of *Esu* among the Yoruba in Nigeria.

²⁵ In Chapter Three, my play *Emi, Caesar!* also utilizes this same storytelling tradition.

²⁶ While there is a thin line between *itan* and *alo*, two of the categories of narratives among the Yoruba, *Lear Ananci* merges the two. While *itan* are historical and factual accounts, *alo* are basically fictional constructs “dramatizing” human foibles, in which, as Olatunji contends, the storyteller demarcates from reality, a coherent fictional world in which standards of normal behaviour may not operate (20).

section, only one article, Giselle Rampaul's "Caribbean Tricksters at crossroads: Davlin Thomas's *Lear Ananci* and *Hamlet: the Eshu Experience*" (2013), has discussed the play but not from the Orisa-Shakespeare perspective. Nevertheless, the play offers another perspective to how the Yoruba use Shakespeare to examine their own social reality.

Lear Ananci tells the story of King Lear, the desperate ruler of Malick, a fictitious country that represents the playwright's country, Trinidad and Tobago, who perverts the process of political power by literally devouring his friend and predecessor, King Henry. This perversion has its effect on him: he becomes insane, bites off his butcher's fingers, flouts the law which says monarchs should remain childless and fathers three daughters from three different women whom he names his children after, divides his kingdom arbitrarily among his daughters and banishes the youngest, Cordelia, who is also affected by her father's insanity and acts irrationally. Another story that runs parallel to King Lear's, centres on the conflict between Gloucester's two sons, Edgar and Edmund, over filial rights to their father's land. While Edgar insists that the land is his because he is Gloucester's legitimate son, Edmund thinks the land is his own by virtue of being the first son, and Gloucester fears that Edgar might kill him if he reads *Oedipus Rex*. The play uses the stories of Lear and Gloucester's family to interrogate the assumptions surrounding the legitimacy of power and public office, as well as the problem of self-perpetuation that are rampant in Caribbean politics.

Specifically, *Lear Ananci* dramatizes the morbid socio-political situation in Trinidad and Tobago, and shows how the same symptoms are found in the whole of Caribbean politics. *Lear Ananci* also dramatizes the effect of "mental slavery caused by blind, corrupt, impotent governments and political systems" as well as the problems posed by "the Caribbean multiple and intersecting cultural influences." The play also indicts Shakespeare by reviving his characters as metaphor for continued colonial influence on Trinidadian politics, and reveals that "the issues of legitimacy, right, corruption, power and responsibility" that are relevant in Shakespeare's time are still relevant today (Rampaul 317). As an example of socio-political activities that undermine the growth of Trinidad and Tobago (and the Caribbean), Alain Maurin et al, in what they term "Hidden Economy," uncover how public office holders and influential citizens (politicians) engage in economic activities where a large

percentage of workers who earn low incomes are forced to use rudimentary equipment, and work outside the framework of the laws and regulations thereby making it possible to evade tax. People who pay taxes regularly are discouraged by the inferior quality of social services that the government provide. As a result, they seek satisfaction from private establishments, which also take advantage of government's failure in order to cheat their clients (Maurin et al 6-12). These activities encourage corruption and engender renewed ethnic fragmentation due to mistrust among the people. Such negative impacts occur in spite of the oil boom in the country and the thriving petroleum economy which should ordinarily translate into positive economic changes for the country's people. It is these kinds of postcolonial political failure and despair that *Lear Ananci* addresses through the lens of the Yoruba epistemology and aesthetic principles as represented by the *Orisa*.

In Trinidad and Tobago, *Orisa* worship is known as Shango (Sango), the name of one of the principal male deities on the *Orisa* pantheon, whereas *Lear Ananci* utilizes and gives prominence to *Esu*, another *orisa* of equal calibre as Sango. This choice is not a misnomer, an *eewo* (sacrilege) as the Yoruba would describe it. Rather, the choice of *orisa* signification is both an understanding of the relationship between *Sango* and *Esu* in terms of what both deities share in common and how that correspondence can be useful to address the socio-political failures in the society.

The relationship between *Sango* and *Esu* can be explained in many ways. For examples, they are both connected to *Ile Ogere* (Mother/Sacred Earth): while *Sango* is identified with nature, environment and productivity; *Esu* is intimately connected to the *orita-meta* (crossroads), the place of conflict, despair and other complexity of meaning that the deity symbolizes. While King Lear possesses Sango's attribute as a king, emperor, empire builder and promiscuous lover whose renown partly rests on sexual conquests; Ananci displays the attributes of *Esu*, the unassuming partner of *Orunmila*, the *orisa* that symbolizes prescient wisdom. Ananci uses the *orita-meta* as a point of metaphoric interaction with the other characters and especially to interpret both the events being dramatized and show Lear as the symbolic representation of Trinidad and Tobago politics.

While the above is a general introduction of the play and the example of a specific political situation that it addresses, specifically, its narrative style and ritual

dimensions both show that it uses and deviates from Shakespeare at the same time. The entire story of *Lear Ananci* is presented as a folktale told by Ananci/Anansi, a mythical spider-figure that was originally from Akan, Ghanainan mythology, whose personality is later morphed into Esu, and whose presence in the Caribbean is bound up with the history of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (Ashcroft et al 35). As Donna Rosenberg writes, the spider or Anansi (Ananci) also assumes human characteristics in those tales. While human society is the domain of the fictional world that Anansi rules, he also symbolizes both the complexity of the human nature and “the creative aspect of human intelligence even as he reveals the fact that deception, greed, suffering and death are inherent part of the human condition [as much as it is] part of human nature to harm others” (Rosenberg7-8); thus, Ananci expresses the people’s keen sense of human nature in a cultural environment where morality and justice are important values.

Among the Yoruba the assumption is that storytellers understand the power of the word, the punning and verbal play that characterize the trope, including its efficacy to address germane issues. Yoruba storytellers often consider their audience to be “children” irrespective of their age because the stories that they tell usually acquire a didactic dimension beyond entertainment. In his first appearance in the play, Ananci assumes this role of a storyteller, “Come children, Ananci have a story; the story of a man called Lear...the story began quite simply. Lear was at Henry’s bedside constantly, and I, on his wall listening attentively” (6-8). Ananci uses the introduction to draw attention to himself, as customary of the storyteller among the Yoruba.

Although *Lear Ananci*’s use of the storytelling device is a demonstration of the author’s own sense of inherited Yoruba tradition, the aesthetic device also recalls Shakespeare’s approach in some of his plays such as *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale*, including *King Lear* where he uses the narrative pattern of fairy tales. As Laurie Maguire contends, in this invariable fairy tale pattern, there is always a good character that is undervalued; ignored or banished; passes a test or tests, marries the hero (ine) and they live happily ever after. However, Shakespeare often shatters the expectation of a reconciliation and a happy ending by going beyond the verbal confines of his plays, to providing an acute observation about the human conditions, and forces his audience to reflect about the infirmities of age and the meaning of life,

so that “art [can truly hold] the mirror up to nature in the most realistic and painful way possible” (Maguire 184-5). While the storytelling device represents Thomas’s utilization of the Yoruba aesthetic tradition that he has inherited, the fact Shakespeare also uses a similar trope in his own plays, shows how Shakespeare is used to make something new.

The storytelling device assumes a ritual dimension however through Yoruba form of symbolism through its plot structure. This is achieved with the use of the *eeta* motif. Ordinarily, *eeta/meta* means “three,” which features prominently in all aspects of Yoruba ritual because it is associated with “*ase*” (the power to make things happen) controlled by *Esu*. According to Lawal, “three” is also the sign of “*agbara*” that is, dynamic power in its physical and metaphysical dimensions. While the phrase “*Fi eeji kun eeta*” that is, to put two and three together, is the Yoruba idiom for making up one’s mind, *eeji* (two) is a sign of balance and equilibrium, that is foregrounded by the “threeness” of *eeta/eta* (Lawal 44). The entire story of *Lear Ananci* is presented in three related plots: a televised news item; a play-within-a-play, and Ananci (the storyteller)’s performance as the Shakespearean Fool, while actions in the three plots take place in Malick, an imaginary society that stands for Trinidad and Tobago (and the Caribbean as a whole).

The first plot, which is a televised broadcast, describes the strange bomb that explodes in the Parliament in Trinidad’s capital, Port of Spain, while a debate on the Equal Opportunities Bill is in progress. The after-effect of the bomb explosion is complete amnesia suffered by the Parliamentarians. A character in the play, Professor Reinhart, tells us, “The key to any possibility of explanation for this phenomenon lies with the fact that no members of parliament seem to be able to recognize or acknowledge any components of reality” (3). This situation forces everyone to turn to Ananci “who we think is the embodiment of the Caribbean people” (4), and who claims to be equal to the task of both narrating and interpreting the unfolding situation, “From my place on the castle wall I studied the positions and for what it’s worth I’ll share my observations with you” (8), of what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago, and the Caribbean as a whole.

While the bombing in the capital city sets off the conflict(s) in the play in this first part, it also shows how the fictional story in the play connects to specific

historical events in Trinidad and Tobago. The play uses the reference to “the Capital city of the Port of Spain” and “The Red House which has been bombed” (2), to show this connection between fiction and history. The Red House is the historical House of Parliament building located in the Port of Spain, the capital city. The bombing of the Red House in the play recalls the Water Riots of 1903 when the Red House, painted earlier in 1897 to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, was burnt down while a debate was going on in the Legislative Council. The burning occurred as a reaction over increase in water rates, and the protests which accompanied the arrest of a woman in the aftermath of the bombing. The government’s intervention led to the death of at least sixteen (16) people (See; Mavrogordato 1979, 2008). *Lear Ananci* alludes to that historical incident through the bombing in the play. A character in the play, Professor Reinhart tells us, “I’m afraid the situation here today is very much as before...Parliament was in session when bombing occurred” (2). The incident also shows how the play links the colonial past with contemporary events. Professor Reinhart says, “the bomb itself caused a fusion of time, physical space and consciousness that has endured the persons and the event itself” (4); and by recalling this particular incident, *Lear Ananci* leaves no one in doubt as to its concern with history.

The second plot, also called the Ghostly play, is presented in the form of a play-within-a-play. It is the central point of reference and most developed plotline in the play. All the principal characters are also introduced here, and the thematic concern of the play is extended beyond Trinidad to the West Indies, “The entire spectacle takes a total of about two hours, then all players disappear to reappear elsewhere in the Caribbean” (5). It is here also that Lear takes the crown as the King of Malick after devouring his friend and incumbent, King Henry.²⁷ The conflict between Cordelia and her sisters, Regan and Goneril over Lear’s estate; and the war between Gloucester’s sons, Edgar and Edmund, over their father’s title and property are also presented here. At the end of the scenes, Ananci who boasts of being capable

²⁷ Although Thomas does not dwell so much on King Henry since the play is about Lear, the political situation in the Caribbean that the play dramatizes invites us to view Henry’s character as being modelled after the historical Haitian leader, Henry Christophe. The trajectory of Henry Christophe’s life reflects the *eeta* symbolism: first a leader in the war of Haitian independence from 1791--1804; later the president from 1807--11; and finally self-proclaimed King Henry 1, of northern Haiti from 1811--20. On the one hand, Henry’s ruthless approach to acquiring power is comparable to the way rulers of Malick acquire power by devouring their predecessors in *Lear Ananci*, and the way they transform state power into personal property is also reminiscent of how historical King Henry created a hereditary nobility to serve his hunger and thirst for power. On the other hand, King Henry’s and Lear’s flamboyant lifestyle in the play echoes historical Henry’s who used elaborate state apparatus to support his overblown image.

of handling the situation is rendered helpless, and overwhelmed by what he terms “the baggage of passing” (16), that is, the burden of guilt shared by all the characters.

In the third plotline, Ananci steps into the role of the Shakespearean Fool and relate the situation specifically to Trinidad, and to the Caribbean in general. He reminds elected officials of their primary duty: that they are meant to serve their people whom they represent, “the experience of the many are determined by the will of the great few” (52). Ananci laments that the reverse is the case; all he could see are “bleed[ing] hopes, and perspire[ing] dreams [which] become grey as black life is drained from the hair” (51), which are metaphors for leadership failure at every level.

Ananci fails in his task as the Shakespearean Fool. Garber explains that the Fool in *King Lear* represents the body and self-preservation voice of common sense and practical wisdom, a figure of infinite value in the court where he reminds Lear of his folly through wit and gesture (674). In the “season of madness” (26) where reason is lost to irrationality, Ananci is overwhelmed and can no longer understand the situation. Professor Reinhart tells us that, “Ananci is not yet in control of his destiny and he recognizes that” (43), although Ananci consoles himself by saying, “All of mankind are slaves beaten by the whips of time” (51). Consequently, the Announcer in the televised section of the play asks, “Professor, do you think that the members of Parliament will ever be in touch with our reality?” (67), to which the stage directions read, “*She waits, but he does not respond.*” *Instead, the television set switches off to signify the end of the play in the midst of “more thunder than ever”* (67), which suggests that there is no end in sight yet for solution to the social crisis that the play dramatizes.

From the foregoing, Ananci’s thought can be described as a reflection of the crossroads (the *orita-meta*), suggests confusion and the socio-political failings in the society. Obviously this situation captures the sad reality that the play dramatizes in terms of the multiple issues of slavery, colonialism and the continuation of despair, if we go by the Yoruba description of the crossroads as “*Orita-meta tii n daamu alejo*” (crossroads as the point of turbulence, confusion and despair), or what another character in the play, Edgar, calls “the season of madness” (26), that the failure of postcolonial leadership in Trinidad and Tobago has come to represent for the people.

Ananci, in utilizing the *orita-meta*, assumes the personality of *Esu*, the presiding *orisa* of the crossroads. Aiyejina describes *Esu* as “a divine trickster, a disguise-artist and shape-shifter” (10). In drawing from *Esu*’s attributes, Ananci also returns to his initial role as the trickster figure. Tricksters’ acts, we are reminded by Priebe, are rarely impulsive but often well-defined and purposely channelled towards a specific goal in the tales that he told (130). The trickster is not only a popular hero, but his triumph in those tales are due to “shrewdness and cunning...steadiness and industriousness, as in European tales” (Bascom 482); his actions usually “directed toward the achievement of a well-defined end [because] he knows socially accepted values even when he behaves contrary to them [since] he is no wise the source of them” (Melville and Herskovits 101), as much as he interprets them.

As the *orisa* closest to his Western counterpart, Hermes, or hermeneutics, in metaphoric terms, *Esu* performs the task of interpretation as *Orunmila*’s partner in the Yoruba *Ifa* divination process, as Ananci does by interpreting actions and events to us in this play. *Esu* as the “*tunfunalo*” (Interpreter of riddles) lends himself effectively to the task/act of interpretation, to “*itumo*” (to untie or unknot knowledge), or to “*yipada*” (to turn around or to translate), the task that stories are meant to perform in regard to social discourse (Gates 688). Let us recall that in the previous chapter of this thesis where I developed a theory of analysis, I presented an oval image of the *Opon Ifa* (Divination tray) at the apex of which is the symbolic image of *Esu*. According to the understanding offered to some aspects of Yoruba iconography and visual aesthetic, *Esu*’s image on the *Opon Ifa* is neither accidental nor fortuitous. The oral and visual *itan* that both the divination and the iconography represent, is an essential discourse that is both evocative and provocative (Lawal 2001:498-526); and suggests as well that the Yoruba climate was and is still characterized by a dialogic ethos (Yai 31-5). The lines drawn on the *Opon Ifa* during divination “represent the intersection of cosmic realms at the metaphoric crossroads” over which *Esu* presides (Drewal et al 23). Just as *Esu* performs his task of interpretation in the *Ifa* divination process, Ananci also gets involved in, and interprets, the actions and situations in this play.

Ananci’s shape-shifting can also be explained from the perspective of what Aiyejina terms the “bacchanal aesthetics.” According to Aiyejina, bacchanal aesthetics is the aesthetics of the crossroads “the melting point of possibilities: the old and the new interpretations” (23), that clearly represents the realities of a morbid

condition. Lear also tells us in the play that indeed, his bacchanal aesthetics deals with “old” and “new” experiences, “the bacchanal in Malick is the war of my head. My shame, my daughters, my wretched society at its worst” (57). Thus, the bacchanal aesthetic here examines despair that cuts across the realities of enslavement and colonisation and the perpetuation of its legacies by Trinidadians against themselves through exploitation and seeming cultural deracination by their drifting apart from each other due to hatred. In these three narrative strands, *Lear Ananci* follows and diverges from Shakespeare at the same time.

Having introduced the play, let us now closely examine some specific situations that are relevant to our purpose. There are a number of key moments where *Lear Ananci* dramatizes the breakdown of ethical values and the conflict in Malick. I refer to these points as “Esu moments,” or what Soyinka also describes as the “Esu-harassed day” (Soyinka 1975:9), in terms of when *Esu* performs his “divine task of putting humanity to the test” (Aiyejina 15). I identify three of such “*Esu* moments” which also reflect the *eeta* motif and the *orita-meta* symbolism. The first “*Esu* moment” occurs when Lear devours Henry (8-12); the second “*Esu* moment” occurs when Cordelia discovers how her father, Lear, became king of Malick (17-35); and the third “*Esu* moment” occurs when Edmund sets Gloucester against Edgar (35-54), respectively.

In the first “*Esu* moment” which occurs at King Henry’s bedside, Lear is put to the test by *Esu*. Here, Ananci represents *Esu* (let us keep in mind Ananci’s ability to transform which I mentioned earlier on) and looks on unconcerned as Lear sits impatiently waiting for Henry to die so that he can take the crown. In this case, we are looking at *Esu*, the deity who manipulates emotion and tests human mental ability to assess situation and make the right decision. Yoruba understanding is that at such a moment, *Esu* presents the individual with choice but remains impartial and unperturbed by whatever the individual decides to do although *Esu* will not hesitate to exact a punishment afterwards, if the decision brings about some form of trouble or failure.

In this scene, Ananci watches as Lear struggles to control both his hatred for Henry and eagerness to seize the crown. When a servant brings water for Henry to drink, Lear whispers, “I pray he trips and dies while getting the water. Heaven knows

I'll eat his rotting body along with Henry's". But after waiting for a while he exclaims, "Lord! Why doesn't Henry die?" Getting increasingly impatient that Henry "refuses" to die, Lear suddenly pounce on and devours him. As the stage direction reads, "*Lear bites off a finger...bites Henry's face, and dives for the throat. Blood is sprayed upon Lear's white clothing. Lear stands bloody and alone, chewing the last of Henry, he stares at the audience madly*" (8-11). Unable to control his desires, Lear obviously fails *Esu's* test. However, after seizing the crown in such a brutal fashion, he also tries to perpetuate himself in office. The politics of bitterness demonstrated by the two characters shows the negative effect of "sit-tightism" (tendency for self-perpetuation), which also accommodates patrimonialism

According to Max Weber, patrimonialism refers to an office that lacks all the bureaucratic separation of the "private" and "official" sphere. In this system, "political administration is treated as a purely personal affair of the ruler, and political power is considered part of his personal property...the office and the exercise of public authority serve the ruler and the official on which office was bestowed; they do not serve impersonal purposes" (Weber 128-9). The system of political power acquisition and its deployment that Lear Ananci dramatizes is similar to what Weber describes and it does not serve the people. As Ananci informs the audience, "the court is full of pretenses, the lies...here men can lie and tell the truth both at the same time like telling a beggar that you'll end his hunger and then you shoot him dead" (12). Patrimonialism is similar to autocracy, which the system of power acquisition in Malick also clearly subscribes to; "the country is the ruler's estate and the state apparatus is ultimately his to use at his own discretion" (Hyden 99). The end-product of this system is tyranny which grows out of an impulsive and oppressive rule that considers political office as a private property. The way Lear acquires public properties which he shares arbitrarily among his children underscores this point.

In that particular scene which I describe above, although Ananci pretends to be neutral and detached, he silently instigates Lear's action psychologically. Ananci's seeming detachment and silence illustrate *Esu's* indifference and reluctance to destroy the bad and the malevolent so that the good remain because he is aware of the positive aspects of both sides of human action and emotion, or what the Yoruba call "*Tibi tire*" (Good and bad are inseparable companion). Instead of intervening,

Esu allows people to make their choice but also remind them of the consequences (Falola 6). In this particular scene, Lear fails to apply self-restraint which *Esu* preaches, a fact the Yoruba also recognize hence the saying, “*Esu ma se ‘mi, omo elomiran ni o se*” (*Esu*, do not tempt me or make me fall into errors; tempt others). In Lear’s case, *Esu* redefines the meaning of ethics, “lures the powerful [Lear] to commit transgression [and] expects maximum sanctions” (Falola 10). The sanctions manifest in the form of insanity although Lear achieves his aim of becoming the king.

The cannibalism that constitutes the process of kinship clearly shows that the political process in Trinidad is flawed. It also shows complete departure from the Yoruba crowning system. Kinkead-Weekes contends that the Yoruba crowning system and the assumption of office by a traditional ruler entails a process of dismantling, of fragmentation out of which “growth” expectedly emerges. At a king’s transition, his demise signifies fragmentation of essence, of destruction to the spiritual body that his position represents; the vacuum is filled by another person after undergoing initiation into the mysteries in which case, his ascendancy signifies renewal, fertility and growth. In that entire process we have “a visionary idea of transformation, linking of man with divine power and forging radiant form out of chaotic opposition” (234-5). That is why, at the demise of a king among the Yoruba, one does not say “A King is dead” but “The King has joined his ancestors” or “The King sleeps.” In this play however, the Yoruba sanctified process is replaced by a perverted version---a horrific act of cannibalism, stench and abuse of office. As Ananci tells the audience while introducing the nature of Malick’s political system:

When a king did die, the person who became the next king, was the one most willing to eat the rotting carcass [carcass] of the last, with salt; he had to suck the dead king’s bones free of its juices and belch loudly in celebration of having devoured the stinking flesh...would-be kings practised slurping on dead men’s intestines like children feasting on the season’s first mango. (7-8)

Lear Ananci uses Lear’s assumption of office through this perverted process to highlight two of the major problems with Trinidad and Caribbean politics: how

society destroys itself by giving power to over-ambitious individuals in an equally flawed system of power acquisition, and how power-hungry individuals go to any length to acquire it. In *Malick*, the system allows antisocial perpetrations at the highest level to go unchecked at the detriment of the society:

[...], men grew horns according to their behaviour; the worst behaved had the largest horns, while the best behaved were properly horned. Women's horns remained unseen, located in a most private place. They could commit murder and still maintain a spotless forehead...such was the politics of *Malick* which had become overwhelmed with men who grew large horns but had painfully broken them off to hide their ill intentions. (7)

The effect of the perversion is seen when Lear challenges the divine right of kings, "What the ass is this divine right business and how does one come about it?" (35), and bear children contrary to the rule that says monarchs should not have children. Considering that the essence of a throne in a Yoruba community is continuity and growth, the rule that Thomas creates in his adaptation is a misnomer, which suggests faulty leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. In this case, the first "Esu moment" is a commentary on the adaptation's society.

The perverted process of Lear's acquisition of power has its consequences, "The eating of the last king's festering corpse was by no means a test but the beginning of a long squalid journey" (8). The imagery of violence and cannibalism is presented in many scenes in the play: Lear refers to ravens, blood-suckers and flesh-eaters and the likes; he thinks his daughters are going to devour him; Edmund kills Cordelia's bodyguard; Cordelia is also hanged (54-7). Lear also recognizes the fact that he is the chief-protagonist of the squalid journey, "I am king here, for there is none worse here than I" (12). While Lear symbolizes what is wrong with the society, the scene also suggests that the people are complicit in their own failure and impoverishment. This is suggested through the Sailors and dancers who celebrate Lear's ascension to the throne with fanfare (12), even though they are aware of the flawed system that brought him to power.

In the second “Esu moment” we have Ananci playing the role of *Esu* who toys with people’s emotion in order to set them up. Ananci meets Cordelia whose portrayal also diverges from Shakespeare’s. When Cordelia enquires about her father, Ananci does not give a straight-forward answer, but only tells her enough to whet her appetite to know more. She is thus persuaded look for him at the castle where she is not supposed to go in the first place:

Cordelia: Fool?

Ananci: Yes

Cordelia: Where’s my father?

Ananci: big question.

Cordelia: Eh?

Ananci: Would you like to know where your father is, or do you prefer to know where he thinks he is? If it’s the latter, I must tell you Cordelia that you should not go there.

Cordelia: Why?

Ananci: Because it is an insane place.

Cordelia: Fool.

Ananci: Yes.

Cordelia: I want to know where my father is.

Ananci: Honestly?

Cordelia: Sincerely

Ananci: Lear is where Lear is and no amount of thinking can change that.

Cordelia: Where?

Ananci: Why in his own head.

Cordelia: And where is Lear’s head?

Ananci: You really are the best of the bunch. Governor plum, King Lear's head is in the chapel and the Chapel is in King Lear's head. It's the first time in a while that both he and his head are in the same place...at the same time (*exits. Cordelia goes to find Lear*). (13-4)

Ananci's cynical response to Cordelia's question--- a silly rant from the Fool as it seems--- is also part of *Esu's* way of putting humanity to the test through words/actions that initially appear to be illogical and/or nonsensical. *Esu* "engages in both a dialectical relationship with those who encounter him" even as he manipulates dialogue which he controls and resolves on his own terms (Falola 11). In this case, *Esu* wants the listeners to fathom the sense contained in the dialogue on their own terms, even though he also wants them to do his bidding. Cordelia does exactly what *Esu/Ananci* would expect: she goes to the chapel to find Lear, sees him clutching his left foot with a missing toe that he claims was "devoured" and appears to be insane (15). Visibly shaken by the sight, Cordelia returns in the following scene and insists that Ananci tells her what he knows about her father. Ananci warns her about the knowledge she seeks and how it can both shock and devastate her but she insists:

Ananci: Whose baggage are you requesting?

Cordelia: My father's

Ananci: Lear's baggage? Heavy, heavy burdensome load

Cordelia: was it painful?

Ananci: oh yes. Yes indeed and not for every back

Cordelia: Please tell me.

Ananci: I shouldn't.

Cordelia: why not Fool?

Ananci: the Burden would become yours and I'm afraid your...back seems inadequate. (16-7)

Ananci describes everybody's (mis)demeanour as "baggage" which accumulate and they bear while on earth. He also considers the secrets that Cordelia wants to acquire

about Lear as part of his (Lear)'s baggage and thinks it's too heavy for her to bear. But she insists on knowing. When he finally whispers into her ears, she is shocked and slumps to the ground (18). From that point, Cordelia changes her attitude towards Lear. She decides not to say anything while he divides his kingdom among his daughters:

Lear: Fairest Cordelia, what do you say?

Cordelia: Nothing.

Lear: Nothing?

Cordelia: Nothing.

Lear: Nothing? Then, nothing will come of nothing. (*He grabs her by the arm*) out! Out! Stinking suzie, pretty pretty, upsetting smell!!!

Goneril: he's going mad.

Regan: going mad, he was mad. He's either sane now or much worse. (25-6)

As Ananci predicts, Cordelia is saddled with Lear's "baggage" to the extent that she begins a gradual process of transformation like *Esu* but, in her case, it is a descent from honour to dishonour, compassion to aggression; she turns from the compassionate young lady that we meet at the beginning of the play into a brutal and callous (wo)man who declares war on her two sisters: Goneril and Regan, whom she heard are planning to kill their father, "Your sisters heard that Lear went to Gloucester to shelter...they are going to kill him" (34). In response to her sisters' threat, she raises an army to disrupt their plans and possibly kill them. She also orders the palace guards and soldiers to pick up arms against anyone who opposes Lear's monarchy, although she also says she hates him because of the brutal fashion in which he seizes the crown.

Cordelia is different from her Shakespeare counterpart in terms of the brutal manner in which she responds to opposition to Lear's authority in *Malick*. Unlike Shakespeare's Cordelia whose "tongue-tied love conceals (and so reveals) true emotion" (Maguire 40-1), the Cordelia that we are presented in *Lear Ananci* revels in

irrationality and violence. She is also different to the way the Yoruba perceive their women as the symbol of “*ero*” (coolness/compassion) which is an essential aspect of the female principle. Although at first Cordelia rejects her father when she becomes aware of how he is enthroned, “What could I say to such a man? I’ve unmasked the devil and found that he is my father...from this day forth, all that King Lear shall hear from me...is silence” (18); she turns around later, requesting for weapon to crush any opposition to his monarchy (35). She insists that her father is divinely chosen to rule, “despite the difference with him, we [will return] King Lear to his rightful place on the throne” (35), and commands the palace guards to assemble and be ready to fight and die to ensure her father seizes the crown. At that point in time, Ananci is confused and wonders aloud, “What a contrary woman. You refuse to speak to your father because of the horrible way in which he became king. Now you’re more than [willing] to fight to the death to give him back the ignominious throne” (35). By birth and association with Lear, Cordelia’s humanity is “destroyed”-- her sense of womanhood and compassion is replaced by uncanny cruelty and sadistic temperament similar to her sisters. She speaks unabashedly (15, 35), does not hesitate to mete out punishment on her father’s subjects or push them beyond their limits (53). Thus, Thomas’s reworking of Cordelia can readily be seen as an indictment of his society.

The Yoruba saying, “*Omo t’eya ba bi, eya lo maa jo*” (The baboon can only produce its own species) or “*Omo t’aye ba bi, l’aye ngbe jo*” meaning circumstance of birth often determines temperament, or even more specifically, society produces its own kind of people, describes Cordelia in the context of the play. More so because, like her sisters, Cordelia is the product of Lear’s violation of Malick’s irrational social/cultural/spiritual law which stipulates that monarchs should not raise children, whereas his affair with three different women produced three daughters named after their mothers. Lear, in changing that status quo, also does it in the most immoral form possible in a strict Yoruba sense---the women are mistresses and not legal wives, and “each as arrogant as the court itself” (12). The law, a creation of Thomas, negates the real essence of the spiritual signification of the throne or even the way the Yoruba perceive life wherein marriage and procreation are a system of continuity. Lear’s ascension to the throne through a perverted, albeit, horrific cannibalistic process, suggests the kind of person that Cordelia could possibly grow up to become, knowing that she is the product of a spiritually and mentally polluted person. Thus, Cordelia is

presented as the most vivid example of how the perversion of the political process impacts negatively on individuals in the society.

What *Lear Ananci* also presents in Lear and Cordelia's relationship beyond the father—daughter configuration is the perversion of the *ako a t'abo* (male/female) principle, which indicates a breakdown of both cosmic and mundane sense of order that governs the castle, the seat of power and Malick as a society. There is thus a dangerous alliance between Lear and Cordelia especially because Lear's "ako" with which Cordelia's "ero" should have a correspondence has been fouled when he, "places his mouth securely upon Malick's anus and sucks hard...and then belch[es] loudly in celebration of having devoured stinking flesh" (7-8), thereby polluting the air and throwing the society into dis-equilibrium.

The third "Esu moment" show how we can understand the play as an indictment of the colonialists in the socio-political failure in the Caribbean. Although *Lear Ananci* holds Trinidadian (and Caribbean) leadership responsible for the failures that characterize postcolonial socio-political life in that region, it also indicts Shakespeare (colonialists) in Caribbean affairs, through Shakespeare's characters from *King Lear* that it retains: Gloucester and his two sons, Edmund and Edgar who are used to dramatize this particular point. These Shakespearean characters' actions recall the brutal economic and political activities of British companies in the West Indies. These companies: the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa (and the West Indies) and its successor, Royal Africa Company, controlled economic activities, especially Sugar, Sugarcane and Slavery (the three 'S'), from around the 1660-1698. After the British also came the Portuguese, the Dutch and France. The French Company of the West Indies was established in 1664 prior to officially seizing what has come to be known as "French-Caribbean" shortly before the abolition of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (Dunn 1972; Heuman 15-6). In the play, both Edgar and Edmund fight over the land, swear to kill each other and claim divine right over it. Ananci comments on this brutal exchange between the "colonial" characters when he assumes the role of the Shakespearean Fool.

The "Esu moment" here deals with Esu's call to people that an attitude of mind must necessarily be cultivated to create a situation where they are not led into assuming (encouraging/doing) what they cannot control; that is, the temptations to

engage in self-destructive acts (Falola 14). *Esu*'s role as the *orisa* who whispers into the human mind to cause confusion is shown at play here. Edmund, who had earlier been disowned by his father, manipulates him to believe that Edgar is planning to kill him. When Gloucester, worried that he has not seen Edgar for a while, wonders if he has gone back to the library because he loves reading, Edmund quickly tells him that Edgar is actually reading the story of Oedipus. He reminds Gloucester of how Oedipus killed his father. Gloucester suddenly becomes afraid thinking Edgar plans to kill him (19-22). Edmund succeeds in pitching Gloucester against Edgar. While Gloucester proposes to banish Edgar, Edmund suggests, "He has to die. Banish him and like Oedipus he will return to sever your head. He must die" (22). As with Shakespeare's characters, Gloucester thinks Edmund is helping him to get rid of his problem, but cannot see that Edmund is acting in self-interest.

Gloucester tells Edmund how he was abandoned by his mother, "the blasted woman" who left him (Edmund) at his doorstep with a note, "illegitimate relations bring legitimate guilt in swaddling garment" (20). Gloucester insists that Edmund's claim to his (Gloucester) property is unfounded and baseless. Edmund thinks "this bastard thing" is "like the wind you never know it's there until it affects you"; he decides to fight for his right as the first son, "I will master the wind; I will be the legitimate illegitimate" (22-3). Edmund also accuses Gloucester of killing his own father to become Earl (21), and trying to rob him (Edmund) of legitimate claim to land and property in favour of Edgar, who also swears to do anything to claim the contested land, "This land is mine. It is my divine right...because it belonged to my forefathers, God knows they fought the devil for it" (30). Meanwhile, Lear watches them from a distance and plans to outwit the family, "like Raven they wait on my throne...I need to...to give them a share before they devour me...give them a small corner to govern, dull their ambition...whet their carnivorous appetite" (23). In order to outwit his father and brother, Edgar aligns with Lear. The conflict involving the Shakespearean characters and Lear's with his people are not resolved. In fact, what is suggested at the "end" of the play is that the actors have returned to the point where they started, even as the situation that is dramatized reflects what happened in the Caribbean past, "I'm afraid the situation here today is very much the same as before" (65). While *Lear Ananci* depicts Lear's flawed process of ascension to Malick's throne as a metaphor for the dystopia in Trinidad & Tobago, the conflict involving the

Shakespearean characters shows the negative effect of external interference in the country's politics and Caribbean socio-political system in general.

In this section of the thesis, I argued that *Lear Ananci* uses the Yoruba storytelling tradition through the Ananci/*Esu* archetype to examine the postcolonial political failures in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean as a whole. The play also uses a number of Shakespearean characters to illustrate the adverse effect of continued colonial influence on the Caribbean society.

Djanet Sears' *Harlem Duet*

Crying foul and 'legitimizing' the discontent of an *Omo ale*²⁸

"*Ibi ori da 'ni si la a gbe*"

[Wherever fate determines is home(land)].

--- Yoruba proverb---

"I think [*Othello*] is racist, and I think it is not. But *Othello*'s example shows me that if I insist on resolving the contradiction, I will forge only lies and distortions [...] the discourse of racial difference is inescapably embedded in this play just as it was embedded in Shakespeare's culture and our own."

(Mason Vaughan 70).

In this section, I examine Djanet Sears' acclaimed 1997 play *Harlem Duet* from a Yoruba perspective, focusing in particular on the play's dramatization of *orirun*. *Orirun* is defined in more detail below, but generally speaking it refers to identity and a sense of affiliation or belonging. Previous scholarship on *Harlem Duet*, and Sears herself, have discussed the play in terms of identity and belonging, but never from a specifically Yoruba point of view---even though Sears travelled extensively in Africa before writing the play, and explicitly embraces African dramaturgy in her other works. This section extends existing scholarship on *Harlem Duet* by looking at Billie and *Othello*'s struggle for belonging from the framework of *orirun*. The three main

²⁸ Bastard, not necessarily product of an illicit sexual relation.

things I will focus on in the play to discuss *orirun* are: Billie's handkerchief, the role of music, and characterization.

Definitions of *orirun* are diverse, but derive from four related sources or categories of understanding. These categories are: 1) filial ties between parents and children, or spouses (Apter 363-5), and relationships constructed from sharing a particular lineage (Olajubu 29-30); 2) social interaction or integration, or a sense of communal belonging built on blood relationship (Akinjogbin 2002:104-18); 3) land or spatial construct by which one recalls the first category suggested by Apter and; 4) knowledge from totems or iconic objects/images by which the individual is able to forge a knowledge of their *orirun* in regard to the aforementioned three categories. At its simplest, *orirun* could be described as one's sense of origin. People claim *orirun* even after they have moved from their place of origin, either through physical migration, or having been born by parents who have migrated to that new place prior to the time they (children) were born.

I also construe *orirun* to mean the spiritual, psychological and/or (meta) physical attempt by an individual to reclaim her/his ancestry in a new/foreign environment based on that individual's sense of her/himself. In this specific case, *orirun* could be interpreted to mean "Identity"--- the sense of "who we are" in contrast to "who we are not" (Apter 356). Mark Currie proposes two ways of identity formation that are also relevant to what Sears has done in her dramaturgy. According to Currie, a sense of identity can be expressed through relationship or narrative. Identity could be relational, established through relationship with other people in terms of understanding the difference between "us" and "them" and determined by our own sense of self. On the other hand, we could use stories/narratives, especially key events in our lives to organize and form a "precise" sense of ourselves. In other words, stories that we tell, and characters through which we tell those stories, actually represent who and what we think of ourselves (Currie 17). As I will show below in *Afrika Solo* and *Harlem Duet* which concerns us, Sears has certainly demonstrated these two ways of identity formation.

Harlem Duet was first produced in Toronto by Nightwood Theatre in 1997, and has gone on to achieve considerable critical acclaim and commercial success (McKinnon 2014:290-320). The play tells the story of an African-American couple, Othello and Billie, whose marriage ends before the play begins, when Othello leaves

Billie for a White woman, Mona. As the play unfolds, we learn that the collapse of Billie and Othello's relationship was, if not caused, then certainly hastened, by their individual experiences of--- and reaction to ---racism and sexism. Sears mentions that *Harlem Duet* began with her contemplation of the kind of mythic figure that Shakespeare's Othello symbolizes, "As a veteran theatre practitioner of African Descent, Shakespeare's Othello had haunted me since I first was introduced to him...Othello is the first African portrayed in the annals of western literature. In an effort to exorcise this ghost, I have written *Harlem Duet*" ("Notes" 14). Sears's view on the canon emphasizes her feelings of ostracism that her first encounter with Othello provoked, noting that although artistic values are arbitrary but their socio-political implications are not (McKinnon 2010:5); thus, "Othello" is a name that conveys the emotion of the black experience that she narrates in the play and, in order to "dismantle" that haunting image, Sears turns towards her own people, her "lost" origin. She identifies "three steps of transformation" namely: identifying a place of complaining, saying it aloud, and locating a creative point for its expression (14); and she also adopts a narrative technique that incorporates the combination of both the dramatic space and dramatic time that shows her implicit knowledge of the Yoruba culture and aesthetic imperative.

Harlem Duet has enjoyed a rich production history and critical reception which focuses on its response to American racism, and to Canadian fixation on the Shakespearean canon. Linda Burnett examines the play as a response to American racism. She argues that Sears uses Billie and Othello--- and the real-life crossroads of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X Boulevard in Harlem, where Billie's apartment is located—to represent two alternative responses to racism for African-Americans: integration or separation. She contends that Sears shows internalised otherness in Othello, who loses his own cultural identity by aspiring towards a White culture (symbolised by Mona), while Billie transitions from an intense pride in her culture through anger and suspicion to full-blown racism that nearly destroys her. Burnett concludes that, "Othello and Billie shift from a middle ground of shared cultural pride and sense of the wrongness of discrimination to a place where one repudiates Black culture, the other White culture" (6). Peter Dickinson examines the play beyond its "Canadian rendered, ethnic, racial and classed subjectivities," using Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theory developed in his work, *Black Skin, White Masks*,

to read *Harlem Duet* alongside Cesaire's *A Tempest* and Carlin's *Not Now, Desdemona*, other Shakespeare adaptations that form part of Black people's "experience of colonization and the expression of cultural imperialism" (188-208). Fischlin contends that *Harlem Duet* occupies a unique place in the performance history of Black theatrical aesthetics in a Canadian cultural context, and fits in as part of the multiple ways in which adaptations of Shakespeare have been deployed to create Canadian national discourses (Fischlin 2002:313-4). In light of Sears's response to *Othello*, regarding her country's obsession with a classical canon that leaves her and her Black community feeling alienated and excluded, McKinnon examines how the play "interrogates her Canadian society's privileged narratives by revisiting, restaging, and retelling [Shakespeare] from a previously marginalized perspective" in order to "critique or challenge the cultural capital and hierarchies that [Shakespeare] privileges" (2-4), such as by stripping "Othello" of his/its mythic symbolism.

From a Yoruba perspective, *Harlem Duet* can be seen as an extension of the playwright's quest for what the Yoruba define as *orirun*, an interest she makes explicit in her first autobiographical solo show, *Afrika Solo*, and continues in an implicit way through *Harlem Duet* and *Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God*. Two proverbs are particularly suggestive of the dimensions of *orirun* that I talk about here: "*Orere oni jin ko ma ni'peku*" (No matter how far the horizon, it has an end) and "*Okun kii gun titi ko ma ni 'bere*" (No matter how long a rope, it must have started somewhere) respectively. The alternate imagery of the end (*ipeku*) and beginning (*ibere*) in both proverbs, underlines the cultural significance of origin. Another proverb: "*Ile l'abo isinmi oko*" (There is no place like home) further underscores the value of emotional/psychological means of reunion with one's ancestry.²⁹

I will first outline Sears's own personal quest for *orirun*, in order to help establish the importance of *orirun* to *Harlem Duet*. While *Harlem Duet* clearly should not be reduced to a reflection of Sears's biography or intentions, she herself explicitly draws readers' and spectators' attention to the real-life events she responds to in her work, and therefore the reception of *Harlem Duet* has often been informed by this knowledge.

²⁹ This is not an adequate explanation but it does provide a sense of what is intended with the proverb.

Born in England to a Guyanese father and a Jamaican mother and moved at a young age to Canada where she now lives, Sears's multi-ethnic heritage is not in doubt; yet she also identifies strongly with Africa (and the Yoruba) both in her outlook and craft. The autobiographical solo show, *Afrika Solo*, represents and recounts Sears's attempt to reclaim herself in Africa through self-knowledge. *Afrika Solo* tells the story of how Sears purposely travelled to Africa to educate herself about her past, and to draw from the performative and aesthetic tradition from that past. In her own words, "I was in West Africa and we were getting ready to go into Mali when we went through a town called Djanet. It seemed like I had discovered a little part of myself so I made it mine" (Sears, qtd in Breon).³⁰ More so, her demonstration of a sense of *orirun* through claiming "her real name" in West Africa, corresponds to the notion of remembering and/or reclamation which is "a metaphysical process that involves crossing the boundaries of space, time, history, place, language, corporeality and restricted consciousness in order to make reconnections and mark or name gaps and absences" (Davies 17). In a conversation with Alison Sealy-Smith and Ric Knowles, Sear affirms that "Only in the last thirty years have many of us [people of African descent] decided, 'oh my gosh, we are African'" (Knowles 1998: 29). Joanne Tompkins observes that, "the identity that she [Sears] arrives at is a hybrid form of Guyanese and Jamaican from her parents, British from her birth, Canadian from her current home country, and the many African heritages she has 'adopted'" (Tompkins 36). The fact that Sears recognises that she is African and proclaims amounts, in a Yoruba cultural sense, to her own recognition of her *orirun*—exactly the import of the two proverbs about *ipekun* and *ibere* above--- and by which she is able to escape being described as an "*omo ale*" (a bastard).

Harlem Duet implicitly engages the same issue of *orirun* and sense of identity through its dramatization of the story of Billie and Othello's failed marriage. In the "Notes" which accompany the play (as a preface to the published script, and very often in the form of program notes distributed to spectators at performances of the play) we are told that "*Harlem Duet* [is] a rhapsodic blues tragedy [which] explores the effects of race and sex on the lives of people of African descent. It is a tale of love. A tale of Othello and his first wife, Billie" (14-15). In performing this task, *Harlem Duet* uses the *eeta motif* (three separate entities regarded as one in this case)

³⁰She was Janet Sears before the trip to West Africa.

as a narrative strategy, that makes it possible to have the same *itan* rendered in three time-frames, linked by the same consciousness and purpose. Most of the play takes place in the present, at Billie's apartment in Harlem, locating the conflict in the couple's relationship in the context of contemporary American racial discourse. But the struggle between Billie and Othello also takes place in two other narrative threads, both explicitly tragic: in the 1860s plot, they ("HER" and "HIM") are slaves planning to escape to Canada, but at the last minute, Othello decides not to abandon his white mistress, Miss Dacey. Later, we find him hanged. In another iteration of the story set during the 1920s Harlem Renaissance, Othello ("HE") is a minstrel actor longing to act in a Shakespeare play in the legitimate theatre. When he forsakes Billie ("SHE") for a white woman, she slits his throat.³¹

Although several critics have commented on Sears's innovative treatment of dramatic time and space, none has connected this dramaturgy to Yoruba aesthetic practice. But it should already be apparent to readers of this thesis that Sears's plural and non-linear treatment of time, space, and action---in which events happen not once, but many times, moving both forward and backward in time--- can be seen (or at least productively read as) exemplary of the key aesthetic elements of *itan* and the Orisa-Shakespeare. Sears also mentions that she wants to write a "non-chronologically itinerant prequel" ('Testifyin' iii), to Shakespeare's *Othello* in order to address the issue of African-American identity. The cyclical and seeming indeterminate loop of the plot is in line with the nature of *itan* which, according to Adeeko, emphasizes significant events and "makes explicit both its criteria of deciding truly significant events and the methods in forming those criteria" (83), along with articulating their pedagogical relevance. Other key features of the work noted by critics also reflect the techniques and tactics of Orisa-Shakespeare, including soundscape, symbolism and archetypal characterization. In the following paragraphs, I will examine how these elements work together with the presentation of action in the three timeframes to dramatize how diasporic Yoruba use Shakespeare to lay claim to their *orirun*.

³¹ Sears uses speech prefixes "Her" and "Him," and "She" and "He" to distinguish the 1860s and the 1920s versions of the characters, respectively, but also to signal that all three sets of characters are supposed to be played by the same two actors. The play requires three other actors to play the roles of Canada, Amah, and Magi.

From an Orisa-Shakespeare perspective, the spirituality of the experience that we encounter in *Harlem Duet*, is symbolized by the corner of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X Boulevard, location of the conflict of the Harlem scene set in the present. The crossroads is an *orita-meta* (crossroads), an elaboration of the mystical aspect of the *eeta* motif. The deeper Yoruba connotation of the *eeta motif* is located in the *orita-meta*, which is a complex term that includes the front yard of a house and/or point of extreme dilemma and confusion that are represented by both the setting of the main plot of the play and Billie's state of mind. As Dickinson writes, "the spatial situation of Billie and Othello's apartment at the corner of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X Boulevards [is] an intersection that reflects the sense of Billie being at a crossroads, one that she in fact is unable to cross, of her being caught in a feedback loop, where her life with Othello repeats itself constantly inside her head" (191), even as she tries unsuccessfully to resolve the dilemma.

The connection of the three time periods to the same location shows that Harlem is the initial notion of *orirun* shared by both Othello and Billie.³² It is "initial" because as events unfold, we realize that Othello's concept of *orirun* differs from Billie's based on experience and perception. Harlem's connection to the history of slavery and the Black Consciousness movement foreshadows the reactions of Billie and Othello to the quest for lost origin/*orirun*. As Sidney Bremer writes, Harlem is "an organic place, a birthright community" and "cultural institution" which embodied the "history, images, social circumstances, and physical experience" (Bremer 47-8), of Black people. Sears also mentions this point though differently:

The play is set in Harlem in New York...And it is, it's a central location in the psyches of Black people. Harlem is almost mythological. It's this place where the best and the worst of everything Black exists or has existed. It has an extraordinary history, a rich culture and my relationship to it is borderless, very much like my relationship to Blackness. Harlem feels like another country, not exactly the USA, a country unto itself that I am part of as well. (Sears, qtd in Buntin)

³²Sears seems to have been inspired by Harlem Renaissance writers/literature in her choice of setting. As Bremer observes, the streets of Harlem Renaissance are often invoked by name and imbued with transcendent power in Harlem Renaissance literature; and in so doing, Harlem transcended the limits of place by acquiring some sort of sensory life-force (50).

In the Act one scene four scene set against the background of the polyrhythmic chorus of strings that accompany Martin Luther King's speech, Billie and Othello recall some edifice of historical landmarks and the landscape of Harlem, by which they demonstrate their own psychological connection to Harlem as their place of origin:

Othello: I never thought I'd miss Harlem

Billie: You still think it's a reservation?

Othello: Homeland/reservation

Billie: A sea of Black faces.

Othello: Africatown, USA.

Billie: When we lived in the village, sometimes I'd be on the subway and I'd miss

(Pauses)

Billie: When we lived in the village, sometimes I'd be on the subway and I'd miss my step...And I'd just walk. I love seeing all these brown faces.

Othello: Yes...

Billie: Since they knocked down the old projects, I can see the Schomberg Museum from here. You still can't make out Harlem Hospital. I love that I can see the Apollo from our—from my balcony. (56-7)

Polyrhythmic music and speech by Martin Luther King in the background of the scene further emphasises the couple's psychological and mental connection to Harlem. They both aspire to connect to it. In the 1928 Prologue scene, this sentiment is expressed by Billie who tells Othello that, "Harlem's the place to be now. Everyone who's anyone is coming here now. It's our time. In our place" (21). "Time" and "Place" are merged as imagery into Harlem, which corresponds to the cultural significance of *orirun* and stresses psychological/mental connection that is unhindered by spatial and temporal barriers. In recognizing Harlem as their *orirun*, they also implicitly assert their identity as Black people. At that moment, we are also shown

that their love for each other is strengthened by the connection that they both have to Harlem. As they try to make love, Othello imagines that her body symbolizes Harlem (and other American cities) of their dream.

In a flashback in Act II, scene seven set in Harlem Othello and Billie also express the same sentiment about Harlem as “a sanctuary” and place of origin/*orirun*, “filled with Black doctors and dentists.” They view Harlem as a protected place where “Black boutiques, Black bookstores, Black groceries... Black banks [are] owned by Blacks from the faintest gold to the bluest bronze” (106-7), even as they are protected by law. This initial dream and sense of Harlem as *orirun* also serves to strengthen the love that they have for each other---a love that is symbolized by the strawberry-spotted handkerchief. While Harlem was the exotic place of origin that the couple attempts to connect to psychologically, the handkerchief becomes a concrete symbol, a material object of that quest, on which they both project the dream of unalloyed love for each other, and filial relationship upon which they imagine a common source of origin. The handkerchief becomes a physical object that binds the couple together and a symbol that links their past with the present.

In the background to the 1928 scene between SHE and HE, a cello and bass produce a melancholic kind of music that is accompanied by Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech which he appears to sing in a slow polyrhythmic improvisational fashion. SHE recalls the genesis of the handkerchief:

Remember...Remember when you gave this to me? Your
mother’s handkerchief. There’s magic in the web of it. Little
strawberries. It’s so beautiful—delicate. You kissed my
fingers...and with each kiss a new promise you made...swore
yourself to me...for all eternity...remember? (21)

In this speech, SHE uses the handkerchief as a source of memory by which she tries to remind HE of his *orirun* in terms of genealogy. She then expands the scope of the handkerchief’s significance with an emotional appeal that uses the symbolism of the mother (and its connection to the handkerchief) to effectively pin that emotional and mental connection down. In another scene between HIM and HER set in 1860 Harlem, our attention is also drawn to the handkerchief. In the background a blues music blends with an American voice reading from the Declaration of Independence;

while HER admires the handkerchief, HIM uses its *itan* to trace his own *orirun* that Billie in present day Harlem will make a recourse to later on:

Him: *It was my mother's. Given her by my father...from his mother before that. When she died she gave it to me, insisting that when I found...chose...chose...chose a wife...that I gave it to her...to you [my] heart*

Her: Oh...It is so beautiful.

Him: There's magic in the web of it.

Her: So delicate...so old.

Him: A token...an antique of our ancient love. (35; emphasis added)

In the two scenes above, our attention is drawn to two of the categories of claiming *orirun*; namely, filial relation (motherhood and marriage) and an iconic object which is the handkerchief. I will examine these two categories carefully in order to illuminate Othello and Billie's individual reactions to *orirun* based on their emotions and experience.

In the Yoruba culture, the mother is regarded as the “unacknowledged” primary source of a child's *orirun*. She is “unacknowledged” in the sense that a child's lineage is primarily considered from the father's line of descent; however, the Yoruba also recognize that the mother's womb remains the child's first point of contact with the earth and should have been her/his “original homeland.” As an expression of that recognition of the mother's unique place, the Yoruba consider her as an *orisa* in her own right, hence the saying “*Orisa bi iya osi*” (No deity is comparable to the mother). When Billie traces the handkerchief's journey and how it came to be in her possession, it is to that epistemic knowledge that she refers. In the following scene where Othello presents a short *itan* regarding the journey of the handkerchief, our attention is also drawn to the same belief, in regard to the irreplaceable connection of the mother to the child, a connection wrought from the womb, the significance of which is recalled from time to time and strengthened by the blood ties between both the mother and the child. In the discussion of *Otaelo*, I mentioned the “Mother within” as that metaphysical connection of a mother to her

child--- a connection that also determines the fate/destiny of the child. The references to the handkerchief are meant to recall that same connection, albeit from a slightly different angle. In this case, a sense of continuity is suggested, in which case the child is said to be the ancestor of the parent (through the symbolism of the handkerchief) in a relationship that is reversed when the parents die.

Hence, the short *itan* that both scenes present of the handkerchief is to draw our attention to the filial relation between Othello and his mother, which constitutes his *orirun*. We should also have in mind that the assumption here regarding Othello's *orirun* through his mother, stems from the Yoruba belief that mothers possess certain authority over their children; an authority that is strengthened by the "*ikunle abiyamo*" and/or the "*omu iya*" (kneeling and breastfeeding) psycho-social and cultural sensibilities identified with giving birth and nurturing. In this case, the potency of the authority derives more from her spiritual rather than temporal position as a parent, and is based on "*adabi*" (Except it is not so), that is, unless the child did not pass through her womb or suckle her breast (Opefeyitimi 164-7). In drawing attention to the handkerchief this way, Billie not only asserts its significance as Othello's *orirun*, but also brings up the importance of motherhood, which is reinforced by the images of kneeling (*ikunle abiyamo*) and breastfeeding (*omu iya*).

While connecting the handkerchief to motherhood, Billie also draws our attention to its connection to a spouse, an opening up possibility that she exploits later on. In Act II, scene five, set in an unspecified "present" in Harlem, Othello is now with Mona. But, when he comes back into Billie's house to pack his things, both of them realize that they still have a pull on each other, and end up making love. Afterwards Billie says:

Sometimes...sometimes when we make love. *Sometimes every moment lines up into one moment.* And I'm holding you. *And I can't tell where I end, or you begin. I see everything. All my ancestors lined up below me...like a Makonde statue, or something.* It's like...I know. I know I'm supposed to be here. Everything is here. (60; emphasis added)

Here, we are presented another perspective of how people can forge a sense of origin which is through sexual union even as the motherhood concept is attached. The

reference to the Makonde statue is relevant to this understanding. Noted for their household figures, objects and mask carvings, the Makondes' most important abstract figures are the *Shetani* (from the Arabic word, "Shaytan" meaning "devil") which probably must be the one that Billie refers to here. The *Shetani* are sculpture of various abstract, animal and anthropomorphic objects usually with a combination of attributes that are deeply rooted in certain archetypes. They are basically products of mythology and popular belief, often identified with malevolent spirits, *ukunduka*, for example, which is thought to feed from sexual intercourse (Kingdon 132; Hsu and Low 44); while it is possible to view Billie's reference to the Makonde *ukunduka* in relation to the sexual relation between Mona and Othello as I will show later on, it also suggests another aspect that connects to the filial relation between a mother and her child that the memory of the handkerchief recalls.

Being a matrilineal culture, the Makonde trace their line of descent from a female ancestor, and the origin of a child through the mother's. Although this is in contrast to the Yoruba culture, the connection could be found in the Yoruba *akose w'aye* and *imori* ("Stepping into the World" and "Knowing the Head") rites in which a new-born's entire life chapter, so to speak, is revealed through a process of *Ifa* divination. What is unique about these rites is that, it is the mother's name and spiritual connection to the child that is required and not the father's. This is one of the points of reference that makes the mother an *orisa* as I earlier mentioned, and strengthens the "*adabi*" as a tool by a parent to enforce obedience on their child(ren).

In this particular context however, Billie's reference to Makonde (let's have in mind the aspect of sexual symbolism) stresses marriage and sexual union. Thus, Billie's speech above shows the spiritual power in sex and how copulation functions as a way of connecting to a certain "moment" that defines one's being, especially when she adds, "all my ancestors lined up below me...and I can't tell where I end, or you begin" (60). In this case, our attention should be drawn to the cultural value that is attached to "*aya*" (the female bosom) or, more specifically, "*fifi aya lu aya*" (Hitting the chest against another) which is euphemism for sexual intercourse, that a mother uses (also under *adabi*) to exact a will over her child(ren) through recourse to the inherent power in the sexual relationship between her and her husband (the children[ren]'s father). Billie uses a similar tactic, making a demand from her husband as she does here while drawing attention to her breasts:

Him: (*Pause*) I want to be with you 'till I'm too old to know.

You know that.

Her: [E]ven when my breasts fall to my toes?

Him: I'll pick them up and carry them around for you.

Her: And when I can't remember my own name?

Him: I'll call it out a thousand times a day.

Her: *Then I'll think you're me.*

Him: *I am you.* (35; emphasis added)

In drawing attention to the “*aya*” (breasts), Billie also draws from the authority that she has acquired in her relationship with Othello. This is in the sense that the imagery of the breasts recalls those of Othello’s mother and its’ expected function as a psychological reconstruction of his source of origin as I have argued previously. In the scene, it is clear that both HIM and HER understand the import of that symbolic gesture, especially when HER says, “I’ll think you’re me” and HIM responds, “I am you” to foreground the fact that, in as much as the *orirun* of a child could be traced to the mother through filial relation, so too could a wife’s link to the man’s (husband) source of origin. It is an intrinsic aspect of Yoruba culture that consequent upon marriage, the couple’s identity has become shared, and connected as one--- a sense of which we derive from the above conversation.

Billie is however persuaded to make a recourse to both this aspect of shared *orirun* between husband and wife and the viability of sexual power to achieve the same purpose due to her discovery that Othello is having an affair with Mona. Although not seen but heard, Mona’s encroachment of their affair is very disturbing, at least to Billie. When Othello comes to pack his remaining possessions from Billie’s apartment, the stage direction provides a casual view of Mona’s “appearance” thus: “*We see nothing of her but brief glimpses of a bare arm and a waft of light brown hair*” (47), and through the short conversation that follows:

Othello: It’s OK Mona, she’s in there. Why don’t you wait in the car.

Mona: (*Offstage*) She’ll have to get used to me sometime.

Othello: I'll be down in a flash. It won't take me that long (*She doesn't answer*)

Hey, hey, hey! (47)

By the time Mona returns in the next scene, Billie becomes aware of her strong hold over Othello. He is completely rattled by Mona's silence. At first Billie finds Othello's frantic reaction funny especially because Mona's voice was only heard on the intercom:

Mona: (*Through intercom*) It's Mona. Could I have a word with Othello.

Othello: (*Overlapping*) Shit!

Billie: One second please.

(*He rushes to the intercom, while attempting to put his clothes back on [...] He puts a finger over his mouth indicating to Billie to be quiet*)

Othello: Hey Mone...Mone, I'm not done yet. There's more here than I imagined. Why don't I call you when I 'm done.

(*Mona does not respond. Othello's demeanour changes*)

Othello: Mona? Mona? I'm coming, OK? I'll be right...Just wait there for a second, Ok? OK? (61)

Although Billie does not react immediately as Othello tries incoherently to explain Mona's call, "I'll be back in...She wants to help...help pack...I mean...I" while he struggles to button his shirt at the same time. As the stage direction tells us, "*Billie does not move*" (61). The silences here in this scene, Billie's and Mona's, say a lot about the direction of the story from that point onward. As McKinnon rightly observes, apart from Othello's reaction to Mona's silence confirming her power over him, irrevocably shattering the renewed rapport between Othello and Billie and ending any hope of reconciliation, her absence is even paradoxically more powerful, "threatening [Billie's] presence" and making us to "imagine the worst" (126); the worst, being what Billie resorts to--- using the knowledge of Othello's *orirun* to cast a

spell on the handkerchief in order to get him back from Mona (and possibly punish whoever touches the handkerchief).

At this point in the play, we begin to see two different attitudes to the same notion of *orirun*: one driven by knowledge but marred by infidelity and the other by emotion and vengeance, both of which are underlined by the sense of “who we are” and “who we are not.” As I mentioned earlier, one can form a sense of identity through relationship with other people even in a new/foreign land. Yoruba understanding regarding connecting to one’s *orirun* this way is explained with the saying “*Ibi ori dani si laa gbe*” that is, wherever fate determines is home/origin. While the Yoruba notion of “*Ibi ori dani si laa gbe*” is to promote the sense of origin in one’s new abode irrespective of spatial and temporal dislocation from one’s original homeland, it also takes into cognizance the essentiality of harmonious co-existence. This belief is itself underlined by their sense of a common humanity. When they also say “*Aye kan lo wa*” (One humanity exists), it is to buttress the knowledge regarding locating home wherever one resides, either by birth, sojourn, marriage or association of any sort so long as the environment is characterized by harmony.

Othello’s action should be understood from this cultural perspective of “*Ibi ori dani si laa gbe*,” which could be deduced from his remark, “My culture is Wordsworth, Shaw, *Leave it to Beaver*, *Dirty Harry*” (73). As the titles of the television programme, film and notable authors suggest, Othello’s idea of origin is shaped by both a historical and contemporary worldview that privileges diversity rather than that of a monolithic culture that Harlem has come to represent for him: a source of origin that refuses to let go of its past history of violence, bitterness, hatred and uncertainty that Billie abhors in her heart. Othello also realizes that his life can only have meaning by coming to terms with his present reality, which includes dealing with racism which he experiences from his colleagues in the office on a daily basis, rather than holding onto a particular idea of home that exists only in his imagination. In fact, in this same scene, Othello also expresses his desire for Harlem, his original homeland, as much as Billie, “that distant thing I know nothing of, but yearn to hold for my very own” (73). But he also reminds her that, “People change... That’s just human nature. Our experiences, our knowledge transforms us” (73). He realizes from experience that Harlem, with its history of slavery and racial struggles, will remain a dreamland for both Billie and himself; an exotic place, an ideal place of origin only in

their imagination, “We struttin’ around professing some imaginary connection for a land we don’t know. Never seen. Never gonna see.” In that same scene set in the present Harlem, with Malcolm X’s rhetoric in the background, he asks Billie, “What difference does colour make?” and tells her that “You are the problem if you don’t see beyond the colour of [your] skin” (73). Othello realizes that people around them have become part of their new community, hence the need to establish a “new” origin in the midst of people and relationship which affect them and they affect in turn, but devoid of hatred based on racial difference.

However, given that Othello’s recourse to this cultural value is tainted by infidelity, Billie interprets his posture differently and calls him “A Black man afflicted with Negrophobia”; a “Corporeal malediction”, and “a crumbled racial epidermal schema[...] causing predilections to coitus denegrification” (66). Brown-Guillory contends that Othello is misguided and delusional (159), while Kidnie insists that “Othello is selling out Black culture and heritage in a misguided effort to gain white respect” (42). Although the type of racism that Billie experienced is not the same as Othello’s, he brings to his own experience an understanding that allows him to see clearly and to critically assess situation especially at his work place where he has to prove that he is capable all the time, “any error [...] only goes to prove them [his white colleagues] right” (54), and to relate with the same people without the kind of hatred that Billie abhors in her mind, “[i]njustice against Blacks can’t be cured by injustice against Whites” (53). Whereas Billie finds his explanation untenable, “Progress is going to White schools...proving we’re as good as Whites...like some holy grail...all that we’re taught in those White schools. All that is in us. Our success in Whiteness. We religiously seek to have what they have. Access to the White man’s world. The White man’s job” (55). Thus, by the time Mona eventually “shows” up and shatters every possibility of mending the cracks on the walls of their marriage, and Othello insists, “Things change, Billie. I am not my skin. My skin is not me” (74), as a final note of registering his disposition towards the new society, Billie resorts to the same handkerchief by which she recalls Othello’s initial *orirun* through his mother, and projects her own connection to the same based on their marriage.

Billie’s frustration should be understood given her level of commitment and investment to the marriage and Othello’s life. She educated him with the inheritance from her mother’s wealth and suffered two miscarriages. She resorts to herbalism and

a vengeful utilization of her *aje* which she projects into the handkerchief as the final attempt to keep their marriage and make him respond to her own sense of self. According to Teresa Washington, *aje* is the “biological, physical, and spiritual force of creativity, social and political enforcement”; it is also “the spiritual vision, divine authority, power of the word, and *ase*, the power to bring desires and ideas into being” (Washington 13-4). The scene opens with Billie

[...] *by the chemical factory at the table. The book of Egyptian Alchemy sits open upon it. Something is boiling in the flask and steam is coming out of the condenser. With rubber gloved hands she adds several drops of a violet liquid into the flask. She picks up a large white handkerchief with pretty red strawberries embroidered on it.*” (75)

Billie, having combined the required ingredients which she puts on fire to boil, she chants an incantation--- *itan*--- tracing the “journeys” of the handkerchief, spanning four generations from whom Othello has descended. This chant also centres specifically on Othello’s maternal line of descent. She then invokes the *orisa*, “My sable warrior...fight with me. I would fight with you...suffer with you...” (76), in order to seal the process and which constitutes a manifestation of *aje*.

Billie’s manifestation of *aje* derives from the power to enact spiritual communication through *Oro* (Power of words), and *ofo ase* (the power to pray effectively), *ayajo* (power of incantations), and *aasan* (the power to curse and drive insane) (Washington 14-7).³³We are also informed through the stage direction that, “*The contents of the flask have been transformed from violet to clear. BILLIE places the handkerchief onto a large tray. Then with tongs, she takes the hot flask and pours the contents over the handkerchief. She retrieves a vial from the table, opens it*” (76). In a Yoruba context, the efficacy of Billie’s projection of the *aje* is possible through her effective utilization of a form of *Oro* called *gbolohun* which, in this particular case, is the *itan* of the handkerchief and the invocation of the *orisa*. These types of *Oro* and *gbolohun* (incantations), include *ofo/ogede* and *awure*, which either work in favour or against the individual, depending on what purpose they are directed. While *ofo/ogede* refers to a powerful poetic genre considered intensely efficacious and

³³ I have borrowed the term “manifestation of *aje*” from Washington.

downright dangerous, and invoked by people (usually medicine-men and those versed in the art) in order to realign the balance of spiritual forces so that they can work in their favour (either for good or bad depending on intention), *awure* is usually derived from the *Ifa* corpus, and are rendered to bring about blessing and good fortune (Barber 362-3). The former is often invoked basically to instil fear and engender compliance to set conditions, while the use of the latter is driven by contrary emotions and intentions. In this case, Billie uses *ofo/ogede* which she strengthens by aligning her own consciousness with the cosmic through invoking the power of *Oya*, the “sable warrior”; the female *orisa* noted for virulent anger and turbulence; and satisfied that the potion is ready, she tells us “Anyone who touches it—the handkerchief, will come to harm” (102), “anyone” as we imagine would be Mona, or even Othello!

We are also informed that this is not the first time that such a mystical ability will be demonstrated in the play. In a scene set in present-day Harlem, Billie’s friend, Amah informs Magi, Billie’s landlady of trying such a spell on her lover, Andrew, “Once I buried his socks under the blackberry bush by the front door. Sure enough, he always finds his way back home” (29). Amah tries this spell after a Jamaican lady told her that she also rinsed her underwear and used the water to prepare a meal for her lover, with the hope that their love would last for eternity. But from indications, the spell doesn’t seem to have its desired effect, nor does Billie’s. The result is in fact inverted, causing her madness and his own death by her hand.

By dabbling into herbalism without adequate knowledge (although Magi tries to warn her), Billie violates a major rule guiding the use of the *aje*. Billie’s attempt fails because she does not consider the rules and principles that guide against the misuse of such an enormous power. While *aje/Aje* as both power and the wielder of the power, possesses the “cosmic/elemental force” to bring desires and ideas into being, the same are also subjected to strict rules of usage that guard against abuse or even the deployment of that awesome/vicious energy under an intensely emotional condition that is devoid of reason as we have presently. We come to this knowledge at this point in Billie’s conversation with Magi who advises her to be careful of her plans:

Billie: Can you keep a secret?

Magi: No, but that’s never stopped you before.

Billie: Then sorry...

Magi: OK, OK. I promise.

Billie: I am about to plunge into a very dangerous waters. Give me your word.

Magi: You're not going to do something stupid, now.

Billie: Your word?

Magi: Yeh, OK.

Billie: I've drawn a line.

Magi: A line. A line about what?

Billie: I'm returning the handkerchief—the one his mother gave him. The one he gave to me when we first agreed to be together...

Magi: I don't understand.

Billie: I've concocted something...A portion... A plague of sorts...I've soaked the handkerchief...Soaked it in certain tinctures...Anyone who touches it—the handkerchief, will come to harm.

Magi: Now, that is not a line, Billie that is a trench. (102)

Billie is so much consumed by the thought of what she plans to do to the extent that she does not recognize Othello's voice on the phone when he calls at that moment. She initially thinks it is Jenny calling. And when she realizes it is Othello, her response is incoherent, full of agitation and excuses. Realizing that Billie is consumed with rage by her actions, Magi attempts to dissuade her from this line of action:

Is everything about White people with you? Is every living moment of your life eaten up with thinking about them. Do you know where you are? Do you know who you are anymore? What about right and wrong. Racism is a disease my friend, and

your test just came back positive. You're so busy reacting, you don't even know yourself. (103)

Billie had the opportunity to learn *ogbon* (discretion) from her landlord, Magi, who also uses *itan* to remind her of slavery and to question the efficacy of using such a power to avenge her disappointment by Othello, "Billie, if this kind of stuff truly worked, Africans wouldn't be in the situation we're in now. Imagine all them slaves working magic on their masters...if it truly worked, I'd be married to a nice man, with three little ones by now" (102). Out of virulent anger and the desire to punish Othello for infidelity however, Billie continues her dabbling into *aje* without adequate knowledge of its use (75; 92-3), which eventually leads to tragedy and her admission to a psychiatric hospital.

In fact, Magi's story serves as an alternative to Billie's own tragic fate and sense of connection to homeland. Along with Amah and later on Canada (Billie's estranged father), Magi only appears in the present-day plot. In response to Canada's question about whether she has lived all her life in the same house she now owns, Magi tells him a story that goes back into about four generations. Magi inherited the house from its original owner, a White man, who apparently fathered children with her own great grandmother. What it means is that even while she believes herself to be black, she might have remotely descended from a White father, yet her claim over the building goes back in the direction of motherhood, through a black woman. There is also a suggestion of budding romance between Magi and Canada (and possibly the occurrence of the "*ifi aya lu aya*" situation), when Canada tells Magi:

Canada: You sure know the way to a man's heart.

Magi: Haven't had any luck so far.

Canada: Yet (*There is an awkward silence between them, after which they both start speaking at once*). (95-6)

Although Canada's return is timely, Billie rebuffs him. Having been unfaithful to her mother, not to mention his problem with alcohol, Canada's arrival is less than welcomed. Billie resentfully recalls how she and her brother Andrew were treated after their mother's death, when their father "hailed [them] all the way [...] from Bronx" (45). However, from the audience's perspective, Billie would be well-advised to heed

Canada's the story about the man who died not because he was shot by an archer but because he allowed the wound to fester without attending to it on time (83). Although Billie does not listen, Canada's story is an example of such *itan* that "gain their authority from the distillation of past experience and entails connecting elements of myth, history and events of the past through *aroba* (oral transmission) that is retold over and again" (Barber 362). Such *itan* exemplify how people connect to their *orirun* through narrative.

The significance of Canada's story, that people can actually learn from the past and prevent it from destroying their present and future by leaving that past "in the past" where it belongs, is lost on Billie who is unable to forget Othello's infidelity and the pain that she has suffered through devotion to him. In other words, Canada's story, rendered in the form of *owe onitan* (proverbial story), stresses the danger in perpetuating the notion of difference which was wrecking Billie from deep inside of her at that crucial moment in the play. The play suggests how Billie is "defined by the continuity of experience; [that] she is trapped in history just as history is trapped in her" (Kaplan 101). Burnett maintains that in *Harlem Duet*, "Sears explores two extreme responses to the racism faced in North American society—integration and separation—and finds each lacking" (78). Instead, I argue that Othello shows that he has fully, or willing to integrate into the society, by utilizing the knowledge from a Yoruba cultural understanding that locates *orirun*/origin where one is born, unlike Billie. Perhaps that is why Sears insists that the play is Billie's story and not Othello's. Billie realizes too late both in the aspect of dealing with Othello and how important her father's return would turn out to be, after the potion she puts on the handkerchief to punish Othello (or Mona) backfires.

Although I agree with Dickinson, Tompkins, Kidnie and others regarding *Harlem Duet*'s use of the handkerchief by Billie in a way that leads to disaster, the play is not necessarily a tragedy. I agree with Kidnie on this point, when she insists that, in spite of the outcome of Billie's emotional and psychological breakdown resulting from Othello's betrayal of her love, *Harlem Duet* should also be viewed from the perspective of how "it turns away from death towards hope and creative inspiration, particularly as embodied by the children" (51). Kidnie refers specifically to Jenny who, though never present physically on the stage like Mona, also wants to support and help her aunt Billie overcome the throes of loss she has suffered by

sending her, her portrait (Sears 84). More so, Canada's return, and apparent reformation, and his decision to nurture his daughter back to sound health, suggests an optimistic future---albeit not for Othello, and perhaps not soon for Billie.

Although Shakespeare is the jumping-off point for the play through the examination of the kind of "mythology" that Othello embodies, *Harlem Duet*---as its title implies--- invests very heavily in music, a feature often lost on readers. As we are informed in Sears's "Notes" which accompany the play, "One voice does not a chorus make" (12), which directly translates to "*Eeyan kan kii je awa de.*" This is Sears's way of saying that Yoruba ancestors are the touchstone upon which she built her vision: she stands "on the shoulders of her ancestors" and has, "access to a choir of African voices, chanting a multiplicity of African experiences" ("Note" 12-3). In an interview with Stephen Hunt, Sears also admits to first experiencing her narrative/performative style in Africa:

They'd be telling some traditional story in a language I did not know. It was in a local language, not the colonial language [...] and this story, which everybody knew apparently, was told by the narrator poet, but it was also told in parts by dancers, and singers and musicians who told the story---sometimes better, and sometimes separately! (2)

While previous scholars have commented on music in *Harlem Duet*, they have not shown its explicit connection to Yoruba aesthetic. Yet, what Sears describes above is essentially Yoruba narrative/performative style that incorporates audience participation and group solidarity "in which the storyteller's comments in response to a wink, a gesture, the coming in of a member of audience or the message from his master drummer, are within the setting of performance, drum, dance, and drama" (Olatunji 113). The setting, audience and voices at the background, are part and parcel of the storyteller's performance.

In *Harlem Duet*, the essential Yoruba nature of the *itan* is also underlined by the soundscape that foregrounds both the fictional experience of Billie and Othello and its connection to Black history. As Knowles explains, the soundscape functions, "not only within excerpts from musical expression that play against their Western orchestral instrumentation even as the action of the play resonates against

Shakespearean tragedy” (Knowles 2002:389), but also with speeches by historical figures who have had similar experience to the one being addressed in the play. Also, the call and respond melancholic blues created by the cello and bass combination, functions to show *Harlem Duet*’s “kind of chorus to [the] re-writing of Shakespeare” (Dickinson 192), and how Billie gets “caught in a feedback loop, where her life with Othello repeats itself constantly inside her head, [and this quandary] is compounded aurally on stage through the use of voice-over sound bites” (119). As it were, actions do not just occur or stand alone, but are bound up with speeches of African-American historical figures. The music and speeches by notable African-American political figures like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Paul Robeson etc. along with the orchestra, fuse together to form an “authentic source” of linking the past with the present, as an excellent example of linking to *orirun*.

In addition to recalling history, the soundscape also functions as a unique form of language that conveys emotions related to the actions being dramatized; as a “rhapsodic blues tragedy,” the play “links tragedy with jazz, high-Western with Black culture even as its musical bridges perform blues on orchestral strings” (Knowles 2004:150). In the stage directions, we are informed that the language produced by the speeches and music should be interpreted especially in terms of the way they accentuate the mood which underlies the interactions of the characters on stage at every point in time. Examples include: in the background to the Prologue, set in 1928 Harlem, an orchestra of “the cello and the bass call and respond to a heavy melancholic blues. Martin Luther King’s voice accompanies them [...] in a polyrhythmic improvisation” (21); in scene one, set in present-day Harlem, at the background are “urban melody blues/jazz riff,” played on strings, and “accompanied by the voice of Malcolm X, speaking about the nightmare of race in America and the need to build strong black communities” (24); in the scene set in Harlem 1860, involving HIM and HER, “the instruments sing a blues from deep in the Mississippi delta, while a mature northern American voice reads from the Declaration of Independence” (33); at Harlem in an unspecified present, “melodious urban blues jazz” keeps time with an “oral address by Marcus Garvey on the need for African-Americans to return to Africa” (39); and in another scene set strategically in Harlem, at the corner of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X boulevards (125th & Lennox) and with Billie in the living room smoking a cigarette, a “string duet croons gently” while

Malcolm X speaks about “the need for Blacks to turn their gaze away from Whiteness so that they can see each other with new eyes” (60). The music in the background suggests that “the black community [is] a homogenous group” (Kaplan 39), and point at “displacement and call for healing” (Brown-Guillory 163). In drawing from the symbolism that the historical characters, their speeches and the musical accompaniments represent and utilizing them to drive the actions at every moment/time frames of the plot, *Harlem Duet* shows that Othello and Billie’s predicament in the play is also the predicament of the African-Americans generally.

In addition to the Yoruba origin of the soundscape, characters in the play are also invested with mythic properties derived from the Yoruba mythology. Billie is a complex archetypal character who combines essential attributes of *Osun*, matriarch of Yoruba female *orisa*, with those of *Oya* and the *Iyaami*. This changing characteristic makes it possible for her to easily traverse the three levels of womanhood recognized by the Yoruba: as daughters, wives and ancient mothers, otherwise known as the *Iya Moopo* symbolic trinity. Because most scholars who have written on the play have focused on the handkerchief and the spell, they have neither paid much attention to how Billie transitions from a wife, sister, a child and even occasionally a mother (to Jenny) through her relationship with the other characters in the play, nor the fact that she is also invested with attributes of the *iyaami* cosmic element, as Mona whom I discuss below.

Although *Osun* is recognized in Yoruba mythology as *orisa* belonging to the “cool” class of the deities, and one who possesses sister-mother duality, much of which Billie demonstrates in the way she nurtures Othello, in her relationship with both Magi and Amah as well as Jenny. But, her vicious aspect comes alive when she “transforms” into *Oya*. Billie’s name, “Sybil” meaning “prophetess. Sorceress. Seer of the future” (Sears 81), given to her by her father, Canada, suggests that she possesses such powers and ability as *Oya*, without her knowing until it manifests at the height of emotional breakdown. This power comes in the form of *aje* (power to control). As Washington explains, the matrix of *aje* that binds *Orisa* to historical entity, and to fictive character(s), can occur through both unconscious and deliberate attempts to “re-member” what is buried in the past by using Great Mothers and powers (101). Billie unconsciously summons the power when she says, “my sable warrior...fight with me. I would fight with you...suffer with me...I would suffer

[with you]” (Sears 76). In Yoruba mythology, *Oya* is believed to possess a certain *sabre* and whisk made from antelope skin. It is also interesting that *Oya*’s colours, brown and/or burgundy (dark red), resemble the colour of the strawberry pattern on the white handkerchief. Billie’s room is “a small chemical factory,” filled up with materials suggestive of her mystical nature as Magi observes in scene three, “Saracen’s Compound...Woad...Hart’s tongue... *Prunella vulgaris* [and a book] Egyptian Alchemy: A Chemical Encyclopaedia” (40). In using the handkerchief which she has infused with deadly potency “what I add to this already fully endowed cloth, will cause you such...such wretchedness” Billie clearly demonstrates her *Oya* quality.

Elsewhere, I explained that a character which assumes the personality and archetype of *Oya* usually appears disturbed. This is exactly the case with Billie and perhaps why she is unable to grasp the import of Magi’s metaphor about their slave ancestors. At one time she is the dutiful and supportive wife to Othello, but, when he rejects her for Mona, she assumes the character of *Oya* who brings about change through rage and turbulence. This “disturbance” is expressed through the yoking together of the elemental forces and the utilization of the femininity of *Osun* and the masculinity (which borders on destruction) of Sango’s temperament. The transformation is usually due to emotional depression that results in a brutal attempt to exterminate the source of the oppression (Balogun 2013:23). Thus, when Billie decides to respond to Othello’s abandonment, “My mate...throughout eternity. Feel what I feel. Break like I break. No more—no less” (75), she summons a power so enormous not for a wrong cause. And her inadequate knowledge of, and inability to control, that power results in tragedy.

Sears invests Othello with the attributes of two male *orisa*; *Ogun* and *Sango*. Othello betrays both the creative and destructive attributes of *Ogun*. Othello also demonstrates the contrasting and contradictory polarity that *Esu*, the presiding *orisa* in the Yoruba diaspora, manifests through his *Ogun* traits. Like *Ogun* in Yoruba mythology, who dismantles obstruction in the undergrowth in order to make a passage for the other *orisa* in the void of transition, Othello also believes in progress in the New World through the capacity of education. He asserts “my culture is Wordsworth...Spirituality beyond race bullshit” (Sears 73-4). This attitude aligns with the assimilative principle of Yoruba culture which recognizes the concept of transition

as a central principle of existence. As Wright explains, “the Yoruba view excessive stability as undesirable because it induces stagnation and entropy” (12). Othello believes that his own perception of life is to utilize the logic of Western education and the opportunities that it provides, in order to survive in the new society, an attitude to life which constitutes a recognition of *orirun* based on where fate and/or circumstance has placed one. Sears herself illustrates such an outlook, insofar as she has made a home for herself in the seemingly inhospitable landscapes she has lived in; her “Notes” explicitly spell out her commitment to making Canada feel more like a home to her nieces and her community. She mentions to Knowles, “Before *Harlem Duet*, Canadian Stage had never produced a work by an author of [Black] African descent. And the problem with Canadian Stage is that it’s called Canadian Stage, so it represents Canada, and I’m thinking, ‘I’m Canadian, so it must represent me’” (Knowles 28).³⁴Othello demonstrates a strong sense of perception and social outlook, a quick-witted perception of his environment and attitude that people have towards him:

It’s implied...no one at school tells me I don’t know how to do my job...I’ll be at faculty meeting, I’ll make a suggestion and it’ll be ignored. Not five minutes later, someone else will make the same suggestion and everyone will agree to it. Mona noticed it too. They think I’m only there because I’m Black. I’ve tasted it. (53)

Othello’s attitude shows his awareness that subscribes to the Yoruba attitude and the epistemological assumption that life requires “the capacity to accrete and absorb new forms and ideas for expanding identity beyond where most value systems would have lost theirs” (Wright 13). Othello demonstrates how the *Ogun* archetype transcends the *orisa*’s “cosmic functionalist framework” to embrace the symbolic representation of “human dilemma of how to balance the need for constraint and the need for freedom” (Barnes 18), and extends this awareness into his *Sango* characteristic traits.

Othello demonstrates *Sango*’s attributes through both his seeming “conquest” of both racist attitudes and women. In Yoruba mythology, *Sango* is the warrior,

³⁴Sears also uses *Afrika Solo* to dramatize that recognition.

military commander and hero-god who creates dynasties and makes a living by breaking frontiers; the spirit that pushes nature to its limit by performing outstanding feats. Othello demonstrates *Sango*'s ability to dismantle barriers by also overcoming the initial racism he experienced among his colleagues in the university campus. He also displays the hero-god's randy, even amoral, attribute; a womanizer who derives pleasure from sexual conquest and breaks boundaries in the process.

I prefer White women [...]. We'd make love and I'd fall asleep not having to beware being mistaken for someone's inattentive father [...] and not be confused with every lousy lover, or husband that has ever left them lying in a gutter of unresolved emotions. It's the truth. To a Black woman, I represent every Black man she has ever been with and with whom there is still so much to work out... I am a very single, very intelligent, very employed Black man. And with White women, it's good. It's nice. (71)

In his quest to be greater than his grandfather, *Sango* is advised to marry a river, a mountain, and a forest, symbolizing *Yemoja*, *Oba* and *Oya*, three of the female deities, which he does. Thus, *Sango* surmounts the seemingly insurmountable; the hero-god's greatness is intimately tied to the women's, who represented different shades of quality (fame/wealth, beauty/meekness and brutality/aggression) that he requires to be successful. The archetypal *Sango* trait is also shown in the dispassionate manner in which Othello tells Billie about the break-up of their relationship and his decision to move in with Mona:

(They continue packing in silence)

Othello: We're getting married.

(Pause)

Me and Mona. We're engaged...Officially.

(Very long pause)

Billie: Congratulations.

Othello: I wanted to tell you...Hear it from the horse's mouth... Hear it from me first. You know

Billie: Yeh...Yes. Yes. Congratulation.

Othello: Mona wanted me to tell you. (69-70)

Although her influence on Othello cannot be said to be witchcraft, if any of the female characters can be called a witch, or has used witchcraft, it is Mona. In her brief but significant “appearance” in the play, Mona shows that she belongs to the class of women the Yoruba categorize as *iyaami*, or more specifically, “*Awon obinrin/iya Aye*” (Women of the world). This description derives from Yoruba conception of “woman” as a term that could be explained from the perspective of “woo” and “man” in which the former could mean “lure,” “entice,” and “seduce” and by extension, the “wooing [of] man” which implies women’s power and control over men. Also, the notion of “Aye” here also adds a metaphysical dimension to the control such women exert over men, and which may suggest “fear” or “anxiety” among other things (Opefeyitimi 121-2). Mona demonstrates attributes of archetypal characters the Yoruba note for their “absent-present” personality and the ability to force obedience from people, even when they are not seen but only heard as she does in the play. They are often categorized as “*atunnida*” (Women recreators of humans). The presence of these women and their ability to manipulate human beings and their fate in order to serve their purpose are recorded in a particular *odu Ifa*:

Atunnida waa forii mi bun mi o o Recreators leave my fate as it is

Waa fori mi bunmi o Leave my fate as it is

Atunniyan da a Recreator of Man

Dakun waa fori i mi bunmi o Kindly leave my fate for me.

(qtd in Opefeyitimi 46)

The Yoruba also classify these women as *eníyán* (irregular human beings) who exert tremendous influence over the lives of *èniyàn* (regular human being). The *odu Osa* from *Ifa* illustrates this point:

*Paaka seyin kungii...*Paaka stiffened his back into a lump

Adia dun eniyan Ifa divination was performed for the witch

A bu f'eniyan Ifa divination was also performed for the human beings

Awon mejeeji n ti kole orun bo Both of them were coming from heaven to wayearth...

Eniyan bi oun ba de 'le aye The witch said that when she arrives on earth

Oun o ma aba ti gbogbo eniyan je ni She would be spoiling the handwork of human beings

Igba ti awon mejeeji dele aye tan When both arrived on earth...

Lo ba di pegbogbo nkan ti awon eniyan ni All the belongings of human beings

Ni awon eniyan nbaa je Were being damaged by the witch...

Eniyan won o je eniyan o ni isinmi The witch prevent human beings from having rest. (47-8)

Through Amah and Magi, we are able to see the sister-daughter sides of Billie. Rasheed Olaniyi contends that Yoruba diaspora and home ties are often articulated through “identity-based” institutions. These come in the form of various levels of associational and life structures, of religious, ethnic, and occupational nature. These networks function as mechanisms for managing threats of insecurity. Sometimes, the people draw on emotional resources, such as friendship and family visits, which help to strengthen ethnic bonds, such as in the relationship between Billie, Amah and Magi. These elements of mutual solidarity act as informal mechanisms of social safety and security, especially in the time of perceived or great adversity. In the long run, the social networks help the people to maintain, reinforce and extend their relationship with the homeland and, at the same, they function as key resources in confronting obstacles to successful adaptation in the diaspora (Olaniyi 237-8). Amah and Magi play these identified roles, and utilize those identified mutual networks to forge mutual solidarity with Billie, especially in her moment of crisis.

Amah is Billie's sister-in-law but she functions in a more "sisterly" role and manner. In scene one set against the background of Malcolm X's speech about the nightmare of race in America and the need to build strong Black communities, Amah comes to visit Billie and is also met by Magi. The three women share their experience like sisters. They discuss the various disappointments they have had in relationships over the years. They also mention the trade restriction imposed on black people by the White authority. Amah mentions that she cannot work as a beautician without a certificate, which she has to get by graduating in a course on how to plait White people's hair and apply make-up. As Magi says "each of [our] emotions sprout new roots, long tangled things, intersecting each other like strangle weed" (30). The emotional current which runs through the conversation is heightened by the information about Billie's miscarriages, the last of which she kept the foetus in a fridge in the house.

In scene three set in present Harlem against the background of Marcus Garvey's address on the need for African Americans to return to their roots, Amah comes to pay Billie a visit. When she sees Billie, she acts like a mother, and exclaims "Child you look so thin" and soon starts to plait her hair (41). Like a daughter to her mother, Billie also unburdens her mind to Amah, especially the grief of losing Othello to Mona, and how she has tried desperately to prevent the break-up from happening without success. She also mentions that the outcome of her marriage reminds her so much of Canada (her father) and mother. She recalls how her father hauled her and her mother back to Nova Scotia because of a White woman. She says that is why she feels that "Nova Scotia was a haven for slaves" (45). However, Billie finds solace in her niece, Amah's daughter, Jenny, whom she refers to as "my baby." In fact, she feels like a mother with Jenny. Later on in another scene with Magi where there is a phone call, Billie thinks it is from Jenny. She picks up the phone and exclaims with excitement, "Jenny...Is that you Jenny. My beauty. My little girl. It's Sybil...Auntie Sybil...The woman who lives in the cave..." (103). Through Jenny, both Billie and Magi relive the value of their skin colour. As Amah tells Billie "You tell Jenny colour's only skin deep," to which Billie responds "The skin holds everything in. It's the largest organ in the human body. Slash the skin by my belly and my intestine fall out" (44). They draw attention to the colour of their skin in order to emphasize the value of their Black identity.

The daughter/mother relationship is fully expressed in the encounter between Billie and Magi. Set in present day Harlem, scene seven of Act Two, the dissonant tone of the music in the background provides a foreboding of what is about to happen. Magi's opening speech about a certain Hakim with seven children but who never married, is interspersed with the remembrance of Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese independence leader assassinated in 1961 and the "Third World" rally. These historical figures are similar to archetypal characters from Yoruba mythology. For example, Lumumba was killed while defending his country, Congo. His sacrifice recalls Ogun's daring act in bridging the gulf of transition that occurred, separating both human beings and deities, after *Atunda's* dismantling of *OrisaNla*, while seven (of the number of children) Magi mentions is symbolic. This is in the sense that seven is a metaphor for a complete cycle that one could relate to both the *itan* being told in the play, and her own life coming to a certain fulfilment as suggested by the possibility of engagement to Canada.

More so, the import of Amah and Magi's roles in Billie's life is underlined in scene ten which ends the play. Set in present day Harlem at the psychiatric ward, Amah visits Billie. After much talk and as she is about to leave, Amah tells her "Some of us spend our entire lives making our own shackles...and the experienced shackle-wearer knows the best polish for the gift" to which Billie responds knowingly, "I wanna be free." Amah then counsels her on forgiveness "If I don't forgive my enemy, if I don't forgive him, he might just set up house, inside me," and in tearful resignation, Billie admits "I just...I---despise---I know...I know...Moment by moment. I forgive him now. I hate---I love so—I forgive him now. And now" (115-6). Sears uses these women and the relationship between them to show the value of community and brotherhood/sisterhood that she hopes Blacks in Canada and her diaspora kin elsewhere can forge among themselves.

Canada is also invested with the *Sango* archetypal characteristic. Canada stands for both "Canada" the country and character in the play. As a metaphor for place, Canada represents for Billie, a site associated with numerous grievances and humiliations involving her father's alcoholism; and Sears's way of making her Canadian audience to reflect on the significance of the name and its connection to the kind of relationship that exists in the real and the dramatic world (McKinnon 134). As a character however, Canada represents for Billie, the site where White women began

to consume the Black men in her life, and most importantly, an example of how the country has failed in his social relations, how it has become difficult for black men to have a successful relationship with their own women. In this specific case, I refer to Canada, the character's abandonment of his wife, (Billie's mother) for a white woman, Debbie, including the serious psychological effect of that break up on Billie, especially when it is repeated by Othello. However, Canada (the character)'s return and subsequent decision to stay in response to Amah's comment about missing him when he returns to Nova Scotia, "Oh, I don't think I 'm going anywhere just yet---least if I can help it. Way too much leaving gone on for more than one lifetime already" (117), is both a reassuring statement that conveniently ties up with Stuart Hall's remark that "what is at issue [in *Harlem Duet*] is the capacity for self-recognition" (8), which I believe that Othello demonstrates but Billie does not on the one hand; and on the other hand, it underlines both the cultural and political significance of locating *orirun*/origin, and/or one's identity at every moment in time, irrespective of spatial and temporal distance to one's place of birth.

The Yoruba aphorism which summarizes this assertion is simple: "*Eniyan bo ni lara ju aso lo*" (People are better raiment) which, at its deeply philosophical level, emphasizes that people should live harmoniously among themselves, after all, as they also say, "the same rain which falls on the sugarcane, also falls on bitter-leaf" (*Ojo to ro s'ewuro, lo ro s'ireke*). Origin and identity (both term that can be used interchangeably for *orirun*) are fluid terms, people's response to either or both, is what truly matters as the example of Billie and Othello that the play dramatizes.

In this section of the thesis, I have examined how *Harlem Duet* uses the story of Billie and Othello to dramatize what the Yoruba call *orirun*, or identity. I argued that while Billie assumes that Othello's new relationship (to Mona) is borne out of a sense of internalized otherness as opposed to her own sense of blackness and solidarity, Othello regards her fixation on blackness as the perpetuation of the past that is no longer helpful. Billie's brutal response to Othello's infidelity in his quest to redefine his relationship to the society ends in tragedy. As Fischlin and Fortier contends, *Harlem Duet* "is explicit in the way it constructs itself as a nexus for different forms of black voices," but of more importance is the way the play dramatizes how "Billie's struggle to deal with her own anti-white racism even as she seeks to affirm her identity apart from white culture is the crucial contradiction [that]

the play highlights” (286-7). I also emphasized that, in spite of the tragedy that accompanies Billie’s attempted vengeance against Othello through the *aje* she works on the handkerchief, her estranged father, Canada’s return and their renewed friendship suggest, “the promise of a dialogue that begins to break with [the] historical inevitability of racism” (287). I concluded that the essence of *orirun* is located in the understanding which Canada offers her daughter, in terms of recognizing one’s inadequacy in any circumstance and the effort to manage such inadequacy within both the freedom and imitations posed by the society that one belongs.

AFTERWORDS

Reflections on the analyses of the Orisa-Shakespeare

“Everything we think, say, or do relies upon ideas, words, and cultural norms that pre-exist us.”

(Fischlin and Fortier 4)

Thus far, I have used the lens of the Yoruba epistemology and principles to examine the cultural and political contexts of the Orisa-Shakespeare. I identified a number of key cultural/aesthetic resources of the Yoruba that the adaptations utilized in order to “use Shakespeare to create something new” and which I summarize below. These include: story, naming, and language. As we shall see in the next chapter, these resources are also central to the development of my own play.

Orisa-Shakespeare uses Shakespeare’s story but not necessarily his plot. Whereas there is always a process of selectivity involved in adaptation in which the adapter chooses aspects that are relevant to her/his own purpose, selectivity also presents a special challenge in terms of the process of creating the new works, as well as their consumption and evaluation (Adeoti 10). Selectivity is however not new in a Yoruba context in which storytellers handle inherited materials which are continually renewed, retold, refashioned and re-arranged over and again, so long as the needs of the audience are met along with the overall psycho-social expectations of the exercise.

Orisa-Shakespeare also uses naming as an adaptive strategy to show the difference from the Shakespeare text that have been adapted. In the “Author’s Notes” to *Otaelo*, Yerima informs his audience that the name of his protagonist, “Otaelo” means “a man who chews and swallows”--- to “chew and swallow” means to pursue and accomplish a certain goal/set objective, except that Otaelo fails in this

circumstance. In *Wesoo, Hamlet!*, the slain king, Sayedero (*So-aye-d'ero*), that is, “make life bearable or worthwhile to live” is in contrast to his adversary, Ayibi’s name: (*Ayi-ibi*), that is, “He who rolls/brings misfortune”, Leto (*Ni-eto/Li-eto* to conform to the Ijebu dialect of the play’s setting) and Iyamode (*Iya mo-odede*) that is, “The old woman who possesses the sacred secret of the palace” to name the central characters. *uMabatha* utilizes phonetic correspondence in Mabatha’s name to Macbeth, Dangane (unmistakable reference to Shaka’s half-brother and co-assassinator, Dingane) for Duncan, Makiwane and Donebane for Malcolm and Donalbain respectively. In *Harlem Duet*, Billie’s name is Sybil, “It means prophetess. Sorceress. Seer of the future” (Sears 81), given to her by her father, Canada.

Naming in the Orisa-Shakespeare also allows us to allude to historical personalities especially through the activities of the fictional characters in the adaptations. In *Wesoo, Hamlet!* for example, the roles of Sayedero and Ayibi, as well as Osofisan’s references to the 1950s, invite us to allude to historical characters associated with the conflict surrounding Yoruba politics in the Western region of Nigeria of that period. At the centre of the conflict were two prominent Yoruba politicians: Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his lieutenant, Chief Ladoke Akintola. Osofisan’s Sayedero represents Awolowo who was preferred by the Yoruba for his charisma and exemplary leadership qualities, his political party’s commitment to and success in providing the people with social amenities which ensured the far greater development of the region compared to other parts of the country. Ayibi represents Akintola who was tacitly supported by the Hausa/Fulani led government of Nigeria, while Awolowo languished in prison, the consequence of which was the escalation of violence that engulfed the Western region and Yorubaland (Abegunrin 334-52; Afolayan 297-315), and which has continued to characterize not only Yoruba but also Nigerian politics.

Orisa-Shakespeare make use of diverse forms of language as determined by their setting: contemporary/everyday form of language in *Lear and Ananci* and *Harlem Duet*, blend of both contemporary and traditional forms of language in *Wesoo, Hamlet!* and traditional language in *Otaelo*. By traditional language, I mean the use of *owe* (proverb), which is an example of a shared cultural material in all the texts, and an essential trope in *itan*. *Owe* proved to be useful and I utilised it a lot to explain “difficult” epistemological aspects in the texts, and to foreground the points

that I was trying to make while analysing the Orisa-Shakespeare. As Hugh Quarshie avers, “interpretation inevitably brings revelation: when we interpret Shakespeare’s plays, we reveal something about ourselves” (4). Shakespeare adaptations is “a postcolonial enterprise and a patchwork quilt of many perspectives.” It is not about how “to rip out and replace old patches with new [ones] or to start the quilt from scratch, but to add to an ongoing work” (Burnett 7). Essentially, my assumption is that the Orisa-Shakespeare add their own “patch” to the larger and broader “quilt” of postcolonial Shakespeare adaptation discourse, by mapping out how Yoruba worldview and aesthetic principles can function effectively to explain what they mean in their cultural and political contexts, without necessarily “writing back” to the Shakespeare canon.

CHAPTER THREE

Introduction: Retelling Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*

"How many ages hence shall this our lofty scene be acted over,
in states unborn and accents yet unknown!"

(Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 3.1.111-3)

"The perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety
of retellings."

(Benjamin 6)

In this chapter, I will draw materials from *Julius Caesar* to write a new play, entitled, *Emi, Caesar!* that addresses the danger posed by ethnic/tribal bigotry to the continued existence of Nigeria. Although animosity among the tribal groups in Nigeria predates colonialism, recent happenings show that the situation is more precarious and terrifying. While *Wesoo*, *Hamlet!* and *Otaelo* engage some of the socio-political issues plaguing Nigeria, none of the texts examines this particular potential danger. In writing the play, I am persuaded by Benhabib's notion of "the redemptive power of narrative" (169), and the example of Shakespeare who wrote *Julius Caesar* in 1599 to warn his own people about the danger of the outbreak of war over succession, having seen the deadly alliances and schemes, following the aged Queen Elizabeth's inability to produce an heir and successor to the English throne.

In doing that, Shakespeare turned to ancient Rome and dramatized the story of Caesar's assassination and the violence which followed it, as well as its consequences to the empire's leadership. While some might argue that Caesar's death does not mark the fall but the rise of the Roman Empire, Nigeria may not survive its own crisis for a

number of reasons. Apart from the diverse composition of the country that is made of over 450 ethnic groups some of which harbour intense hatred and bitterness towards each other, the situation is made more complex by the influence of religion, corruption and differing political orientation of the people. However, before discussing how I have used the key aesthetic resources that I identified in the analyses of the Orisa-Shakespeare (see “Afterwords”) to write *Emi, Caesar!*, I will first place the situation which the play dramatizes in context by citing specific historical events that built up to it.

Emi Caesar! uses the story of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* to depict events preceding the collapse of Oyo, the last great empire of the Yoruba, in the 1830s. During that time, Oyo was at the height of its power, which was achieved through the military prowess of Yoruba leaders such as Adegun Onikoyi, Edun Gbogun, Timi of Ede and Prince Atiba of Ago-Oja to mention a few. Unfortunately, where the Yoruba Empire gained its renown was where it was also very vulnerable. This is because the conflict between these powerful citizens also paved the way for the gradual disintegration of the empire from within.

Although Oyo had been challenged before by external threats, none of these compared to the internal wrangling among Oyo’s elite, who were torn between loyalty to their own specific tribes and the empire. According to Funso Afolayan, at the height of the instability from the crisis created by these power brokers, the Fulani forces attacked, while Dahomey and many other kingdoms formerly under Oyo’s control, seized the opportunity to break away and declare their own freedom. Oyo collapsed not so much because of the threat from without, but disaffection among the people within (Afolayan 298-9). I have chosen this historical episode not simply because it marked the end of the last great pre-colonial Yoruba Empire, but also because the collapse of Oyo from internal instability set the pattern that has dominated Nigerian society and politics ever since, a pattern distinguished by internecine strife and a failure to learn from the past.

History has repeated itself several times since. The 1914 merger enforced by the British colonial government on the 450 tribes and kindoms inhabiting what is now known as Nigeria, only intensified internecine strife. Elections in 1922 saw skirmishes between Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba factions. In the 1960s elections in the

then Western region, the same situation was repeated: serious disaffection and infighting between the two prominent Yoruba leaders of the time, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his deputy, Chief Ladoke Akintola, led to the collapse of a common front that could have resulted in the Yoruba gaining control of the political power at the centre (Afolayan 300). The 1993 election was annulled by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida---formerly a trusted friend of Abiola---to prevent the election of the Yoruba candidate, M.K.O Abiola. Elections held since the death of Abiola have been characterized by skirmishes among the Yoruba, and other tribes in the country, in the fashion of the age-long feud. In the 21st century, Nigeria remains threatened by internal divisions which pose serious threats to both the people's unity and the country's continued existence.

In choosing to allude to *Julius Caesar* in my own play, I considered how Shakespeare dramatizes the danger in political alliances prompted not so much by national but more by personal interest, what Mark Antony in the play calls “domestic fury and fierce civil strife” (3.1.263), which is also at issue in both past and especially present-day Nigeria. According to Michael Hattaway, Shakespeare's history plays, including *Julius Caesar*, are bound up with tragedy not so much because they concentrate on important personalities and how they deal with challenges and their destinies, but because of how their actions often affect their societies. These plays are remarkable “for their interrogation of sovereignty and the way they portray the horror and savagery as well as the glories of war, suggesting throughout [...] that the course of human history is evidently ordained by the might of armies and the actions of particular men.” Besides, considering that the focus of Shakespeare's “history plays” is politics, they could as well be considered “political plays in the way that they reflect upon the course of actions and to historical processes” (Hattaway 8-14), as a sort of defining structure of enquiry about both human actions and historical events. As a Russian director, Grigori Kosintsev also asks, “Who said [Shakespeare] was reflecting history? He was interfering with the present” (qtd in Hattaway 16), and its likely future relevance.

In drawing inspiration from Caesar's story to write *Emi, Caesar!* I use Shakespeare's text from this particular point of reference bearing in mind not only its present, but also future, relevance to the survival and continued existence of Nigeria. Thus, I also dramatize the alliances between Oyo elites and the consequences of their

actions. Expectedly the new demand requires change in setting and thematic focus. In my own play, the actions starts at Oja Oba, the King's market, as Onikoyi (Caesar), returns from a victorious battle against Nupe forces, accompanied by his lieutenants Soso (Mark Antony) and Aroni (Octavius Caesar) and the other army generals, notably, Edun Gbogun (Marcus Brutus), Timi Ede (Cassius), AreAgo (Cinna) and Bada (Metellus Cimber). While Onikoyi addresses the jubilant crowd that has come to celebrate his victory, Timi points out to Edun the danger in the growing popularity of Onikoyi, a native of Ikoyi-Ile, a vassal state under Oyo, and how it poses a serious threat to their own position in Oyo. Ifagbemi (Soothsayer) also arrives at the scene and warns Onikoyi of danger to his life, which he (Onikoyi) promptly dismisses before leaving. Two Oyo elders, Ogundele (Flavius) and Ajasa (Marullus) unsuccessfully attempt to break off the excited crowd after Onikoyi's exit.

At home in the company of his wife, Diekola (Calphurnia), Onikoyi sets two of his slaves free and sentences another one to death for "mistakenly" killing his friend. Although the condemned slave's girlfriend pleads for her lover's life by telling Onikoyi that they are both expecting a child, Onikoyi insists on the judgement being carried out. Meanwhile few days later, the other generals meet and decide to bring Atiba (Publius Cimber), who had earlier been accused of misconduct and banished, back to Oyo, knowing that Onikoyi will be against the decision, and thus create the opportunity to take actions against him. After the other generals' exit, Edun's wife, Rolake (Portia) pleads with her husband to change his mind regarding Onikoyi, by considering the effect of his actions on the land, especially against the background of the threat from Fulani forces. Ifagbemi also returns to Onikoyi's house to warn him as he prepares to attend the *ijala* that is organized in his honour; Diekola also tells him about his dream in which she also sees danger. At that moment, Lagbayi (Decius Brutus) one of Onikoyi's trusted lieutenant, whom the generals have co-opted into their plans, enters to persuade Onikoyi to attend the *ijala* where he is eventually killed by the generals. Soso and Aroni, joined by Odekoya (Aimilius Lepidus) decide to avenge Onikoyi's death; while Oyo generals fight each other, Fulani forces attack and destroy the empire.

While I use the story of *Julius Caesar* to dramatize the danger inherent in tribal bigotry in Yorubaland and Nigeria, I also demonstrate a Yoruba understanding of the dichotomy between fate/destiny and human action. In most of his history plays

and especially *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare also provides examples that, although a certain divinity or supernatural force shapes human lives and destinies (which is also a strongly-held belief among the Yoruba), people should also be held accountable for their actions: “Men at some time were masters of their fates/The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,/ But in ourselves, that we are underlings” (1.2.140-2). With this particular point in mind, I specifically chose the soothsayer’s scene in which a man who claims that he can foretell the future warns Caesar that the “Ides of March” will be a day of danger for him. As a source of dramatic action in my own play, I use the *Ifa* priest’s scenes to also highlight the epistemological imperative between fate/destiny and human actions. In those two scenes, I highlight the Yoruba context of fate/destiny in the saying, “*Ayamno o gboogun*” (There is no armour against fate), and Caesar’s comment, “What can be avoided/Whose end is purposed by the mighty gods?” (2.2.27-8), in contrast to “*Owo ara eni la fi ntun oro ara eni i se*” (We choose our path in life) and “*Arigisegi to ba segi, ori ara e lo maa fi gbe*” (The wood insects which gather sticks always bear the load on themselves), which emphasize that human beings are the architect of their own (mis)fortune.

Generally speaking, although my own adaptation is based on *Julius Caesar*, I depart greatly from this Shakespeare play especially its plot; hence, my play should be understood from the perspective of what Fischlin, in “Nation and/as Adaptation,” terms “interpretive *frission*” wherein “recognizable aspects of the source-text are interwoven into the new contexts, however defamiliarized, of the adaptation” (317). First, in deviating from Shakespeare’s plot, I adopt the traditional Yoruba storytelling form which is similar to, but also different from, *Lear Ananci*’s approach.³⁵ While I use human character (Baasotan) to tell the story, *Lear Ananci* uses a mythological character (Ananci) that is invested with human qualities, and while the play begins from the point of myth based on this fact, my own specifically delves into history from the beginning.

Secondly, I delay the murder of my protagonist and have it occur towards the end of the play. Whereas the assassination of Caesar occurs in Act 3, scene 1 which is

³⁵ Although in my own play and *Lear Ananci*, the traditional call-and-respond between the storyteller and the audience is discarded. In such an instance, the storyteller sets the stage for the narration by his call “*A alo o*” (Here is a story) to which the audience responds “*A alo o*” (Let’s have the story), thus bringing into operation a different kind of imagination outside of normal experience. At the end of the story, he says “*Idi alo mi ree gbangbalaka/Idi alo mi ree gbangbalaka*” (This is the end of my story), through which he returns his audience into the world of waking reality (Olatunji 201-21).

the middle of the story because it allows Shakespeare to show the aftermath, I show the aftermath of Onikoyi's murder and the annihilation of Oyo by Fulani forces at the beginning of my play. The market where the play starts is in ruins after Fulani invasion and this beginning of the play is strategic. In the era that I depict, a market is usually situated close to the palace which is both the seat of government and soul of the land; and, once a market which represents the commercial nerve centre and means of livelihood and often intimately tied to the palace is destroyed, the entire society is destroyed with it.

What it means is that my play starts at the end rather than the beginning and self reflectively moves back to tell the story of how this chaos came to be. I use this approach to also show that my plot conforms to the Yoruba cyclical sense of time that is often depicted in *itan*. Often times, *itan* presents to us the idea of walking backward into the future. Even in *Ifa* divination which embodies the supreme source of *itan* for the Yoruba, past events are usually narrated with the future in focus. In order to utilize this sense of dislocation of time, I also use characters as symbolic representation of time: Onikoyi as the past, Baasotan as the storyteller, and Boy, as the future. At the same time, I allow these three characters to interact in a couple of scenes in order to show how the three timeframes: past, present and future, intersect fluidly in the story without any form of demarcation.

I also utilise the *eeta* motif: the entire play is divided into three acts, each determined by the turn of events: Act One begins with Baasotan and Man at the market in ruins. I introduce Onikoyi and the other Yoruba generals here and allow the actions to progress to the point when Odekoya comes to inform Onikoyi of the *ijala* being planned to honour him; Act Two begins with the meeting of the conspirators and ends with Lagbayi's successful attempt at luring Onikoyi to the *ijala* as planned by the conspirators, against the advise of both his wife, Diekola, and the priest, Ifagbemi, about his death; Act Three begins at the *ijala* ceremony, Onikoyi's assassination and Soso's revenge, to the conspirators' desertion of Oyo and the empire's subsequent destruction as I present at the beginning of the play.

Again, I use the *eeta* symbolism through the three *orisa*: Ogun, Sango and Esu that I place in Onikoyi's compound. The presence of the *orisa* is also to highlight the ritual/spiritual significance of the *orisa* in Yoruba social life and to show how

Onikoyi fails in terms of his level of spiritual consciousness/connection to the deities. Although he is the custodian of the shrines of the *orisa* who represent the regulatory spirits of his life both in Oyo and in his compound, it is apparent that they do not mean much to him even though at some point in the play, he propitiates them.

I relocate the setting of the entire play to Ikoyi Ile, Oyo and its immediate environs, notably Kusu and Iju Sanya, which are historical towns and relics of the tragedy that Oyo once suffered in the hands of Nupe. In my play, Ikoyi Ile replaces Caesar's house; Kusu replaces Sardis where Brutus's camp is located after the assassination; the Hunters' enclave replaces both the Capitol where Caesar is assassinated and the Forum where Mark Antony brings his corpse and makes his most memorable speech about the conspirators; leader of the conspirators in my play, Edun Gbogun's house replaces Brutus's house; Iju Sanya and bush paths replace other locales in the Shakespeare play, especially the street where the poet, Cinna, talks about seeing and eating with Caesar in his dream.

I also remove Mark Antony's famous funeral speech, but have Diekola make the speech. I aim to use this choice of dramaturgy for two reasons: to stress that the Oyo empire that I tell its story here has no regard for the female principle, and to show that Onikoyi and Diekola's as well as Edun Gbogun and Rolake's relationships are representative of how the society does not respect the *ako a t'abo* (male/female) principles. The attitude towards women in the play is similar to Caesar's Rome that is dramatized in *Julius Caesar*. According to Alexander Leggatt, women's bodies have great impact in Shakespeare's Roman plays, especially because of the patriarchal nature of their society, where women are just convenient values for their men, who demand chastity, domesticity and silence from them (238). Elsewhere, I discussed this male/female spiritual arrangement through the imagery of *Ele*, the female genitalia and emphasized how traditional Yoruba were able to forge a culturally-stable society and succeeded together by recognizing the collaborative role of the male (*okunrin*) and the female (*obinrin*) (Balogun 2015:121-52). It is apparent that Oyo does not respect the male/female arrangement.

Secondly, I also aim to show that my protagonist and his adversaries are archetypes of behaviour that are prevalent in contemporary Nigeria, in terms of the expression of ethnic/tribal emotions that encourage violence. In so doing, I invest my

central characters with the sensibility of *Ogun* and emphasize the destructive aspect of the *orisa*. To make these traits more visible in my characters, I strip their actions of any morality. For examples, while Edun and others conspire to assassinate Onikoyi because their own relevance is threatened by Onikoyi's popularity, they use tribal emotion to draw other people (especially Lagbayi, Ajasa and Ogundele) into the plan, while Onikoyi is also a flawed character: he is arrogant and implacable in his attitude.

Onikoyi shares many traits of Caesar from the perspective of the *Ogun* destructive attribute. The manner in which Calpurnia summarizes Caesar's character, "Your wisdom is consumed in confidence" (2.2.49), also describes the way Onikoyi sees and carries himself in the play. Rather than heed the advice of his wife, Diekola and the *Ifa* priest, Ifagbemi's warnings, he shrugs them off. Thus, Onikoyi also shows that, like Caesar, he is confident in his military prowess, "Danger knows that Caesar is more dangerous than he is/ We are two lions littered in one day/, and I the older and more terrible. And Caesar shall go forth" (2.2.44-8). He is also like Caesar in the way he responds to both his wife and the *Ifa* priest; "Yet Caesar shall go forth; for these predictions/Are to the world in general as to Caesar" (2.2.27-9) and "Shall Caesar send a lie? Have I in conquest stretched mine arm so far/To be afraid to tell graybeards the truth?" (2.2.65-6), when Caesar discountenances Calpurnia's dream. Onikoyi, like Caesar who refers to himself in the third person, "Caesar is turn'd to hear" (1.2.17) when the Soothsayer calls him in the crowd, also refers to himself in the same manner.

Although I use the exact names of the historical characters whose lives I dramatize in the play (with the addition of a few fictional characters), I use the strategy of naming in the title of the play. I use *Emi Caesar!* to show a corresponding play on sound and meaning in relation to Yoruba words. As Osundare writes, "sounding is meaning, meaning is sounding" more so because the articulation of words operates "through a complex system of tones and glides; tone is the power-point, the enabling element in a Yoruba communicative event" (Osundare 2002:8), and in Yoruba names. In other words, the meaning of Yoruba words are, first and foremost, determined by their tonal nature. The words are enunciated along a continuum of tonal levels and diacritic marks (low///; mid/_/; and high/\), or /mí/, /re/, and /dò/, are placed on their heads respectively, to show this tonal difference. The marks ensure that the proper pronunciation and meaning are given specifically

sounded/articulated words. Without the diacritic marks, a written Yoruba word could mean different things; for examples, *oko* (farm/village), *oko* (husband), *oko* (spear), *oko* (hoe), *oko* (car/ship), *oko* (penis) etc. In the case of my title, “*Emi*” which prefixes Caesar, it can be translated as either soul or spirit, or even the personal pronoun “I”. Specifically however, I use the ambiguity of the title to suggest that my central character is a “reincarnation” of Caesar, both in spirit and peculiarity of experience even though they are also different from each other, even as they are separated in time and place.

In my choice of language, I replace Shakespeare’s poetry with *owe* (proverb) and verbal tropes like *oriki*, chants (mostly *ijala*) with which I dramatize the nuances of Yoruba cultural life and expressions in the play. Following scholars like Karin Barber and Adeleke Adeeko, I took advantage of how *owe* is used in everyday conversation among the Yoruba and as a trope in their literature, specifically its essential cultural/aesthetic possibility notably, the intellectual concept of its subject matter, its mode of transmission which derives from daily habits and concrete images, and its value in existential lessons.

Although these verbal resources are basically from a stock of expressions some of which are used in everyday conversation by mostly elderly people, the *owe* that I have used in this play are drawn from Owomoyela (2005), the *ijala* are from Ajuwon (196-208) and the *oriki* of the *orisa* are from Beier (1970) including their English translations. However, I have slightly twisted some of them to serve my own purpose in this adaptation; and where I twist them, I reinterpret the translation. But, I did all the English translations of the songs in the play although they are from Yoruba folk music repertoire. I also emphasize the relationship between *itan* and *iran* (spectacle) through the *ijala*--- which exemplifies Yoruba fusion of ritual, play, performance and spectacle--- that I strategically present before the assassination of Onikoyi.

Of importance however, is the question of my target audience which is crucial to how I hope the play should be viewed. Specifically, I direct my adaptation to the Nigerian audience at home and those in the diaspora, but who have nonetheless experienced what I talk about in the play and are equally concerned about the situation in the country. I also believe that the play will appeal to people in other parts

of the African continent, most especially those who have experienced, or are experiencing, the debilitating effects of ethnic/tribal conflicts. According to Bergmann and Crutchfield, racial, ethnic/tribal bigotry often engender violence which takes many forms: genocide, ethnic cleansing and civil wars which are its extreme and visible realities, while there are some of its other manifestations, such as rioting/public demonstration and hate crimes that are not too obvious, less organized, but also significant in every sense (147). Given that the root cause of some of these violent acts remain the dissolution of multi-ethnic empires by colonial powers as the cases of Nigeria, the Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda and the Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin and Kamba in Kenya have shown, the contribution of the colonial powers to the crises cannot also be ruled out. However, I intend my adaptation to force a reflection on the part of Nigerians and their expectations regarding the future of the country, which hangs on a precarious balance at this particular point in time.

Emi Caesar!

Cast in the order of appearance

Man

Baasotan --- the storyteller

Boy

Man (Caesar)

Adegun Onikoyi --- commander of the Oyo Army

Ajasa

Ogundele } Elders in Oyo

Aroni --- Onikoyi's acolyte/praise singer

Diekola --- Onikoyi's wife

Ifagbemi--- the Diviner

Edun Gbogun }

Timi Ede }

Bada } conspirators against Onikoyi

AreAgo }

Ikolaba }

Odekoya --- Leader of the League of Hunters

Odegbami --- his son

Rolake --- Edun Gbogun's wife

Soso } Onikoyi's aides

Lagbayi }

Hunters, Soldiers, Traders, Children, Crowd, Drummers etc

ACT ONE

Scene One

Lights. An old market in ruins. Stalls are emptied of their contents. Small whiff of smoke can still be seen in a few places, suggesting complete destruction. People are seen sitting in various groups, some moaning softly in pains. Baasotan walks in, behind him is a boy and another middle-age man, who seems troubled by the sight)

Man

What is this place called?

Baasotan

Oja Oba...the king's market.

Man

Market? But this doesn't look... *(Pauses and looks around)* What happened here...to the market...to these people?

Baasotan

Plenty...plenty happened here, my friend. This place used to be the heart of our land. People came from far and near to trade with us. To buy from us, and, we, from them. Money exchanged hands, as did laughter. We flourished...but now? *(Pauses)* As you can see, that will never happen again.

Man

These women used to sell things here?

Baasotan

All of them...and the men...and many of their friends and women that are dead and those unaccounted for. Gone...vanished.

Man

Vanished? How?

Baasotan

How can we tell? We all ran...left everything behind when Fulani forces came running down the hills, pounding the earth with their horses, chanting with rage, shivering to spill our blood. Those who couldn't run...we have a whole field behind over there where we buried them. My daughter was also buried there...with her husband. I am left with him...their son to take care of. But, how much can an old man do? How much longer do you think I have left before joining them in that field? Before this...this war that has destroyed our lives...the lives of our children, like my grandson here, we thought we were safe...

Man

Before the war...

Baasotan

You called what happened a war? When we couldn't fight but surrender to cruel, senseless slaughter? It was not a war...it was an invasion!

Man

Yes...before the invasion—what was your own work?

Baasotan

I used to be a storyteller. Chronicler of lives. Mender of souls with tales.

Man

So tell me what really happened...will you?

Baasotan

How shall I say it? What mouth will tell this kind of story...what tongue will recall this? Who would care to listen to how our lives were destroyed in one day?

Man

He will want to know...your grandson, he will want to know what really happened to his parent...to your people...these people and those buried behind that field.

Baasotan

He doesn't need a story...he can see the story. What the eyes can see never leaves the head—he won't forget this sight.

Man

But you owe him still...tell him.

Silence

Baasotan

Sometimes a man appears to bear the destiny of a land on his shoulders. When he falls, the land falls with him. Oyo didn't know this on time...until the Fulani forces came rushing down our hills, destroying everything that stood on their way. But, it wasn't the Fulani that destroyed Oyo--Oyo tumbled by its own very hands! But, how shall we tell this kind of story...how shall we say it? With what tongue...what?

(A man gets up to sing his oriki)

Man I

Baasotan.

Omo Otuugbedee

Omo Bebo wo,

Koo oto toko bo o

Iku nbe lobo Obinrin

Iku ti i pa ni!ⁱ

Baasotan

(Moved)

O seun gan an ni, Alade, omo Ogboja!

Emi o fo 'gun to dun-un 'le d'omo

Ma fo 'gun to daa d'omo

Oka ku,

Omo re jo 'gun oro.

Baluwe ku,

Omo re a si jo 'gun ito.

Nijo moba ku,

Omo ni o jo 'gun ise ati itan an mi

Omo naa ni o jo 'gun oso eyin.ⁱⁱ

(Silence)

Tonight is a special night. And so I will tell a special story.
But first tell me this: why would the calabash-beater tarry
and refuse to take his leave when the funeral is over?

Woman I

Does he want to inherit the wife of the deceased?

Crowd

(Variously)

I wonder! Who knows! Nonsense!

Baasotan

Indeed! Tell me: what happens to the child that was never taught how to behave at home, or that one who was taught but refused to heed instruction?

Man II

It is from outside, right on the street, that they learn wisdom!

Baasotan

Indeed! Why did we behave like the child who was never taught wisdom at home, and the one who refused to heed instructions that were given by the parent?

Crowd

(Variously)

A-ah! Howu! Ki lase? [What have we done wrong?]

Baasotan

If a man engages in a dangerous venture, he does not cast discretion to the wind! *(Pauses)* That was what we did...what he did! *(Drumming is heard from afar. Praise chants are also heard. Shortly a man, dressed in war attires, appears followed by some men. It is Adegun Onikoyi).*

Man I

Onikoyi oo!

Eso Ikoyi omo adipele mo lo s'ogun

Onikoyi omo ekun Kaba Oke

Onikoyi omo ekun Kaba Lona-gbogbo!ⁱⁱⁱ

Onikoyi

It is the deficiency of biceps that blunts the machete. If a man has strong biceps, he can cut trees with a cudgel (*Chuckles, then addresses the crowd*) Children of our fathers, I greet you all! We have done what you wanted of us. Nupe turned their backs on Sango, and dishonoured the name of Arabambi, Olukoso arekujaye, *sangiri ola'giri ola'giri ka-a-kaa-ka f'igba edun bo!*^{iv} They threw dust at Oyo. They threw ashes and pebbles at us. Isn't that child a bastard, who stands outside and throw pebbles into his father's compound? And Sango's anger swelled, overflowed its bank as the tides push waters ashore. Sango said Oyo should teach Nupe a lesson, and we did!

(People jubilate)

Baasotan

The gods recognize their own when they see one. They recognize the scorpion...he stings with his tail; he stings with his whole body. They send their greetings to the son of the lineage of conquerors!

Onikoyi

Is it my story you want to tell this time?

Baasotan

Why not?

Onikoyi

(Silence)

What voice do I hear from afar?

Aroni

The Ifa Priest comes to you!

Ifagbemi

(Entering) Beware, son of legendary warriors. That this sun that shines much too soon might not set mid-day!

Onikoyi

What do I make of your tongue?

Ifagbemi

There is honour...abundant honour...but death stands by its side.

Onikoyi

Whose death?

Ifagbemi

(Calmly) Yours.

Onikoyi

(Pauses) You saw my death while you divine? I just returned from the battleground where death lives in splendour. You see my death? How shall the world receive the news?

Ifagbemi

If death can kill both the tortoise and the snail with their iron-cast carapace, what spell does a rooster with its fluffy feathers boast as armour against death?

Onikoyi

(Chuckles) What made you think of this?

Ifagbemi

You don't believe me?

Onikoyi:

If it is war that you see, then let it come. Whatever is becoming for a person is what is becoming; a noose is not becoming for a chicken. If a warrior turned his back on war when it is declared, what honour does he boast of... what is left of him?

Man

I would listen to him if I were you.

Onikoyi

(Turns to Man) Who are you...your name?

Man

My name is not important...is it? But I will urge you to heed his message.

Onikoyi

(Turns to his men) Who are you?

Aroni

I am Aroni, son of Orimadegun.

Onikoyi

And you?

Soso

I am Soso, son of Bateji, grandson of Aare Ona Kakanfo Teyeje.

Onikoyi

And who am I?

Soso

You are my lord.

Onikoyi

Your lord who?

Soso

My lord Adegun Onikoyi, Yanbilolu, son of the lineage of conquerors.

Aroni

(Chants his praise) Onikoyi! Eso Ikoyi..!

Onikoyi

Not now, Aroni! *(Silence, he turns to Man)* If your name is not important, how can what you say to me?

(Pauses briefly and turns to his men)

Lead on home to Oyo. The next voice I want to hear is that of our father, Alaafin Oluewu! *(Onikoyi exits with his men as his acolyte, Aroni, chants his oriki, Ifagbemi stands looking at him as he departs).*

Boy

Who is he?

Baasotan

I thought one of the men mentioned his name.

Boy

I was not paying attention. So who is he?

Baasotan

Come with me then if you want to find out. And, I have to warn you: do not interrupt my story.

Boy

I promise. Shall we go?

(They all exit except the Generals: Edun Gbogun, Timi Ede, Bada, Ikolaba, and AreAgo).

Bada

What shall we make of that?

Timi

To what are you referring?

Ikolaba

It is clear, isn't it? When the evidence suggests an obvious conclusion, one should not shy away from it.

Edun

Perhaps our nobles will do well to speak to us in plain tongue.

Bada

I thought it is matured rooster that settles disputes for people in the dead of night. Incontrovertible evidence settles all doubts and disagreement.

Edun

Yet, your tongues still remain twisted.

Ikolaba

If it is only Edun Gbogun that does not see potential danger in the show that Onikoyi puts up before our very presence, perhaps it was our mistake. Yet, we shall say to be mistaken is not necessarily to be unwise.

Edun

Did you all really think I did not see that? Do we have to make much of that? I thought the person who claps for an imbecile to dance and the imbecile are no different.

AreAgo

Yet, an imbecile is acceptable in a town but not among one's kin.

Edun

They say the beak of a bird snatches whatever the bird desires, but, believe me, the rock has nothing to fear from the bird.

Bada

Indeed?

Edun

Indeed! If one laughs while stabbing another, does that stop the dagger from piercing the skin?

AreAgo

We shall see.

Edun

All the same, we shall keep our eyes on him.

(They move out)

Fade

Scene Two

Lights. Road leading out of Kusu towards Oyo. Noise can be heard from afar. Two men: Ajasa and Ogundele approach.

Ogundele

I hear voices.

Ajasa

Me too. Perhaps the market women. The King's market is not far from here and today is its busiest...so what do you expect? *(They pause to listen)* Did you hear that? That doesn't sound like a market rant.

Ogundele

They say Adegun returns victorious. Nupe forces have been defeated! *(Song becomes louder as a crowd of people appears. The people sing triumphantly)*

Iwo lo ko je Baba o,

Onikoyi, iwo lo ko je Baba

Bi toro se kere, kii segbe sisi

Iwo lo ko je Baba!'

Ajasa

Peace! Now what is the meaning of this?

Woman I

Have you not heard? Oyo defeated Nupe...the contemptuous rebels who think our compassion is a sign of cowardice!

Woman II

And who could have done it if not the son of our fathers
from the lineage of conquerors? Who could have done it if
not Adegun Onikoyi, who could have done it?

Man I

At last we have taught Nupe a lesson that if a dog knows
excrement, and a pig knows a mud pit, the turkey should
also know to whom to direct its fart!

All

Not Oyo again! (*They start another round of singing and
jubilation*)

Iye ni won o maa wo,

Lehin eiye,

Won o l'eiye mu,

Iye ni won o ma woo!^{vi}

Ogundele

Peace! Hold your peace! (*Noise gradually subsides*) What
nonsense! Is that why you have all left your wares in the
market unattended?

Ajasa

Aren't you the same people who praised Edun Gbogun to
high heavens?

Ogundele

I thought these same people called Gbogun an *orisa*?
Didn't you call Edun Gbogun an *orisa*, the saviour of
Oyo?

Man II

Wasn't the same Oyo sinking beneath the yoke under the very presence of Gbogun?

Woman II

Right in the very eyes of Gbogun, we lost Mugba mugba...Abepo...and Kanla, right under his watch.

Man II

Did you mention Kanla? Who doesn't remember the defeat of Oyo at Kanla? That was when we knew why failure dogged our path—why Oyo and the Yoruba continued to stumble in defeat.

Woman I

Must we spell it out? Yesterday, the antelope was caught in a pit trap; today the antelope is caught in a pit trap. Is there no other animal in the forest beside the antelope? Must we spell it out?

Woman II

I had thought Gbogun would have learnt wisdom from our fathers: when one becomes old, one stops warring!

Man I

Indeed, when a kite hovers, a chicken does not hang onto an insect. So in his aged wisdom, our father the king, Alaafin Oluewu, summoned Adegun from Ikoyi Ile. And, like his fathers, Onikoyi stood firm at the head of our forces. Didn't we all think our men have lost the fight in them? But, Onikoyi, said they still have fire in them. Now, what do we have here!

Ogunde

Enough! Enough of your ranting talk! If a tick clings onto
a fox's nose, it is not a chicken that will remove it!

Ajasa

If Gbogun's honour has lost its lustre and appeal, it is not
the untrained mouths of wayward children with bruised
tongues like yours that will announce it!

Man II

Is that? But there is something that I know: only two
things are proper for a warrior. A warrior either go to
battle and drives the enemy off, or he dies at the battle!

*(The crowd resumes their celebration as they move off.
Ajasa and Ogunde watch as they depart)*

Fade

Scene Three

Ikoyi Ile, Adegun Onikoyi's agbole (compound), outskirts of Oyo.

At the centre of the compound are shrines of Esu, Sango, and Ogun, arranged side by side. Drums swell lengthily as Adegun arrives with his entourage. He goes to the shrines, squats and picks up the seere (a small metallic object, which produces a sound when it is shaken) on the ground. Drums stop playing, everywhere is silent. He shakes the seere briefly. He mumbles some prayers. He rises and turns. Aroni chants Onikoyi's oriki to the accompaniment of the drums. His wife, Diekola, comes out.

Aroni

Yanbilolu

Eso Ikoyi omo eru ofa

Agbon ti o ri ku sa

Omo asiju apo biri da 'gba ofa so'fun

O po 'fun yooyo da 'gba ofa si 'le!^{vii}

Onikoyi

Wife, do we meet you in peace?

Diekola

As I should be, my lord (*She embraces him excitedly*)

How's our father Alaafin Oluewu?

Onikoyi

Oluewu sits like a rock in Oyo, still his old self though...frail and weak of course, but very wise.

Diekola

And the battle?

Onikoyi

Fought and won. Bloody of course, many men fell on both sides. Well, what is war after all? But on the last count, it was me and my men, Soso, Lagbayi and the rest, who stood tall and alive!

Diekola

I am glad!

Onikoyi

But I was alone except for these loyal warriors. Why?

Diekola

Alone? How? Where was everybody...Edun Gbogun, Timi Ede...the rest of the commanders, where were they? Why would they leave you unprotected?

Onikoyi

Where were they? Good question. How do we tell? But, I rose with all my strength, threw all caution to the winds, and roused my bold and trusted and determined men with my own battle cry. My men picked up their guns, amulets, charms, and bows and arrows...everything at their disposal. We pushed those bastards back, broke their resistance and snatched honour from the hands of dishonour!

Diekola

(Sighs) I am glad. I am truly glad!

Onikoyi

Same thing with me. You should have seen our people when they met us at Kusu.

Diekola

It is amazing how words always travel very fast. We heard everything here in Ikoyi Ile that the markets in Oyo and everywhere were closed for days. People celebrated. They wanted to see your victorious face... and your men's...your bold and enchanting faces, perhaps to catch a glimpse of how you ravaged the Nupe forces!

Onikoyi

You should have seen how they danced all through the path from Kusu right to the palace of Alaafin Oluewu in Oyo. Defeat at battles was almost becoming a permanent garment we wear all around.

Diekola

That's in the past now I suppose.

Onikoyi

Certainly. And, talking about the past, summon everybody in the compound, young and old, men and women, everybody! (*Aroni goes in quickly*) We shall treat the past tonight. Oh, how I feel like a god tonight! (*Aroni returns, followed by people of all age. Baasotan and Boy also come in with them. Silence everywhere. Onikoyi surveys them, and points at a young woman who gets up slowly, frightened*) Do I know your name?

Young Woman

(*Shaking*) Morenike. I am Morenike, my lord.

Onikoyi

Come to me. Don't be afraid. You have done nothing wrong. Diekola tells me you work with your heart. She also tells me that you are cheerful, and laugh a lot. Your

hands are done cracking kernel in my compound. I think you should set them to a more useful purpose (*Pauses*) Go meet Aroni. Be a wife to him. Perhaps you will bear him children who would be blessed with his kind of sonorous voice (*She is shocked, so is Aroni, who recovers and starts to sing Onikoyi's praise. She sobs with joy, runs to Diekola and embrace her*) Enough Aroni, I still have some work to do! (*Silence as Young Woman goes to meet Aroni, who pulls her to his side, both giggling with excitement. Onikoyi goes to an old man and crouches by his side*) They tell me you were a hunter and a very good one at that. Perhaps it was only a rumour...what do you say?

Old Man

It is true, my lord. But it's all gone...the strength is gone. I can hardly load a gun by myself now, or strap a machete to my side, or even carry my hunting bag.

Onikoyi

That is obvious, isn't it? Lagbayi will teach you some new skills. He is a good warrior and hunter, same with Soso here. Perhaps one day soon we shall hunt together, you by my side and, together, we would show the wild that men can grow old, but not their skill no matter how slow and weak it might have become (*Old Man begins to sob*) Oh did you see that? He cries. Have I done something wrong?

Diekola

He is only happy, my lord (*Lagbayi goes to the Old Man, lifts him up and takes him to a corner*) I will get him some water to drink (*She exits, returns with a bowl of water*) Drink. Be fine!

Onikoyi

Why did you do it, Alani? Tell me why! (*A young man rises slowly*) We all thought Adelani was your friend, or perhaps we were wrong?

Young Man

(*Stammers*) I...I am sorry, my lord!

Onikoyi

I only want to understand why you did it. He shouldn't have died...should he?

Young Man

I don't know. I swear I don't know.

Onikoyi

Nobody kills anybody without knowing. Common, talk to me!

Young Man

I was annoyed. He provoked me. But, I swear I have learnt my lesson. No day passes without my asking his troubled soul to forgive me.

Onikoyi

Oh, so you also know that his soul is troubled. That is it then (*He goes to the shrine and picks up a cutlass, raises it for everyone to see*) Bear witness everyone. By sunrise three days from now, Adelani's troubled soul shall be appeased (*He calmly places the cutlass in its place*) Soso, make sure it is done!

Woman

Don't my lord! (*Silence, woman gets up slowly and walks towards Onikoyi. She kneels a few feet away, sobbing*) I beg you my lord...let him live!

Onikoyi

Who are you?

Woman

Nobody.

Onikoyi

But you want his life spared?

Woman

I beg you.

Onikoyi

He was angry. We all get angry, don't we? But only fools fall victim of their anger. And Adelani's soul thirst yet. His soul is trapped, unable to join his ancestors. I only want to do what needs to be done, and this "angry man" here knows it.

Young Man

(*Quietly*) I know.

Woman

You don't know! (*Sobs*) He...he doesn't know, my lord (*Turns to Man*) Why don't you tell him? Tell him...please, tell him!

Diekola

Tell him what? What should he tell my husband?

Woman

He cannot die. He must not die. My child needs his father!

Diekola

Your child?

Woman

I am with a child...his child. I am three moons gone!

Silence

Diekola

Did you hear that, my lord?

Onikoyi

Everybody heard (*Pauses*) But, what must be done, must be done.

Diekola

You cannot do this, my lord.

Onikoyi

Do not tell me what I cannot do! (*He exits. Diekola turns to his men*)

Diekola

Soso?

Soso

My lord commands, we obey! (*Diekola is perplexed, runs after Onikoyi. Woman cries loudly as Young Man is being taken away. Others cry, some run out. Aroni goes away with his new bride. Everyone else leaves except Baasotan and Boy*)

Boy

How could he do that? That woman said she was expecting a baby for that man he just sentenced to death. How could he not be moved by that piece of information?

Baasotan

Boy, which one of your questions should I answer?

Boy

That was cruel!

Baasotan

You heard him, didn't you? He said he had sworn by the gods of his fathers?

Boy

The gods understand compassion, or they don't?

Baasotan

"Nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so," is that not?

Boy

Shakespeare didn't mean it that way. You are manipulating it all!

Baasotan

But, this is not Shakespeare's story; this is mine.

Boy

Fine, but it doesn't change anything. It was cruel and brutal. And, how can you tell such a story?

Baasotan

You ask too many questions for your age.

Boy

You said it is fine to ask questions.

Baasotan

Good. Then, what other thing did I tell you while we were coming here?

Boy

Which one?

Baasotan

About stories.

Boy

You said a story is greater and older than the storyteller.

Baasotan

So, if you want this story to be told, you need to be quiet (*Changes the topic*) He comes out with his wife now. Will you be quiet?

Boy

Whatever! I think we should go.

Baasotan

Yes, I also think so (*They both exit, as Onikoyi comes out, now dressed in dansiki and kembe [a small fitted top and short that extends to the knees]. He is followed immediately by Diekola, Aroni and some drummers*)

Diekola

I think you shouldn't have done that, my lord.

Onikoyi

Done what?

Diekola

The Woman. They are expecting a child together. Did you--

Onikoyi

I swore before I knew, Diekola. Stop pestering over what cannot be undone!

Silence.

Diekola

Ifagbemi sent his boys to propitiate the *orisa* in your absence.

Onikoyi

Ifagbemi? He did? *(Pauses)* Why would...

Diekola

I had missed the count, so I sent for him.

Aroni

But the same Ifagbemi came to Kusu and told...

Onikoyi

How is your woman doing, Aroni? *(Turns to Diekola)*
Perhaps we should show our appreciation by sending him
some gifts *(As he walks toward exit)* And we should be
celebrating our victory too!

Diekola

(Goes to Aroni) What were you trying to say about
Ifagbemi?

Aroni

What I was trying to say?

Diekola

That he came to Kusu? What happened in Kusu? What did he tell my lord?

Onikoyi

(He re-enters) He saw me crumbling even as my sun shines brightly in the sky. What do I make of such a rant? Onikoyi court battles; he will die at the front, not with his back turned. Whatever the invalid craves is what causes their death!

Diekola

(Sighs) Leave us alone, Aroni *(Aroni exits with the drummers)* Few days after you left for battle I had this dream. It was after news had reached us that your men have been completely routed by Nupe forces and our people lamented another heavy loss and defeat. I saw a different thing in my dream. Blood was everywhere as are mangled bones and bodies. At first I was terrified, then I saw you standing tall, and I knew you would return to my bosom. But, lately my dreams have not been clear!

Onikoyi

And you think it has something to do with Ifagbemi's message?

Diekola

It is only a small stream that a crab can produce its oil in, when the water becomes huge and swift, it sweeps both the crab and its oil away!

Onikoyi

(*Chuckles*) Indeed! Yet if the wind blew strong and wild the water in a coconut still remain...you do know that? I have honours to receive yet, not my death!

Diekola

You still remember the troubles you had when you did not allow Oyo warriors to pillage Bariba after we defeated them?

Onikoyi

I suppose that was in the past.

Diekola

Do you really think so? People want the right thing to be done, but they also fight anyone who wants to do it. Perhaps some of your men are still angry with you.

Onikoyi

How can they be angry with me? I have done everything I had to do to keep us safe and sound. I have risked my life more than anybody else. I have spent more time away from my house...from you...what else does Oyo want me to do?

Diekola

I am not saying you haven't done enough.

Onikoyi

What are you saying? Why would anyone want my death?

Diekola

The same reason why they wanted you to keep Oyo safe.

Onikoyi

If I have truly done that...kept Oyo safe, then I believe it is not death but honour that yet awaits me.

Odekoya

(Entering into the agbole with Odegbami) The more reason we should return together to Oyo immediately.

Onikoyi

(Playfully) He comes! Son of the great humbler of the wild!

Odekoya

And he stands tall among other men...son of the lineage of legendary warriors. When a king is absent...

Onikoyi

We must salute his palace! *(They embrace)* Welcome to my home, brave Odekoya.

Odekoya

Thank you. Here is Odegbami, my son from Amosa. You remember my late wife from Gbere?

Onikoyi

We will remain grateful to them in Gbere for keeping our father, Alaaḡin Onigbogi, safe when those bastard Nupe first invaded Oyo and he sought refuge in Gbere.

Diekola

But, he also died in Gbere and could not return home to his palace and people. What a shame for a king to die in exile! Come Odegbami, let me show you some interesting things in our *agbole* *(She goes in with Odegbami)*.

Odekoya

That was really a shame...about Alaafin Onigbogi, don't you think?

Onikoyi

Indeed. What do you mean we should return to Oyo immediately?

Odekoya

The league of hunters prepare a night of *ijala* to honour you and our brave warriors. We shall assemble in three days' time.

Onikoyi

I am honoured! Just what I was telling my wife, but she thinks otherwise.

Odekoya

Women...they always look for something to worry about, don't they?

Onikoyi

When was the last time you had a good meal in my house? Diekola will prepare us a good one.

Odekoya

That won't be necessary. We head for Gbere so that Odegbami can meet some of his mother's family, and have to leave for Oyo on time before it gets dark (*Diekola appears with Odegbami. He is munching a bone*) Oh, did you see the poor boy! (*They all laugh*)

Onikoyi

Odekoya and his men plan *ijala* in my honour. In three days' time we have to be in Oyo.

Odekoya

You should both be at your best. We will surprise you (*To Odegbami*) Come son, we should be on our way (*They exit. Onikoyi follows them. Diekola sighs*)

Diekola

*Ijala...*is this what I saw in my dream? (*Sighs*) Is this...it?

Fade

ACT TWO

Scene One

Oyo. Edun Gbogun's compound.

Edun Gbogun and Timi of Ede are in a crucial meeting. Present also are Oyo senior military officers: Ikolaba, Bada and AreAgo.

Timi

The colombus monkey is never so reduced by circumstance that it becomes a land-hugging creature. The vulture is never so badly off that it becomes the equal of a chicken. What has come over you? Why have you reduced yourself this low that a child unweaned from his mother's breasts take the shine away from your table?

Edun

He doesn't like me. That much I know.

Timi

And who should apologize for that? Me? He doesn't like you but it was you who stood your ground to have him lead our warriors to battle against Nupe forces.

AreAgo

After what he did to our men in the Bariba case.

Edun

We couldn't have won that argument. Our men wanted to plunder Bariba, he stood against it, what should I have done? He did what our tradition expected of us.

Timi

Oh, you make me sick when you say this! Those men fought to safeguard that tradition!

Edun

They deserved to be compensated, but not to plunder. We were all clear about that. I couldn't have prevented Onikoyi for doing the right if our men were losing their heads!

Timi

So, why cry to us now? I thought we have lost our heads.

Edun

This is a different case, is it not?

Bada

No, this one only makes it obvious. Because you fear another defeat under your command. Because it would be one defeat too many. Our people have not forgotten what we suffered at Mugbamugba and Kanla.

Silence

AreAgo

Say something to that!

Edun

What should I say...that it is not true, that I am not troubled? What should I say? (*Pauses*) Well, at least he has proved me right, has he not? At least I made a good choice...he is a good soldier...he proved it more than once!

AreAgo

And he proved something else again...about Ojo Amepo!

Edun

What about Ojo Amepo? He was the Aare Ona Kakanfo before me...what about him?

Timi

What about him? Amepo usurped your position. What reason did he give? That you also usurped Toyeye of Ogbomoso's position...yet you cannot see all of the shameful past coming back to shame you all over!

Edun

What? By our gods, Adegun is from Ikoyi Ile...he cannot become the Kakanfo!

Timi

Are you listening to yourself? It is all too clear you are not thinking.

Edun

Thinking about what?

Timi

That you are weak...and unreasonable...that this path you tread will lead to your end!

Edun

What will Onikoyi do? Bring war on me?

Timi

What if he did? What if he rallied the men under his command to challenge your authority?

AreAgo

Are we really debating this issue? Edun has been digging his grave long before now. When Alaafin Oluewu said

people of Ikoyi Ile and the other environs are all Oyo, Edun was his voice. He endorsed Onikoyi's appointment as the field commander in the last battle against Nupe. Now, are we debating Adegun Onikoyi's identity? He is Oyo, simple and clear!

Bada

When you say things this way, AreAgo, you make me sick. When did the people of Ikoyi Ile become Oyo? The monkey and gorilla may resemble, but by our gods, they are not the same thing! That Ikoyi Ile shares her territories with Oyo and pay allegiance to the Alaafin of Oyo do not mean that we draw blood from the same loins!

Timi

This guinea worm is fast becoming an ulcer, lord of Gbogun. No sooner was he appointed commander of our forces against Nupe did he start to issue commands. No sooner...and he starts to lord things over us...over me and the rest of the soldiers that are senior in rank to him!

Bada

Because you, Edun Gbogun, allowed him, sanctioned him, and established this error! When we sell our own people cheaply at the market place, how could we possibly avoid not paying through our noses to buy them back? We have warriors, courageous men. But, you said 'No' to all of them! You told Alaafin Oluewu, that none of our own men was good enough. That our assault are not more than scratches by a baby trying to suckle from his mother's breasts, unless the strength of an *atohunrinwa*^{viii} was added to boost our feeble claws! Now people say the guinea worm you are nursing is fast becoming an ulcer, lord of Gbogun, you tremble. Can't you see? The wound

left by a cutlass may heal, but the one left by speech never heals.

Ehun

And you believed them? Is that what this is all about?

Timi

An unpleasant inside is what a venerable elder should have, not an unpleasant mien. Have you heard how the people of Oyo praise him lately? Better and above your name! Yet it was because you elevated him! The day an elder dies is far better than the day an elder is disgraced!

Ehun

The spinach is never disgraced in the gathering of vegetables!

Timi

Really? Why did you summon us? Answer me!

Silence

You say nothing. Indeed, only one day brings disgrace to a person, the shame is experienced every day!

Ehun

Are you blaming me for all this? (*Walks away*) It is all my fault. You don't have to force it down my throat. I know.

Timi

You miss the point again. Who talked about blaming you or anyone? We are not interested in what is your fault. What are you going to do about it? That is what we want to hear!

Edun

See...that is the problem (*Pauses*) I don't know what to do.
I swear by Ogun, the god of War...I don't know!

Timi

You like the way things are? Is that what you are telling me... telling us? That the best that is good for Oyo can only come from Ikoyi Ile, but not from our own loins? From the fringes of Oyo but not from her very own heart and bosom...is that what you are saying? (*Chuckles*) Look at you...you can't even sleep soundly any more. It tears you from the inside...gnaws at your liver, twist your inside so much that sleep parted from you many moons ago. Your young wife told me how...

Edun

What? Are you out of your mind? You go behind my back hopping around my wives?

Timi

I didn't ask. She told me! (*Pauses*) You are troubled, aren't you? She thought you were losing your mind. Aren't you losing sleep because an upstart warrior takes the shine from you? Miserable Edun, "that General of yesterday!" Are you not losing your mind...are you not?

Silence

Edun

(*Mutters*) It's a shame! It is my shame...I agree with you.

Bada

It is not a shame to be troubled, lord of Gbogun. It will become a big shame if you cannot do anything about it.

AreAgo

You have to return to your days of glory. It is another person's divination that one does not repeat, not that which concerns one. Snatch honour from the cursed hands of dishonour... and do it quickly.

Edun

How?

Ikolaba

How...you ask? Be the Generalissimo that you once were!

Silence

Edun

When is Atiba returning to Oyo?

Bada

Atiba cannot come to Oyo. We banished him and swore an oath to keep it that way.

AreAgo

Did Edun Gbogun forget that?

Ikolaba

I believe he must have got used to living with his mother's people in Ago Oja.

Edun

Obviously you are not thinking with me.

Bada

What do you mean?

Edun

To kill a partridge on one's farm, one has to be cleverer than the partridge. Send words to Atiba. And you should all prepare yourselves!

Fade

Scene Two

Onikoyi's agbole. Adegun is with his trusted soldiers Soso and Lagbayi.

Onikoyi

Atiba returns to Oyo? Is that supposed to be a rumour?

Soso

His wife and children arrived last night. Our men said they sighted his caravan moving towards Oyo.

Onikoyi

His Caravan? How do you mean?

Lagbayi

As usual...isn't it? The caravan bearing his family and household before he showed up...like a king even when he is not the one wearing the crown in Oyo.

Onikoyi

Edun Gbogun...Timi Ede...our Generals...do they know Atiba plans to return to Oyo?

Soso

Our men say Atiba couldn't be this bold without their knowing.

Onikoyi

Perhaps now I have the answer to my question.

Soso

What question?

Onikoyi

Nothing.

Lagbayi

They went straight to Timi Ede's house.

Onikoyi

And Atiba?

Lagbayi

We suppose Atiba will arrive Oyo in time to attend the *ijala* that was called in your honour.

Silence

Lagbayi

You are not saying anything?

Onikoyi

Intention is the eldest, contemplation is the next, and the plan of action is the third. Atiba couldn't have planned this alone. But why are these old men doing this...taunting me, is it? Does he know about this...Alaafin Oluewu...does he know?

Soso

He is as confused as you are. No, he doesn't.

Onikoyi

What can an old man do to reverse all of this...not with the threats from the Fulani and the little annoyances from Dahomey...what can he do?

Soso

Some traders from Oyo were attacked few days ago by the raiders from Bariba.

Onikoyi

But Timi and Edun are planning to bring Atiba back to Oyo, these cowards... they could not even deal with Gezo's warriors. I whipped their backs and drove them back. Only cowards fear them... Amazon warriors, they call them, but I whipped their buttocks and sent them back to their husbands' bedroom where they truly belong...I did!

Diekola

(Enters) If Atiba returns to Oyo, or if Edun Gbogun and Timi Ede want him, so be it. He is a prince. He is Oluewu's cousin.

Onikoyi

I know everything Atiba is, and what the bastard will never be!

Diekola

You are angry but may I say this is no time for anger? You have a duty...a task to perform. Isn't that why Alaafin Oluewu wanted you and made you the Kakanfo? Like chained buffalos the Fulani forces still rumble from the North threatening to overrun our territories. Nupe will return after their wounds must have healed. The Amazons of Dahomey will regroup to face our soldiers. You don't imagine King Gezo will fold his arms if he truly wanted to free his people from Oyo's eternal control, did you? If Atiba wants to return to Oyo, so be it as long as you are able to discharge your duties to your king and people.

Onikoyi

So be it? What about the oath we all swore regarding Atiba? The sanctity of the oath sworn in the very presence of our gods? Where is that honour? Does it mean it is nothing...that there is nothing of sacred value in that oath?

Diekola

What about duty?

Onikoyi

What about it? (*Pauses*) Oh, it's now all too clear to me. Is this Oyo politics? Are you...are they using you against me?

Diekola

Me? Use me against you...how?

Onikoyi

Why would you tell me to close my eyes to this kind of thing, in spite of the obvious treachery, this gang up against the Alaafin, against the throne?

Diekola

Are you saying this to me...accusing me?

Onikoyi

Who can I trust again in this part?

Diekola

Even me...your wife?

Onikoyi

(*Goes to her, she moves away*) In my kind of business, trust can be a burden you must understand.

Diekola

Even in your house...with your wife...with me?

Onikoyi

Make light of this conversation, Diekola, but think of what concerns this land. When Ojo Amepo conquered Iware, where was Atiba? Where was he when we conquered Okiti, Ajamu, Koto, Ajaba...all of those threats... when I fought alongside Aare Ona Kakanfo Ojo Amepo? Is Atiba not a soldier... and a prince? I thought he should be more concerned about saving Oyo...saving the throne, where was he while Amepo and the rest of us fought to save Yoruba land?

Diekola

Atiba was at Gudugbu. He had to go to Ago Oja to attend to his ailing mother.

Onikoyi

The lie he told everybody! The lie cowards and shameless opportunists like him tell to win people over to their side, only to disappoint them in grave consequences!

Diekola

If that was it, why not let him continue to live the life of lies that he had chosen?

Onikoyi

No, I cannot, Diekola. I cannot. I shall not!

Diekola

Why not?

Onikoyi

Because the men who died... brave men who laid down their lives defending the honour and integrity of Oyo would have died in vain. Because Atiba's return to Oyo makes a mockery of their sacrifice!

Diekola

(Turns to the men) I want you men to leave us alone...please I beg of you.

Lagbayi

We came...

Demoke

I know you came to give him a report as always. But, please I want to speak to him...as my husband, not a warrior *(Pause, no movement)* I said I want...!

Onikoyi

Diekola!

Silence. Onikoyi gestures at the men to leave.

Onikoyi

Stay with Aroni at the grove *(Men exit)* What is this about? You do not shout at these men...ever!

Diekola

(Kneels) I think there is something you are forgetting. As the bee hums and the small calabash containing charms also hums, the intestine must not be silent. One should not ignore one's problems in spite of other people's preoccupation.

Onikoyi

And what do you think is my problem?

Diekola

Everything else but Atiba.

Onikoyi

Atiba is my problem! Our problem! Atiba is the problem of Oyo!

Diekola

(Sighs) There is a particular way a man would eat his food and people would call him a thief. Familial obligations do not extend to diseases; let each person look well to their arms!

Onikoyi

Really? What is this about, Diekola? You don't believe that what I am pursuing here makes sense, or should be of any importance? What is this about?

Diekola

That is it.

Onikoyi

That is what?

Diekola

Then you have not heard them...what they say? You are not even an Oyo man. Perhaps not a proper Yoruba!

Onikoyi

Whoever is saying that? Who is saying that? My father fought battles and died defending Oyo. My father's fathers shed their blood, laid down their lives so that Oyo may

continue to stand. I have fought battles all my life, not only to defend Oyo, but Yoruba land...who is vomiting such poison? Who wants me out of the circle after staking my claim at the centre of it?

Diekola

Are you really sure you have staked enough to lay that claim at the centre...by their own standard?

Onikoyi

Whose standard?

Diekola

We will remain small groups of people divided by what should ordinarily unite us...unless--

Onikoyi

Unless what...tell me!

Diekola

You have something else to fight than fighting Atiba. I even wonder what his return to Oyo will add to what we already are.

Onikoyi

What some of us have spent a greater part of our lives fighting...treachery!

Diekola

Yet you have something more to prove than fighting Atiba.

Onikoyi

(Exiting) I have nothing to prove to anybody!

Demoke

Then you should listen to my dream!

Fade

Scene Three

Edun Gbogun's house.

Edun Gbogun meets with Lagbayi, Ogundele and Ajasa are also in attendance.

Lagbayi

I don't understand, my lord Gbogun. You said I should serve him. You said I must trust him with my life as my father trusted you. You said...

Edun

Do you think I am too old to remember what I said? But right now, I want you to listen to what I am saying. Is that difficult for you to do? *(Pauses)* This song has to change as its dance step.

Lagbayi

Now you want me to switch allegiance?

Edun

You still don't understand, Lagbayi? An abandoned well kills a horse and we rejoice but the same well will in time kill a human being if we do not take precaution. This is taking precaution, Lagbayi *(Pauses, sees that Lagbayi is not convinced)*. This is not about what is right or wrong; it is about doing what is necessary...for Oyo.

Lagbayi

But I thought everything Onikoyi has done is for Oyo.

Edun

Any proper Oyo man would have done same. You could have done the same and much more!

Lagbayi

But, he is our field commander...General of the Day. You appointed him. And you asked me, and all of us, to obey him...take instructions from him, and trust him with our lives. And like your obedient son that I have always been, I gave him my total allegiance.

Edun

That is the point: loyalty. That is why Oyo is different. We understand what loyalty means, we stand by it, and die for it if necessary. You have shown example.

Lagbayi

Thank you my lord.

Edun

You should thank me when everything is returned to their proper places and everyone where they truly belong (*Pauses*) There is no stopping Atiba from returning to Oyo. When locusts are done feeding on a farmland, they return home. Atiba's sojourn is ended, must we deny him a return to his father land? And it is not just having Atiba return to his father's house, it is also about making sure we do not repeat past mistakes...ever again!

Lagbayi

So where is lord Atiba now?

Edun

Where he is supposed to be.

Lagbayi

In Oyo?

Edun

Where else do you want him to be?

Lagbayi

And, he will attend the *ijala* in honour of my lord Onikoyi?

Edun

Perhaps. It all depends on you.

Lagbayi

Me? How?

Edun

See to it that Adegun attends the *ijala*.

Lagbayi

Why is that necessary? He knows he is being honoured, why won't he?

Edun

Make sure he doesn't change his mind.

Lagbayi

And when he attends?

Edun

For our collective good. Especially yours.

Lagbayi

What are you talking about?

Edun

Let us just say Edun Gbogun wants to right what he did wrong (*Pauses*) See to it that Adegun doesn't change his mind.

Silence. Lagbayi exits

Ajasa

That is it! It is the goat that dies at the time of the harvesting of yam that asks to be eaten with pounded yam.

Edun

It is too early to rejoice. I doubt if my words sit well in the veranda of his ears.

Ogundele

If he needs further prodding, that is not a difficult task. We can ensure that happens.

Edun

Thank you. It will not go unnoticed.

Ajasa and Ogundele exit. Edun paces about. Romoke enters, stands by the entrance.

Rolake

Come to bed, my lord. It is getting late.

Edun

I can see it is getting late.

Rolake

Then, come to bed.

Edun

(Sighs)

Rolake

Your men say he is not an Oyo man. But does that really matter after everything that he has done for Oyo? You recommended him to lead our warriors and stood by his choice because you believe in, and trust him.

Edun

I must have been beside myself when I did that.

Rolake

Because he deserves it. Because he has shown the strength and skill deserving of a commander and he has not once failed you since he took charge...not once. Why are you not considering that, my lord?

Edun

Whatever you have in mind, just say it.

Rolake

One arrives according to one's worth; a horseman often arrives with hoofs and stirrups. Onikoyi arrived! You need to let go of this feeling... please!

Edun

What feeling?

Rolake

You know what I mean, my lord. No matter how tall Onikoyi rises, he will still remain under your shadow. You do not need to limit his height...or his effort to rise.

Edun

If the leopard does not act mighty, won't people take it for a cat?

Rolake

Oyo chews more bones which can injure the gum. That should be a matter of concern than waste time debating if a bush fowl had enough meat. Besides, I don't think Atiba is a good bait in this affair. You do not cause a flood because you wanted to catch a rodent that run into your bedroom. Atiba isn't really the right---

Edun

Who has been telling you things about Atiba?

Rolake

Or what you have been telling me in your sleep? You hardly lie down by my side every night before the whole business of the day is laid bare in my palms. You have not had a sound sleep in many days. You even age quickly now. Why not let things be, my lord? Whatever a man cannot cure, he must learn to endure.

Edun

You are a woman. You understand very little.

Rolake

But I do understand that if a man has to recite genealogies to establish his claim to inheritance in a place, it means he has no claim to patrimony there in the first place. You do not need to go to great length to assert your authority and honour. As long as Adegun is victorious, the honour still comes back to you for making the right choice!

Edun

Then you know very little about the way of this life.

Rolake

(Pauses) I will be on the bed...waiting for you.

She exits. Silence

Edun

I will have my honour back!

Fade.

Scene Four

Along a bush path.

Ajasa and Ogundele quickly catch up with Lagbayi.

Ajasa

So, what are you going to do?

Lagbayi

What am I going to do? It doesn't make sense at all!

Ogundele

Good things don't usually make sense at the initial stage.

Lagbayi

What is good about this?

Ogundele

Everything is good about this.

Ajasa

Lagbayi cannot understand because he has made up his mind not to understand.

Lagbayi

Because you haven't seen Adegun at the battle ground. You cannot understand his sense of patriotism. I have never seen anyone so bold... determined... committed—all for Oyo! And, how can I understand when we start talking about who is from Ikoyi Ile, and who is from Oyo. Aren't we all Yoruba?

Ogundele

The palm tree and the coconut tree may stand tall and resemble each other, but we all know which is more productive. We all know the difference when it matters.

Ajasa

Because you were not really listening to the people when Onikoyi returned from battle, it is difficult for you to see why Edun Gbogun wants Atiba. What do you think will happen if Alaafin Oluewu dies tomorrow? I wonder if you still remember the story of Bashorun Gaha, the kingmaker and king destroyer. You do not want that history to repeat itself.

Lagbayi

You think Adegun Onikoyi could become another Gaha?

Ajasa

It is a trap that the giant rat disdains that wrenches its testicles backwards. Dangers that one belittles are likely to cause great havoc.

Lagbayi

Not him...not Onikoyi.

Ajasa

But, he dispenses justice, his kind of justice that is bereft of feelings.

Lagbayi

He had one of his servants executed, is that what you wanted to tell me?

Ogundele

After pleading he was going to be a father!

Lagbayi

His wife pleaded, not him. I was there.

Ajasa

What difference does that make? He killed him anyway!

Ogundele

Bashorun Gaa, the kingmaker and king destroyer...that was how he started. May our gods forbid that another Gaha should rise in our time...before our very eyes...and all we do was urge him on!

Lagbayi

And, why bring Atiba? Until a king joins his ancestor, another one is never crowned. Alaafin Oluewu yet lives!

Ogundele

An old and weak king?

Lagbayi

It is sickness one can cure not old age, isn't it?

Ajasa

Edun Gbogun says, bring Adegun to *ijala*. That is simple enough, isn't it?

Lagbayi

Simple? How can you know? That was a declaration of war. You are farmers, aren't you? How can you possibly understand what Edun Gbogun meant? They know too well that Onikoyi will stand against Atiba's return to Oyo. Are they planning to start a war when we are still struggling to drive away our assailants?

Ogundele

Well, in that case he should be up to the task.

Lagbayi

It doesn't make sense! He will only see treachery in this move, and why won't he?

Ogundele

If you ask, I think war and treachery are different ways of describing the same thing.

Ajasa

Didn't you tell me: a warrior must do something much more important than killing the enemy at the battle ground; that he must also stay alive and master the art of surviving; that he must do what is necessary at every point in time? Isn't that what makes him different from farmers like us...why you are different?

Lagbayi

And you think that's what we need...at this time?

Ogundele

Why are you really making much of this simple task? Ensure Onikoyi attends *ijala*, is that too much to do?

Lagbayi

I didn't say that, did I?

Ajasa

Then go on and do it.

Lagbayi

I only fear what could happen if Atiba also attends the ceremony.

Ogundele

These are old men, Lagbayi. They can take care of themselves.

Lagbayi

Really?

Ajasa

The person digging a grave is the one performing funerary duties, those crying are merely making a noise. Prove yourself a warrior; when a duty is one's turn, one does not dodge it!

Lagbayi

It is not out of fear that the palm tree pleads to be allowed to stand; it is on the account of tomorrow's palm wine.

Ajasa

Except that what we have the good sense to preserve today will yield benefits for us all in future. Think about it!

Fade

Scene Five

Ikoyi Ile.

Onikoyi's agbole. Adegun Onikoyi is by the shrine. He squats and pours libation.

Dirge at the background

A o m'eni fe t'eni o

A o m'eni fe t'eni

A ri won l'oju, ari won ni 'rin ese

A o m'eni fe t'eni.^{ix}

Onikoyi

Esu Laalu

He is Esu,

Who turns right into wrong, and wrong into right

He is Esu,

Who throws a stone yesterday and kills a bird today!

Esu slept in the house,

But the house was too small for him.

Esu slept on the veranda,

But the veranda was too small for him.

Esu then slept in a nut,

At last he was able to stretch himself!

He is Esu,

When he is angry, he hits a stone until it bleeds.

When he is angry, he sits on the skin of an ant.

When he is angry he weeps tears of blood.

Esu do not fight me!

But, is this you, Esu? Is this you playing your pranks,
pitching brothers against themselves? When two brothers
fight over a piece of rich farmland, a stranger reaps the
bounteous harvest. Isn't that the wisdom of our fathers? Is
this you, Esu, at your deceitful best?

Sango, I salute you!

Soldier. Emperor. Scourge of felons

Who rides fire like a horse.

The god who died in the market place

And woke up in the house

Sango walks alone but enters into town

Like a swarm of locusts!

Sango, why are you silent when your throne is being
desecrated? I do not understand your silence when your
vicegerent, Alaafin Oluewu, is being humbled and
disgraced wrought by the hands of some of your bastard
children...why Sango?

Ogun Onire.

God. Pathfinder. Needle that pricks at both ends!

Ogun kills on the right and destroys on the left,

Ogun kills on the left and destroys on the right,

Ogun kills in silence.

Ogun do not fight me, I belong to you!

When the path became clogged at the earliest time, it was you, Ogun, who broke resistance and paved the way for passage. My path is strewn with treachery, Ogun give me your strength!

Ifagbemi

(Entering) How about a person who vows to disgrace you, and you respond that there is no way he can succeed, but if he spreads the word that you did not clean yourself after defecating, to how many people will you display your anus to prove him wrong? What if a devious person goads one to confront a leopard and fill one's quiver with broken arrows, what then shall we do?

Onikoyi

(Turns and rises) Whatever the rest of the world does, I will not forswear! *(Ifagbemi sits, brings out his opele and divines, Onikoyi sits on the ground with him)*

Ifagbemi

Asadanu, asadanu l'omode n sakuta Ode baale

Adia f'aye

Ni jo t'oun ati isekuse jumo n s'ota

Nwon ni ki aye ru'bo

Aye ko ko ru

Esu ba ni ki awon mejeeji wo ijakadi

Isekuse ba gbe aye sanle

Won ni: E ma wo o

Isekuse de 'le aye o.^x

(Pauses briefly, then continues)

Bi e r'aye e sa f'aye

Bi e r'aye e sa f'aye

Isese waye ijimere dudu

Aye naa lo t'aso ijimere b'epo

Aye naa lo p'ogidan

Ogidan oloola iju

Bi e r'aye e sa f'aye.^{xi}

Silence

Onikoyi

Why are you not talking?

Ifagbemi

This is not looking good...not good at all!

Onikoyi

Still what you read from your *opon Ifa* is my death?

Ifagbemi

And for a start do not attend the *ijala*.

Onikoyi

That was called in my name and honour?

Ifagbemi

And be vigilant!

Onikoyi

(*Rises*) Whoever does that...hide somewhere...when people aim to honour him?

Ifagbemi

(*Sighs*) Then say nothing... and do nothing.

Onikoyi

Even if circumstances demand that I do otherwise?

Ifagbemi

Say nothing

(*Ifagbemi packs his stuff and rises, moves towards exit and stops*)

Do nothing.

Onikoyi

What are you trying to make of me?

Ifagbemi

Do not say...

Onikoyi

I came back from wars that should have terminated me, so do not tell me what you think I should not do...ever! If your *opele* insists that Onikoyi will die tomorrow or even tonight, my fathers' say, NO, he yet lives. Yanbilolu will not die before his time! (*Silence, Diekola enters unnoticed*)

Ifagbemi

The insect which the woodpecker kills suffers from one of two things: it is either deaf or stupid. You came back from war, but you have not finished the battle.

Onikoyi

I am Odumbaku. I died many years in the past. What is left is my after-life, believe me! (*Walks away and sees Diekola*) See to it that his gift is well packaged.

Ifagbemi

I do not need your gift.

Onikoyi

But you need to leave my house... now. And do not return unless I send for you!

Ifagbemi

Of course, son of legendary warriors (*Ifagbemi exits. Onikoyi stands looking at him as he exits. Aroni enters*)

Onikoyi

Aroni, go and get my things ready and get yourself prepared as well. We have an *ijala* to attend in Oyo tonight. We must leave on time.

Aroni

I wanted to report...my lord.

Onikoyi

Not now. Go get prepared (*Aroni exits. Onikoyi turns to his wife*) Are you coming with me to Oyo?

Diekola

The Priest...he wants you to stay at home, isn't it?

Onikoyi

He wants nothing like that from me. Are you coming to Oyo or not?

Diekola

You don't lie to me. Please, don't start now...my lord.

Onikoyi

How can he insist on that? Me? Sit at home and be quiet even if the occasion demands that I speak?

Diekola

Because that is the sensible thing to do.

Onikoyi

Or, the most cowardly?

Diekola

Only that one who is insane will ever call you a coward
(*Silence*) I had another dream yesterday. Three times I have had the same dream.

Onikoyi

(*Going towards the inner room*) I will listen to your dream, but not now.

Diekola

Because you know it's about you?

Onikoyi

(*Stops*) About me? Your dream is about me? Come then, let us hear it.

Diekola

Plenty celebration, a lot of dancing, and chanting.

Onikoyi

The *ijala* in my honour is tonight. There will be a lot of what you saw.

Diekola

Everybody was there, but you were not. I searched everywhere, yet couldn't find you.

Onikoyi

You have not been sleeping well lately. Your heart is heavy. Never mind, after tonight, we shall have enough time to cuddle and make love.

Diekola

You think my emotions make me unwell and disturbed?

Onikoyi

What else could make a woman lose sleep?

Diekola

You don't know when to stop, do you? When your mind is made up about something even if it means hurting people close to you?

Onikoyi

What do you want me to do, Diekola? Say it. But not to sit at home and pretend to be unwell when I am hale and sound. What do you want me to do?

Diekola

Listen to me.

Onikoyi

I am.

Diekola

No, you are not (*Pauses*) A horse is powerful, it runs and gallops with strength that even a thousand animals can

never muster, but, sometimes it falls. Can't you understand that as well, my lord?

Lagbayi enters.

Lagbayi

Do I meet my master in peace?

Onikoyi

Come on in, Lagbayi. You are just in time. Diekola worries for my safety. She thinks I am in danger.

Lagbayi

Danger? Well, I won't say that.

Diekola

Because you don't know?

Lagbayi

Because when we start living our lives governed by fear, the land itself will tumble---buried in uncertainty. And, come to think of it: who really understands what danger means than the son of Onikoyi? When people go to war, they go with their hearts. They go with their heads. When we slaughter them, we cut off their heads and then remove their heart from their chest, leaving them to meet their ancestors as empty shells.

Onikoyi

Did you hear that? Lagbayi always speaks with sweetness, as his strong arms that I trust at the battle ground. But, Diekola sounds very convinced. Perhaps you will send words to Odekoya and his men...

Lagbayi

You are not thinking of calling off the *ijala*...because she fears for your safety, are you?

Diekola

There will always be some other time to honour him. Tell the nobles other pressing matters came up that Onikoyi must attend (*Aroni enters*) Go with Aroni and give them our regrets.

Lagbayi

Everybody is waiting for him...those who matter both in Oyo and its environs.

Diekola

He sends his regards and never intends to disrespect anyone.

Lagbayi

The horse in front is the one that leads a race for others behind to set their own pace...never a trembling horse.

Diekola

He is not shrugging off his duty. He is just taking the right steps.

Lagbayi

This is fear...simple and clear. How can I say it to our men, that the man I fought by his side at the battle ground hides under the thighs of his wife because she is afraid? The man who led the onslaught against Bariba, Dahomey and Nupe, crushing them in brutal rage, how shall I deliver the news? Fulani forces are lurking at the corner. How can we stand tall and bold in front of the threat when our

Generalissimo, my lord Adegun Onikoyi, buries his head in fear?

Diekola

Tell them whatever...

Lagbayi

That he chose to hide under the skirt of his wife!

Onikoyi

Enough!

Silence

Lagbayi

My lord, I will tell our men that you are unwell if that is what you want.

Onikoyi

I said enough!

Lagbayi

Enough? When you still stand here swayed by her emotions? Could we have won those wars you led, the battles I stood beside you fighting in unfriendly territories where the sound of swords and piercing arrows are the only thing we were hearing, if we were afraid? You didn't tell me you will come home to become soft and easily manipulated by your wife, or hide under her thighs when you saved me in the hands of the Dahomey warriors. You should have left me to die rather than be the one to stand in the presence of the Generals and lie to them that you are unwell because your wife wanted you to be unwell!

Diekola

Stop telling him things!

Lagbayi

Why? Because he will change his mind?

Diekola

Because you will only hurt him!

Lagbayi

Hurt him? I am not the one hurting him, you are.

Onikoyi

Get me my apparel.

Diekola

My lord?

Onikoyi

You heard me... get me my apparel.

Diekola

You cannot attend this gathering.

Lagbayi

Why?

Diekola

Because... (*sighs*).

Lagbayi

Because...say it.

Diekola

Don't prod me!

Aroni

(Enters with Onikoyi's apparel. He changes his clothes on the spot as they speak)

The report my lord?

Silence

It is urgent, my lord!

Silence

Onikoyi

Speak.

Aroni

Words just came in...Fulani forces routed Bariba two days ago. They moved down across the river towards Gbere, destroying everything along their path. Nine Gbere soldiers managed to escape. They brought the news.

Lagbayi

Did you hear that, my lord? Remind me of the time we ever slept soundly without a sigh and a moan, when worry and despair weren't mixed up with our sleep? That is what happens when fear lives right inside the heart of anyone
(Turns to Diekola) Shall we not listen to this?

Onikoyi

It is enough, Lagbayi.

Lagbayi

Whatever you say, my lord. But, I think it is below you to say you are unwell.

Onikoyi

(To Aroni) Where are the men who escaped?

Aroni

Under Soso's care. They told us Fulani forces push forward. Closer to Iju Sanya after which they will head straight for Oyo!

Diekola

I would rather these threats should be of more concern than the *ijala* upon which my lord disparage the voice of Ifa and mine.

Onikoyi

But entertain fear that could dampen the morale of our men and kill their zeal to crush our enemies?

Diekola

This isn't the first time Oyo will succumb to threat.

Onikoyi

But, we won't because of that fail to attend tonight's *ijala*. After this night, we shall meet the Fulani forces strength for strength and teach the ambitious fools new ways of fighting and routing stubborn enemies!

Aroni

May I ask a question, my lord?

Onikoyi

Still on the Fulani?

Aroni

No my lord, what Ifagbemi said...

Onikoyi

(*Sternly*) He said nothing!

Aroni

What do you want me to do, my lord?

Onikoyi

Tell your wife her thighs must wait tonight. You come with me to Oyo.

Onikoyi

Lead the way Lagbayi, Aroni will join us.

Diekola

Wait! Wherever one finds the greatest disaster, one also finds the greatest lamentation. Just so you know what you are bringing into this house with your resolve (*Onikoyi exits with Lagbayi, Diekola sits apparently sad. Baasotan enters with Boy. They both look at Diekola*)

Boy

Well, he is off to the feast, isn't it?

Baasotan

It seems so. Well, he has to.

Boy

What do you mean he has to? Why can't he just listen to somebody? The priest for instance; his voice was clear "with a clear tongue shriller than all the music."

Baasotan

Now Boy, will you leave Shakespeare out of this? This is my story!

Boy

Then change something in this story. Or just say something to his wife, assure her of his safety...change something...please!

Baasotan

The story—

Boy

Is greater and older than the storyteller, I know!

Baasotan

Well, if you want to change something, it's not here anymore.

Boy

(Interested) Where?

Baasotan

We have to get to Oyo in time before the *ijala* starts *(He dashes out)*

Boy

(Running after him) You can't leave me behind, old man!

Fade.

ACT THREE

Scene One

Oyo. The Hunters Enclave.

The League of Hunters and all Oyo's military Generals are in attendance. The ijala in honour of Adegun Onikoyi is in progress.

1st Hunter

Ogun o o!

Ogun Onire oko o mi.

Igba akoko t'Ogun mbo wa 'le aye

Aso ina lo mu bo 'ra ewu eje l'Ogun wo sorun

Ire lode lo d'ologomo aso

Ti n wo mariwo s'orun!^{xii}

2nd Hunter

Yanbilolu oo!

Ikoyi eso omo adipelemo logun

Bi ng ba n re 'le oga mi

Adegun omo asaju inu agbo.

Eruwa o gbodo sun 'gbe omo eru ofa.

E ma a bo e wa m'okoo mi

L'ogun ba kan 'lekun kokoko o.

Aya Olukoyi ni "Baale mi okoo mi."

'Un to mu o leekini

Ti ko lee mu o
To mu o leekeji,
Ti ko lee mu o.
Kinni ohun lo tun n pad abo yi.
Sebi ajagun ni babaa re?
Gbera nle o dide o bogun lo.
O ni “Bi a bi ni si lomokunrin wa
Sigidi owo otun dide Ologun lo
Eyi to leti o leti mo
Sigidi owo osi dide o logun lo
Eyi to lenu o lee fohun mo
Taarin gungun
Gbera nle o dide o logun lo.
Eyi to lese ko lee dide mo
Legun ba ra girigiri solukoyi
Olukoyi ni “Ng o se seyi se?”
Omo akin se i dojo.
O ni “Firifiri lujū i se ti fii wo ‘mu.
Googoo laguntan i wo.
Bi osan bi oru ni i salaso dudu
Bi tasa ba ‘bode a fe e ku.”
L’Olukoyi ba lo mogun lowo.^{xiii}

3rd Hunter

Yanbilolu o!

Eso Ikoyi omo eru ofa

Jagun to gbomo re lowo ole

Gbonya danu ni ara ana re

O gbe egbaa junu

Fara mo 'ra

Ara lo n gbe ni.

Egbaaa o gbe ni.^{xiv}

Bada

Stop the proceedings!

Silence

Ikolaba

Before a ram's tethering rope slips to its horns, shall we dwell on matters which concern us all?

Onikoyi

I thought we are here to drink and merry. Wine and serious talk are not the best of friends.

Timi

Except that this matter concerns you in the main.

Onikoyi

Like I said, lord Timi, this is hardly the place for any serious talk. If this matter which concerns me is so pressing, I would rather it is discussed when are all sober.

Timi

In time before Prince Atiba returns to his father's house tonight?

Onikoyi

(*Chuckles*) Perhaps his mother's people have pushed him away because he shames them with his cowardice.

AreAgo

That is an undignified way of talking about a prince!

Onikoyi

More undignified than a prince turning his back on his people...his land of birth when it mattered? (*Rises*) What was more degrading than his cowardly conduct when Oyo came under heavy attack, when our territories were ravaged by war and aggression? What was more degrading, I ask you!

Odekoya

Relax Adegun...you speak in the presence of honourable men!

Onikoyi

Then tell men like AreAgo to choose their words carefully!

Timi

Sit down!

Silence, Onikoyi sits calmly.

Edun

You insult my presence, Adegun.

Onikoyi

Apology, my lord.

Edun

What Timi said about Atiba...isn't that the right thing to do?

Onikoyi

I didn't hear what he said. Perhaps I was not really listening.

AreAgo

But you just reacted to—

Timi

It's all right!

Edun

It's all right, AreAgo. Of course we weren't all paying attention, were we? But I wonder, whoever prevents a man from returning to his father's house? Why prevent Atiba from returning to claim his place in his father's house? Aren't treading against customs?

Onikoyi

I had thought a certain kind of glory was in exile for a man who fled his father's house in the first place. I am certain we are all aware Atiba fled Oyo on his volition...he chose to live in exile!

Bada

Listen to that rudeness!

Edun

Since he asked to return, shall we prevent him?

Onikoyi

After we all did, I wonder?

Edun

If you really have anything to say, Adegun why not say it?

Onikoyi

If Atiba was here, I would have loved to ask him some questions.

Bada

But now that he isn't?

Onikoyi

It's a shame... a big shame certainly.

Edun

Let us hear them... your questions.

Onikoyi

(Rises) At Kanla when we first met the Fulani forces, Bale Ago Oja chose to fight by my side. As our men advance during our onslaught, we crushed Esiele. We humbled Popo. Their men swore allegiance to us and fought alongside our own warriors. But we retreated because the Fulani forces proved to be stronger, and formidable, to push forward was to drive our men into their death. Ago Oja is Atiba's maternal place of birth, where was he when we fought to save his mother's people?

Ikolaba

But you were the one tasked with holding our north post at Ago Oja, not Prince Atiba!

Onikoyi

But, it wasn't also Bale Ago Oja's duty, was it? But his territories, Atiba's territories, were closer to Katunga, and much closer to the Fulani controlled enclave, and was in

danger of being seized by the Fulani forces. Does it not make sense what Bale Ago Oja did? It would also make a lot of sense if you don't interrupt me! (*Pauses*) Next question: on our second meeting with the Fulani, despite his failing health, the brave Generalissimo, Aare Ona Kakanfo Ojo Amepo led that Oyo attack. I fought by his side together with Atiba and saw how a man, Ojo Amepo, fought and died with honour as a soldier. We thought we had secured victory after nine days of heavy fighting, but something strange and terrible happened. Suddenly, Amepo was surrounded by Fulani forces after we had been pinned down up the north towards Katunga. At that time Atiba suddenly disappeared. How did the Fulani forces know that Amepo was going to be at Wonworo? How come only untrained and ill-equipped warriors were with him? Amepo couldn't even find his horse. His charms and amulets failed him. He was captured...our field commander captured, stripped naked, paraded round the town and slain in the most disgraceful fashion, his head and limbs decapitated and sent as present to the Alaafin in Oyo, with a message that his own fate will not be different. While we mourned and buried our dead, all Atiba did was to leave for Ago Oja. He didn't even attend Amepo's burial and give him his last and well-deserved respect! Of course, what will a nestling do for its mother than become mature and fly away?

Timi

Are you accusing Atiba of conniving with the Fulani?

Onikoyi

I am not. I didn't. We all did. Was that not why we all swore that Atiba must not return to Oyo? Was that why his flight out of Oyo was construed to be treachery

consequent upon which he remain banned from entering Oyo?

Bada

And you make a case of such a simple oath?

Onikoyi

An oath we swore in the presence of the Alaafin is not a simple oath. An oath we swore in the name of our ancestors, in the name of Ogun, Sango and Esu, is never...ever a simple oath!

AreAgo

Wasn't the same Amepo you glorify now as treacherous as Atiba if his case with Teyeje of Ogbomoso is anything to go by?

Ikolaba

If this was time to share blame, then Atiba should not be held responsible for Oyo's defeat by the Fulani when Afonja was as guilty of the same offence.

Onikoyi

What are you talking?

Bada

What do you stand to gain if Atiba remain banned?

Onikoyi

Are you asking me, lord Bada? Why are you doing this? Is this how low Oyo politics has sunk?

Bada

What did you just say?

Onikoyi

You heard me! When status and rank determine the nature of our laws in Oyo? And we cannot even preserve a word upon which we placed our honour and stood on oath, in the name of the same ancestors we claim to live by? Is this what Oyo prides herself upon!

Timi

Did you hear that again? Twice now he insults Oyo!

Odekoya

Please I beg, shall we go on with the feast? I am sure there would be a better time or place to address Prince Atiba's return to Oyo.

Onikoyi

Atiba may return to Oyo on one condition.

Edun

And what is that?

Onikoyi

If he will come to stand trial and prove his innocence in the disgraceful death of Kakanfo Amepo.

Timi

Never!

Onikoyi

If shame means nothing to us...to the way we want Oyo to be seen, it's a shame!

Edun

(Rises and charges at him) I hate your tongue!

Edun stabs Onikoyi. He staggers, stumbles and quickly gets up, but not in time before the rest of the conspirators stab him repeatedly. He falls down again groaning in his pool of blood. He manages to stand, staggers towards Lagbayi and embraces him for support. Slowly, Lagbayi brings out his own dagger, raises his hand and stabs him at the back.

Onikoyi

(Groans) A-ah! And you, Lagbayi?

He slumps and dies. Everything happens so fast that the hunters are taken by surprise. Aroni recovers and runs out. Unable to speak and trembling, Odekoya goes to Onikoyi's corpse and bears it tenderly. Finally, he regains his voice.

Odekoya

What have you done? In the name of our fathers, what have you done!

Bada

It is either you are with us, or against us!

Odekoya

I am not with you! *(Bada brandishes his dagger, advances toward Odekoya, who stands boldly waiting for him)* Do it. Go on...bury your dagger in my chest...do it!

Edun

Bada! *(Pauses)* Our task is done!

Edun Gbogun exits. The other conspirators follow him quickly. Confusion in the Hunters' grove

Fade.

Scene Two

Dawn next day. Same place. Onikoyi's corpse is now covered with palm fronds as if it is a sacrifice for Ogun, the God of War. Dirge at the background. Baasotan enters with Boy.

Irukere nro oo

Gbede gbede gbede!^{xv}

Baasotan

Well, Boy, we are too late!

Boy

Is he dead? *(He goes to the corpse, kneels and touches him)* He is still warm. Is he really dead?

Baasotan

If he wasn't, he won't be on the ground.

Boy

(Sighs) A-ah! "If there were reasons for these miseries, then into limits could I bind my woes. When heaven doth weep, doth not the earth overflow?" *(Pauses)* "No man shed tears for him. He lived in fame and died in virtue's cause."

Baasotan

Shakespeare again!

Boy

He lived and died according to your story. You wanted him dead!

Baasotan

Me?

Boy

You did. So that his wife and friends should “weep their tears into the channel, till the lowest streams do kiss the host exalted shores of all”

Baasotan

You are clearly obsessed with Shakespeare. Who taught you all of this? (*Aroni and Soso enter*).

Soso

Where is he?

Odekoya

Just over here (*Soso goes to Onikoyi’s corpse just in time for Boy to move away. He removes the palm fronds slowly. He is clearly sad*) It happened so fast. Nobody expected anything!

Soso

(*Calmly touching Onikoyi and feeling the stabs*) So fast you couldn’t even stop them...or kill at least one of them? (*Dirge grows louder*) They have to see him.

Odekoya

Who have to see him?

Soso

The people...can’t you hear them?

Odekoya

Nobody will enter into our grove. This place is sacred.

Soso

Sacred? Did you just say sacred? This place stopped being sacred the very moment Adegun shed his blood here!

Odekoya

(Hunters quickly draw their weapons) Nobody will enter into this grove!

Soso

Really? Is this what you want? *(He removes his upper clothing in readiness for a fight)* Then you will have more than his death on your head!

Aroni

Stop...please! *(Pleads with Odekoya)* Diekola...his wife is out there too. She can't see him? Even for the last time before his corpse is taken away for a warriors' burial?

Boy

(Whispers to Baasotan) They will allow her, isn't it?
(Pauses) Say something old man!

Baasotan

I don't know, Boy. It's their house. We are all trespassers here.

Boy

But, she deserves to see her husband at least for the last time!

Aroni

We cannot shut her out today of all days!

Boy

Say something old man!

Silence

Odekoya

Let her come (Aroni goes out, returns with Diekola after a while. Aroni points at the corpse. She goes to Onikoyi's corpse and kneels slowly. She sobs. Aroni sings Onikoyi's praise)

Aroni

Onikoyi oo!

Iku pejo, iku porooo

A—jo—logun ma jee yan je.

Eyi a ba se la a ka.

Yanbilolu lo logun ile,

Eso Ikoyi lo logun ode.

Iba somo elomiran lo lagbara bawonyi

Won o ni je a mii

Iba somo elomii lo lagbara bawonyi

Won iba ti je a rin

A o romi lodo eja a wale

A o r'Onikoyi niwaju Ogun, imo omo ogun o jo

Yanbilolu

Orun un re rereereeee!^{xvi}

Diekola

(Caressing Onikoyi's body) Son of those who dance to meet battle. Is this really you...cold and silent? Death that kills swiftly and never flinches with regret, is this you? *(Sighs, controls her tears)* Is this the best Oyo thought that

you deserve? It is with stone that the vulture is greeted in a foreign land; only where the vulture is known is where it receives favourable treatment. How different from vultures are these people who surround you? Is Oyo now not a foreign land? After everything you did for her, all the sweat and pain of lonely nights in the cold, in enemies' territory and yet you are not accepted? But a dog never forgets its benefactor; only human beings do! If you had listened to me. My tongue is weak, but not as weak as my body and I never for once lied to you...not once. You should have listened to me! (*Sobs. Stops suddenly and rises*) Do we still have enemies threatening us from outside? Do we truly have enemies...any at all? What about the thought we nurse in our hearts against ourselves? How we conceive of ourselves through our differences and those things that divide us instead of the ones that should bind us together? (*Rises and turns to Soso*) He is all yours. Honour him!

(*She exits. Aroni goes to Onikoyi's corpse, covers it up with the palm fronds and sits by the side sobbing quietly while intoning a dirge*)

Soso

If the earth is unkind and kills a helper on a farm, the responsibility falls on the owner of the farm. (*Leaving*) It is your *sacred* grove, take care of it!

Odekoya

Wait! I was only doing what I had to do.

Soso

What you and your cowards here could not do when they stabbed him to death?

Odekoya

We are no cowards! How could we have known that they planned to kill him here? We only wanted to honour him. Ogun bear us witness!

Soso

Do not swear or Ogun kills you this instant!

Others

We swear by Ogun!

Silence. Soso walks away visibly angry. Aroni goes to him

Aroni

We cannot honour him this way...fighting each other!
(Pauses) What are we going to do?

Soso

You do not kill the son of Onikoyi and live the rest of your life in peace. Lagbayi has to explain to me why he was a part of this.

Aroni

But, we first have to take care of his body.

Soso

You do that. Lagbayi is mine! Tonight we will pull down his house and destroy everything and anything that stands in our way!

Odekoya

After that?

Soso

We go after the conspirators...starting with Edun Gbogun!

Odekoya

Gbogun will be expecting us.

Soso

That is the point. We will go as warriors, not as farmers or chanters.

Aroni

I am first a warrior, before becoming a chanter. Do not worry about me.

Soso

Exactly what I want to hear because when we start this, there is no going back until the conspirators all pay for their crime. Are we together in this?

Odekoya

My men are ready!

Soso

(He picks up a cutlass, the weapon of Ogun, and bites. He scoops up sand from the ground, touches his head and chest with it, then throws into the sky. The others do the same thing) On this very oath, on *OgunOnire* and *ile atepe*, we all stand. May *Ogun* and *ile* guide us!

All

Ase! [So be it!]

(They all exit, except Baasotan and Boy, who sits dejectedly on a low stool)

Baasotan

Well, shall we leave too? *(Pauses)* We will miss the best part of the story if we tarry long here.

Boy

You have told the best part of the story. And it is sad.

Baasotan

You remember Shakespeare but forget my own rule.

Boy

The story is greater and older than the storyteller. I said that before!

Baasotan

But he is going to be avenged; that's the best part.

Boy

(Rises, speaks as he goes to Onikoyi's corpse) I know he will because "he sits high in all the people's hearts, and that which would appear offence in us, his countenance like the richest alchemy will change to virtue and to worthiness." *(He kneels by the corpse and touches the ground)* "O pardon, thou bleeding piece of the earth." *(He exits)* Old man, I am done with your story!

Baasotan

Now, what do I do with this boy!

Fade

Scene Three

Lights. Lagbayi's house. A middle-aged woman and a young girl are busy preparing a meal. Soso suddenly enters with some warriors. Woman tries to run.

Soso

Stay Labake, I am not here for you! (*Petrified, both woman and girl lie face down on the ground*). Come out Lagbayi. Be a man at least for the last time! (*Silence*) I will not say it twice. I will have your entire household pounded, every living male child cut into tiny bits and the dead exhumed and killed all over again (*Pauses, no movement*) And the women, starting from the ones here, taken naked out into the forests and tied up for the entire people to have a glimpse of their womanhood before slitting their throats (*Women and young boys run out from the inner room, sprawling on the ground and begging for mercy. Lagbayi comes out quietly behind them. Soso motions his men to seize him*). Look at you...why?

Lagbayi

Gbogun only asked me to ensure Onikoyi attends the *ijala*, I didn't know he had other plans, I swear to you!

Soso

You of all people should know (*To his men*) Tie him up.

Lagbayi

You can't do this to me (*Men tie him up*) You are my friend. You won't do all those things you threatened.

Soso

You stopped being my friend the moment you drew your dagger. It shouldn't have been you.

Lagbayi

At least spare my family...please, I beg you!

Soso

Onikoyi also had a family. He had a wife. Did you think about that before you and others buried your daggers in his chest and back? Did you? But I know why you did what you did. At the end you realized Onikoyi knew you were part of the conspiracy, whether by your design or foolishness, so, it was best he died for you keep your secret. But, you were wrong...all of you, you were wrong!

Lagbayi

But please spare my family!

Soso

Sensible men think about their family before starting a war (*Lagbayi's family cries*) Quiet! (*Turns to Lagbayi*) Do you remember what happened at Wonworo? What we saw of the remains of Kakanfo Ojo Amepo? He died for something...unfortunately, I can't say the same about you (*To his men*) Take him out! (*They drag Lagbayi out, his household in tears*) As for these people, and everything that stands here, bring them all to ruin!

(*He exits*)

Fade.

Scene Four

Lights. AreAgo's compound.

AreAgo is with his two sons. The mood is pensive.

1st Son

What are you going to do? Soso and his men come for you. They are seizing people...they called them conspirators. And they mentioned your name too.

2nd Son

Why would they mention your name? What did you do father?

Silence

1st Son

Say something father, you can't just ignore us!

AreAgo

I will not run. Let them come.

2nd Son

Then it is true what people are saying.

1st Son

Let them come. Did you hear that? Let them come so that you can be taken to who knows! Right in our presence and we do nothing?

2nd Son

He won't come alone. He will come with his fierce dogs. What can we do?

AreAgo

Then, do nothing.

2nd Son

Do nothing and watch while they cut you into tiny bits?

AreAgo

You don't understand, do you? I am not going to run from an upstart we trained how to load a gun. I will stay and save what is left of our family honour.

1st Son

What honour? By getting yourself killed like a common rooster?

AreAgo

You don't talk to me like that. I am your father!

1st Son

Then go out there and meet him, fight him like a man instead of waiting for him to come and get you here. If you truly want to save what is left of our honour, go and meet him, don't let him come here!

2nd Son

Do you know what people say he did to his friend, Lagbayi, did you? He killed him and his whole family, men and women, and children!

1st Son

You started this fire, quench it!

2nd Son

Otherwise you are nothing! *(They both exit. AreAgo paces about)*

AreAgo

I will not be shamed. Rather than die, the earth shall
wither!

Fade

Scene Five

Along a path towards Kusu.

Timi Ede runs along with Bada and AreAgo, with a few soldiers.

Bada

We can stop here and rest!

AreAgo

It still beat me how Soso and his men managed
it...breaking the walls in Gbogun!

Timi

Edun should have listened to me!

Bada

He chose the path of honour.

Timi

What honour? That was suicide!

AreAgo

It was the way they killed him...cut him into bits and
pieces right in the presence of his wives and household.
That was callous. They should have at least showed his
family... his children some compassion.

Bada

They are animals!

AreAgo

As a warrior, I have never seen such fury all my life.

Bada

We wanted this, AreAgo. No one should expect killing Onikoyi won't have consequences (*Pauses*) Any word regarding Atiba?

Timi

He returned to Ago Oja.

Bada

He returned?

Ikolaba runs in with some warriors. Bada and the rest scamper for cover.

Ikolaba

It is only me!

Timi

I thought they said Odekoya and his men had besieged your hideout.

Ikolaba

They did, but I managed to escape. A hundred warriors, see what is left...four of us! Now, they even manage to infiltrate our rank, how do they manage to do that?

Bada

Traitors! Many of them are traitors.

Timi

Then, you must move cautiously and tell no one your plans.

Bada

So is it true Atiba left for Ago Oja?

Ikolaba

Atiba never came to Oyo in the first place.

Bada

He did not?

Ikolaba

Of course he did not. I thought you knew this.

Bada

I knew and was still asking you?

AreAgo

So, Edun Gbogun only used us?

Ikolaba

You wanted him to act...to do something. Well, he did what we all wanted I suppose.

Bada

How long have you known this?

Ikolaba

From the moment he mentioned it. The idea came rather too suddenly, only a fool would believe that.

AreAgo

So what are we then...fools?

Ikolaba

Well, you should know. For me, I never liked Onikoyi. I saw an opportunity and used it. That was all and how I liked it!

Bada

(Suddenly grabs Ikolaba and pins him down) Give me one good reason not to slit your own throat...tell me, you conniving bastard!

Ikolaba

(Pants) Fulani forces advance towards Oyo. They have completely routed Katunga. A-ah! Katunga smoulders in the distance. The people of Oyo are moving out in their hundreds....you need me to fight by your side!

Bada

No, you are no good to me. You lied and connived to deceive me!

Ikolaba

No...I swear it was not—

AreAgo

Fulani forces close in on Oyo, Bada. We need all our strength if must survive!

Silence, relaxes his grips on Ikolaba

Bada

Where are they headed...the people of Oyo?

AreAgo

Who knows? They are just going...running away...everyone, young and old.

Timi

They will run right into the hands of Dahomey Amazons. If they are moving out of Oyo that is at least safe...

(Ikolaba suddenly twists and turns Bada face down on his stomach, putting a knife to his throat).

Ikolaba

You think you can threaten me..uhn? Cowards don't play this game!

Bada

(Panting with anger) I am no coward!

Ikolaba

Then, you tell me what will happen after I slit your throat.

Timi

(Puts a knife to Ikolaba's neck) You slit his throat and I rip yours from the back of your head!

AreAgo

Stop...will you all stop this madness! We can't survive by fighting each other. Oyo is far from being safe, so are we!

(Ikolaba moves slowly away from Bada, who sits up rubbing his neck).

Bada

Oyo is far from being safe. So, where the people are headed is? *(Pauses, rising suddenly)* Perhaps we shouldn't have done this? If Dahomey Amazons are moving towards Oyo from Aja, they should be in Oyo in a few days *(Pauses)* This is not the best of time.

Timi

Surely not the worst of it!

Bada

We shouldn't have done this!

Ikolaba

Done what? Allowing this...this slaughter?

Sounds of gunshot in the distance.

Timi

Is that our own men? Or the Fulani forces? Or the
Dahomey Amazons?

Ikolaba

How can we tell?

Bada

And you still think it is not the worst of time for us...for
Oyo?

They all leave in a hurry.

Fade

Epilogue

Lights.

Baasotan is still with the crowd.

Silence.

Baasotan

Indeed. It was the worst of time. The Fulani forces invaded Oyo. It was a complete rout. They made good their promise to Alaafin Oluewu. In the open space in the palace courtyard, they slaughtered him like a dog that was sacrificed to calm the wrath of Ogun. The palace was set ablaze. Our people scamper out in fear, in all directions, seeking peace, finding none. Dahomey didn't have to fight to win their freedom (*Sighs*) Well, Boy, shall we go home to your mother now?

Boy

I want to stay for a while. My new friend just gave me this: "Who's there?" (*He raises a copy of Hamlet*) And, I have to read it before coming home.

Baasotan

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Hm! "To be, or not to be?" You want to hear that story too?

Boy

I have had enough bloodshed tonight.

Baasotan

But that one too is not so much different from the story I just told.

Boy

I won't see it. I saw yours (*Turns to his friend*) Shall we go now? (*As he exits with his friend*) Tell my mother that I am not coming home tonight. She doesn't have to prepare dinner for me.

Baasotan

(*Chuckles*) What a boy!

Fade to final blackout.

CONCLUSION

“B’oko ba ro’kun, bo r’osa, dandan ni ko f’abo f’elebute”

[After the ebbs and tides, the canoe must return to the shores]

--Yoruba proverb--

According to the Yoruba, the end of a particular journey is not the end of the world, as research of this nature is expected to open up a new area of research in the field/subject. Hence, from a Yoruba perspective, a “conclusion” is not necessarily the end but a “new” beginning. As I discussed in the introduction, I do not assume that cultures are an open window to each other, but the values which this thesis has brought to Shakespeare adaptation scholarship can also be offered by other cultures which are peculiar to, or different from, the Yoruba culture. The Igbo culture, for example, shares a palpable resemblance with the Yoruba culture yet it is unique in its own way. Its application to understanding postcolonial Shakespeare adaptations can prove to be very rewarding, much as the Zulu culture can as well.

Extensive scholarship about Shakespeare adaptation emphasizes how adaptations work in their “deliberate and announced difference” (Hutcheon), how the adapters transform an inherited tradition through the “power of imagination and innovation that triumphs over nostalgia and authenticity” (Bradley), and how the adaptations also function as “canonical counter-discourse,” by being “culturally affirmative as well culturally oppositional” (McKinnon) even as they use the past to write about the present (introduction 15-8). This thesis consolidates and extends existing scholarship on Shakespeare adaptation from an alternative perspective to the aforementioned, by exploring how Yoruba and Yoruba-influenced writers adapt Shakespeare.

For examples, building on previous understandings of Aimé Césaire’s Eshu, I have traced Césaire’s Eshu (*Esu* to be precise) to its origin in the *Atunda* personality, to whom he is directly related in Yoruba mythology. Similarly, building on previous scholarship on *Harlem Duet*, which scholars have always read in regard to Sears’s

engagement with the issue of race and class in multi-cultural Canadian society, I have demonstrated how Sears draws from and adds to a specifically Yoruba frame of reference. My analysis shows how the power Billie invests in the handkerchief, interpreted mostly as “juju”, “voodoo” and “magic,” is more specifically and more accurately a manifestation of *aje*. I proved that Billie’s effort combines *Oro* (power of the Word), *ofò ase* (the power to pray effectively), *ayajo* (power of incantation) and *aasan* (the power to curse and drive insane) in order to will something into existence, which she intends to use in the hope of punishing Othello for his infidelity.

The new interpretation that this thesis has offered as shown by the above examples is only possibly through the knowledge of the *Orisa* and the Yoruba worldview. By introducing *Orisa* from the Yoruba worldview which represents the past together with Shakespeare in this thesis, I have also been able to prove that future possibilities are also rooted in past experiences, and that the Yoruba epistemology and aesthetic principles can also function effectively in this regard.

At the same time, I also acknowledge that the Yoruba precepts which I identified and analysed as parts of the cultural significations of the Orisa-Shakespeare could face challenges in view of contemporary realities. For instance, it is possible to consider Othello’s quest for his *orirun* as a rationalization of infidelity or at least dishonesty towards Billie. However, far from being a “fixed social reality,” Yoruba rituals are also marked by their malleability and possibilities to change; yet, that do not deny them of their essences and validity as psycho-social and ritual practices some of which have survived until now.

Earlier on, I mentioned Jane McLuskie’s misunderstanding of the cultural reality behind *uMabatha* she saw in performance (introduction 15). In the same article however, she also makes a very valid submission---which speaks to what I have done in this thesis--- that there is also the need to consider the play as a repeat, revival and a tribute to Shakespeare which offers a way of understanding the process by which theatre practice is connected to political and aesthetic discourse, the way one culture connects to another, whether these connections are historical or geographical, Zulu or English, pre or post imperial, pre or postmodern. McLuskie’s statement is true of the texts that I have examined in this thesis. They are both theatrical and textual

adaptations, some of which are written into different cultures, but which I have analysed from a specifically Yoruba cultural perspective.

The knowledge of the Yoruba provenance also informed the way that I have structured the thesis. Broadly, I have divided the thesis into two parts: exegesis and creative component, which tallies with the duality of the Yoruba world. At the same time, I have structured the thesis to reflect the tripartite (three levels of existence) structure of the Yoruba universe: Chapter One introduces the Yoruba culture, ritual and belief and other aspects of life that influenced the drama/theatre. In this chapter, I also developed the theory of analysis that I used to examine the texts in this thesis. Chapter Two contains the textual analysis of the texts which cover both the “Home/Africa” and the “Diaspora” of the Yoruba. In Osofisan’s *Wesoo, Hamlet!*, I examined how the play dramatizes continued political rivalry in Yorubaland through the conflict between its protagonists, and alludes to the violence associated with oil exploration in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. In Yerima’s *Otaelo*, I explored the play’s dramatization of the tragedy surrounding the *Osu*, an agelong cultural system of segregation being practiced in some parts of Igbo land, and how the play is also useful to address the ongoing agitation for the Republic of Biafra by the Igbo populace in Nigeria. In *Lear Ananci*, I examined Thomas’s use of the play to dramatize the failure of postcolonial leadership both in his country, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Caribbean Island in general. In Sears’s *Harlem Duet*, I explored a cultural angle to the breakdown of Billie and Othello’s marriage, by looking at *orirun*, or identity, in the context of the play. In Chapter Three, I used the insight gained from the theory and its application to explore the cultural and political contexts of the aforementioned texts, to write a new play which alludes to *Julius Caesar*, and addresses the current socio-political situation in Nigeria. What comes out most strongly from the analyses of the Orisa-Shakespeare and my own play, is the fact that human society continues to evolve ways to deal with issues by drawing from the knowledge of the past, represented by both Shakespeare and the Yoruba tradition, in tandem with recent knowledge that is represented by the adaptations.

My thesis has also uncovered new areas of knowledge which might be of interest in such fields as Cultural Studies, Anthropology and/or history, although I have not concerned myself so much with those areas of studies but to focus on the dramatic/theatrical elements. I also admit that I have not fully elaborated on the values

of the *Orisa* in this thesis, or even the Yoruba culture itself in its entirety. What I have done is to use a small aspect that has the potential to engender further research in a productive way.

In this light, further research may focus on either the male/female *Orisa* and examine them fully, or examine the viability of the attributes of such *orisa* in relation to Western theories such as feminism for example, or even focus on areas that could pose challenges to the utilization of such attributes in modern society.

Another area of further research that I would suggest is to engage how the Orisa-Shakespeare can be more effectively integrated into the broader discourse of post-colonial theatre in general. In this case, other plays which resonate with Yoruba aesthetic principles, such as Orson Welles' *Voodoo Macbeth*, Derek Walcott's *A Branch of the Blue Nile*, Murray Carlin's *Not Now, Sweet Desdemona*, and Abdulai Sila's *The Prayer of Mansata*, can be introduced, alongside those that I have analysed in this thesis, bearing in mind their areas of convergence and/or critical departure from each other that would in turn serve as points of entry to examine their post-colonial significance.

More so because the Yoruba are well aware of the geographical, racial and ideological differences among people, any of the approaches that I have suggested above is valid, so long as it aids in the expansion of the frontiers of knowledge and establishes the fact of the Orisa-Shakespeare as valid examples of a new sub-genre of the Shakespeare adaptation scholarship. To this end, when the Yoruba say "*Aye kan lo wa*" (One humanity exists), it is to express such an understanding. This is true, most especially when we look at the Orisa-Shakespeare (and my play) from the perspective of what they are saying about their own societies and not in opposition to Shakespeare's canonical status.

Appendix of Yoruba expressions in *Emi, Caesar!*

-
- ⁱ Baasotan
Son of Otuugbedee
Examine well the female organ,
Before you go to bed,
There is Death in the female organ,
Death that kills one!
- ⁱⁱ Thank you so much, Alade son of Ogboja.
I will leave behind a good name for my children
I will pass over a good legacy to my children.
When the cobra dies,
Its children take over a legacy of poison.
When the bathroom dies,
Its children take over a legacy of urine.
Whenever I die,
My trade and skill of storytelling shall pass over to my children.
Your own children will share your legacy.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Hail, Onikoyi!
Son of the lineage of warriors who dress up in heavy accoutrement to face battles.
Onikoyi offspring of the leopard at Kaba-on-the-hill,
Onikoyi offspring of the leopard at Kaba-on-all-sides!
- ^{iv} The lightning that strikes and destroys with ferocious anger!
- ^v You are the first among equals,
Onikoyi, you are the first among equals.
A *toro* coin may be small in size but it is greater than *sisi* in quality and value,
- ^{vi} They will only watch the fluttering feathers of a bird
as it soars in the sky,
Not catch it!
- ^{vii} Yanbilolu,
Warrior from Ikoyi,
The wasp that carries death about and is never afraid of it.
One of the lineage of warriors who swallow a thousand bunch of arrows,
And spit the same with the skill with which they swallowed them!
- ^{viii} a stranger, usurper, persona non grata
- ^{ix} One does not know whom to trust.
One does not know whom to trust.
Faces conceal intentions,
Gestures do not reveal them.
One does not know whom to trust.
- ^x It is exercise in futility for a child to pick rolling stones at the King's courtyard
This was what *Ifa* said to *Aye*
When earth and evil were in enmity
The earth was asked to offer sacrifice
But she refused
Esu asked both of them to wrestle,
Evil then overcame the earth
Therefore, people said:
"Oh come and see,
Alas, evil has entered into the earth!"
- ^{xi} If you encounter aye, flee from *aye*
If you encounter aye, flee from *aye*
The primeval *ijimere* was black
This aye, it is that soaked *ijimere* clothes in palm oil;
This aye it is that slew *ogidan*
Ogidan the surgeon of the wild.

xii Hail Ogun!

Owner and lord of Ire, my father!

When Ogun first descended onto the earth,

He was draped in a hoop of fire and loincloths of blood

Ire it was where he changed his apparel into limitless clothes sewn of palm fronds!

xiii Yanbilolu

Son of the lineage of warriors who dress up in heavy accoutrement to face battles.

I should like to salute my master's lineage

Adegun, offspring of one who leads a gathering.

Eruwa never sleeps in the forest, offspring of a load of arrows.

Let war come forward and take my husband

War approached closely.

Olukoyi's wife said, "My husband,

What tried to capture you the first time,

But failed to do so.

What tried to capture you the second time,

But failed to do so.

That thing is back again.

I hope your father was a renowned warrior

xiv Yanbilolu,

Warrior with a quiver of a thousand arrows,

Bee of the virile sex who, like a bee,

Stings a child with resulting protracted pain.

Jagun who rescued his child from sloth.

And shook off misery from his relative-in-law.

He overlooked a loan of sixpence,

And drew a relation to himself.

"It is our relations who rally round us,

Sixpence can't rally round us."

xv The horsetail bends slowly

Slowly and slowly and slowly!

xvi Yanbilolu!

Death kills snake, death kills poison.

A warriors' President who never cheats.

Reference is normally made to one's achievements

Yanbilolu owns the inside Ogun

Son of Onikoyi owns the outside Ogun

If it were other people who wielded such a high authority,

They would suffocate us.

If it were other people who wielded such a high authority,

They would confine our movements

Without water in the river, there won't be fish,

Without Onikoyi at the head of the army, soldiers will be in disarray

Yanbilolu,

Rest in peace!

Works Cited

- Abegunrin, Olayiwola. "Chief M.K.O Abiola's Presidential Ambitions and Yoruba Democratic Rights" *Yoruba Identity and Power Politics*, edited by Falola Toyin and Ann Genova, Rochester Press, 2006, pp. 334-52.
- Abraham, W.E. *The Mind of Africa*. Chicago University Press, 1962.
- Achebe, Chinua. "Chi in Igbo Cosmology" *Morning Yet On Creation Day*, edited by Chinua Achebe, Anchor Books, 1975, pp. 93-103.
- Adedeji, Joel. "The Origin and Form of the Yoruba Masque Theatre" *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, vol.2, no.46, 1972, pp. 254-76.
- Adeeko, Adeleke. *Proverbs, Textuality, and Nativism in African Literature*. University Press of Florida, 1998.
- Adelugba, Dapo. "Three Dramatists In Search of a Language" *Theatre in Africa*. Edited by Ogunba Oyin and Abiola Irele, Ibadan University Press, 1978, pp. 201-223.
- Ademoyega, Adewale. *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup 1966*. Evans Brothers, 1981.
- Adeoti, Gbemisola. "An Exploratory Study of Ahmed Yerima's Drama" *Muse and Mimesis: Critical Perspectives on Ahmed Yerima's Drama*, edited by Gbemisola Adeoti, Spectrum Books Ltd, 2007, pp.1-56.
- _____. *Aesthetics of Adaptation in Contemporary Nigerian Drama*, Concept Publication, 2010.
- Adewale, S.A. *The Religion of the Yoruba: A Phenomenological Analysis*. University of Ibadan, 1988.
- Adeyemi, Adesola. "Itan Oginintin, *The Winter's Tale*: Shakespeare meets Yoruba gods" *African Theatre: Shakespeare in & out of Africa*, edited by Jane Plastow, James Currey, 2013, pp. 48-60.
- Adu-Gyamfi, Yaw. "Wole Soyinka's "Dawn" and the Cults of Ogun" *ARIEL: A Review of International Literature*, vol. 28, no.4, 1997, pp. 73-89.
- Aebischer, Pascale et al. *Remaking Shakespeare: Performance Across Media, Genres, and Cultures*. Palgrave, 2003.
- Afolayan, Funso. "Politics, Ethnicity, and the Struggle for Autonomy and Democracy" *Yoruba Identity and Power Politics*, edited by Toyin Falola and Ann Genova, Rochester Press, 2006, pp. 297-315.
- Aiyejina, Funso and Rawle, A. Gibbons. "Orisa (Orisha) Tradition in Trinidad" *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol.45, no.4, 1999, pp. 35-50.

Aiyejina, Funso. *Esu Elegbara: A Source of an Alter/Native Theory of African Literature and Criticism*. CBAAC, 2010.

Ajuwon, Bade. "The *Ijala* (Yoruba) Poet" *Oral Poetry in Nigeria*, edited by Abalogu N. Uchegbulam et al, Nigeria Magazine, 1981, pp.196-208.

Akinjogbin, I.A. *The Cradle of a Race. Ife; from the beginning to 1980*. Sunray, 1992.

_____. *Milestones and Concepts in Yoruba History and Culture*. Olu-Akin Publishers, 2002, pp. 104-19.

Akporobaro, F.B.O. *Introduction to African Oral Literature: A Literary-descriptive approach*. 3rd ed., Princeton Publishing Co., 2006.

Ani, Marimba. *Yurugu: An African-Centred Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behaviour*. Africa World Press, 1994.

Appiah, Kwame-Anthony. "Myth, Literature and the African World" *Wole Soyinka: An Appraisal*. Edited by Adewale Maja-Pearce, Heinemann, 1994, pp. 98-115.

Apter, Andrew. "Yoruba Ethnogenesis from Within" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 55, no.2, 2013, pp.356-87.

Ashcroft Bill et al. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Routledge, 1989.

Awodiya, Muiyiwa. *Femi Osofisan: Interpretive Essays I*, edited by Muiyiwa Awodiya, CBAAC, 1996.

Awolalu, J. Omosade. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. Longman Group, 1979.

Badawi, M.M. "Shakespeare and the Arabs" *Cairo Studies in English*, 1963/66, pp.186-96.

Balme, Christopher. *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*. Clarendon Press, 1996.

Balogun, Lekan. "'Ele Supremacy': Obinrin-Aesthetic in Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan's Once Upon an Elephant" *Rewriting Her Story: Critical Essays on the Female Subject in the Colonial and Postcolonial World*, edited by Pangmeshi, Adamu and Blossom, N. Fondo, Ken Scholars Publishing, 2015, pp.121-52.

_____. "Ajubaba: Shakespeare and Yoruba Goddess" *International Journal of Comparative Literature & Translation Studies*. vol.1, no.3, 2013, pp.18-25.

_____. "Otaelo: Reading Shakespeare's *Othello* in Igbo Culture" *Cross-cultural Studies*, vol.1, no.9, 2013, pp.110-37.

_____. "Buying Our Lives with a Riddle: Adaptation as the 'Female Other' Perspective" *International Journal of Learning, Teaching, and Educational Research*. vol.6, no.1, 2014, pp.81-92.

Banham, Martin and Eldred Durosimi Jones. "'...tinap ober we leck giant': African Celebrations of Shakespeare" *Translating Life: Studies in Transpositional Aesthetics*,

edited by Chew Shirley and Alistair Stead, Liverpool University Press, 1999, pp. 121-36.

Barber, Karin. "How Man Makes God in West Africa: Yoruba Attitudes Towards the 'Orisa'" *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 51, no. 3, 1981, pp. 724-745.

_____. Foreword. *Myth Realism and the West African Writer*, edited by Priere, K. Richard, Africa World Press, 1988, pp. ix-xiv.

_____. "Literature in Yoruba: poetry and prose; travelling theatre and modern drama" *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, edited by Irele, F. Abiola and Simon Gikandi, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 357-78.

Barnes, Sandra. Introduction. "The Many Faces of Ogun." *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New*, edited by Sandra, T. Barnes, Indiana University Press, 1989, pp. 1-26.

Bascom, William. "Folklore and Literature" *The African World*, edited by Lystad, A. Robert, Frederick A. Praeger, 1965.

Beesoondial, Ashish. "'Sa bezsominn Shakespeare la'—The Brave New World of Dev Virahsawmy" *African Theatre: Shakespeare in & out of Africa*, edited by Jane Plastow, James Currey, 2013, pp. 98-110.

Beier, Ulli. *Yoruba Poetry*. Cambridge University Press, 1970.

Bell, Hilary. "The Landscape Remembers You: A Reflection by Hilary Bell from an Interview with Naomi Wallace" *Trans-Global Readings: Crossing Theatrical Boundaries*, edited by Svich Caridad, Manchester UP, 2004, pp. 111-5.

Belhassen, S. "Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*" *Radical Perspectives in the Arts*, edited by Lee Baxandall, Penguin, 1972, pp. 175-77

Ben-Amos, D and Goldstein, K. *Folklore: Performance and Communication*. Mouton, 1975.

Benhabib, Seyla. "Hanna Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative" *Social Research*, vol. 57, no. 1, 1990, pp. 167-96.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller. Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." *Illuminations* (1936). Translated by Harry Zohn, edited by Hannah Arendt, Schocken Books, 1969, pp. 33-109.

Bentley, Eric. *What is Theatre?* Methuen, 1952.

Bergman, Werner and Robert, D. Crutchfield. Introduction. "Racial and Ethnic Conflict and Violence" *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2009, pp. 146-53.

Blacking, John. *How Musical is Man?* Faber and Faber, 1976.

Bradley, Lynne. *Adapting King Lear for the Stage*. Ashgate, 2010.

Breon, Robin. "Interview with Djanet Sears: A Black Girl in Search of God" *AISLE SAY Toronto*. 19 March 2016. www.aislesay.com/ONT.SEARS.html.

Brener, Sidney. "Home in Harlem, New York: Lessons from the Harlem Renaissance Writers" *PMLA*, vol.105, no.1, 1990, pp.47-56.

Bristol, Michael. *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare*. Routledge, 1990.

Brown-Guillory, Elizabeth. "Place and Displacement in Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet* and *The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God*" *Middle Passages and the Healing Place of History: Migration and Identity in Black Women's Literature*. Edited by Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, The Ohio State University Press, 2006, pp.155-70.

Buntin, Mat. "An Interview with Djanet Sears" Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project (CASP). 3 March 2016. www.canadianshakespeares.ca/

Burnett, Linda. "Redescribing a World: Towards a Theory of Adaptation in Canada." *CTR*, 2002, pp.5-9.

Cahn L. Victor. *Shakespeare the Playwright: A Companion to the Complete Tragedies, Histories, Comedies, and Romances*. Greenwood Press, 1991.

Cartelli, Thomas. *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formation, Postcolonial Appropriations*. Routledge, 1999.

Carter Harrison, Paul. Mother/Word. "Black Theatre in the African Continuum: Word/Song as Method" *Totem Voices: Plays from the Black World Repertory*, edited by Paul Carter-Harrison, Grove Press, 1989, pp. xi-lxiii.

Césaire, Aimé. 'Un poete politique: Aimé Césaire' *Le magazine litte'raire* 34, 1969, pp. 21-32.

_____. *A Tempest*. Translated. Richard Miller, TCG Translations, 2002.

Cohen, F. Peter. "Orisha Journeys: the Roles of Travel in the Birth of Yoruba-Atlantic Religions." *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 117, 2002, pp.17-36.

Cohen, Robin. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. UCL Press, 1997.

Cohn, Ruby. *Modern Shakespeare Offshoot*. Princeton University Press, 1976.

Conteh-Morgan, John and Tejumola Olaniyan. *African Drama and Performance*. Indiana University Press, 2004.

Currie, Mark. "The Manufacture of Identities" *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, edited by Mark Currie, Macmillan Press, 1998, pp.17-32.

Dasylva, O. Ademola. "Globalizing the Yoruba Omoluabi Concept of the Persona: A Theophilosophical Perspective of the African Heritage" *Hirenthia: Journal of Humanities*, vol.1, no.1, 2014, pp.79-95.

Davies, Carole Boyce. *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migration of the Subject*. Routledge, 1994.

De Silva, Tamara. *Symbols and Rituals: The Socio-Religious Roles of the Igbin Drum Family*, 2006. University of Maryland, PhD dissertation.

Desmet, Christy and Robert, Sawyer. *Shakespeare and Appropriation*. Routledge, 1999.

Dickinson, Peter. "Duets, Duologues, and Black Diaspora Theatre: Djanet Sears, William Shakespeare and Others" *Modern Drama*, vol.45, no.2, 2002, pp. 118-208.

Dike, E. Victor. "The Osu Caste System in Igboland; Discrimination Based on Descent" *CERD*, 2012, pp.1-24.

Dionne, Craig and Parmita Kapadia. *Native Shakespeare: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage*. Ashgate, 2008.

Douglas, Holt and Cameron Douglas. *Cultural Strategy*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Drewal, Henry John et al. *Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought*. The Center for African Art, 1989.

Drewal, Margaret Thompson. *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*. Indiana University Press, 1992.

Dunn, S. Richard. *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713*. Chapel Hill, 1972.

Eghagha, Hope. *Ritual Imagination in Selected Plays of J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi, and Wole Soyinka*, 1992. University of Lagos, Akoka. PhD dissertation.

Ekanola, A. Babatunde. "A Naturalistic Interpretation of the Yoruba Concept of *Ori*" *Philosophia Africana*, vol. 9, no.1, 2006, pp. 41-52.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: the nature of Religion*. Harper and Row, 1957.

_____. *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*. Princeton University Press, 1961.

Falola, Toyin and Ann Genova. Introduction. *Yoruba Identity and Power Politics*. University of Rochester Press, 2006, pp. 1-28.

Falola, Toyin. "Esu: The God without Boundaries" *Esu: Yoruba God, Power, and the Imaginative Frontiers*, edited by Toyin Falola, Carolina Academic Press, 2013, pp. 3-33.

Fischlin, Daniel and Mark Fortier. General Introduction. *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A critical anthology of plays from the seventeenth century to the present*. Routledge, 2000, pp.1-22

Fischlin, Daniel. "Nation and/as Adaptations: Shakespeare, Canada, and Authenticity" *Shakespeare in Canada: 'A World Elsewhere?'* edited by. Bryden, Diana et al., University of Toronto Press, 2002, pp. 313-38.

_____. "Virtual Shakespeares: Theatrical Adaptations and Transformations of Shakespeare, 1600-1997" Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project (CASP). 13 Oct 2015. www.canadianshakespeares.ca/

Frassinelli, Pier Paolo. "Shakespeare and Transculturation: Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*" *Native Shakespeare: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage*. Edited by Dionne, Craig and Parmita Kapadia, Ashgate, 2008, pp.173-86.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. 2nd ed. Atheneum, 1967.

Ganapathy-Dore, Geetha. "Playing Hide and Seek with Names and Selves in Salman Rushdie's *Joseph Anton*, *A Memoir*" *Atlantis: Revista de la Asociacion Espaniola de Estudios Anglo-Norte-Americanos*, vol.35, no.2, 2013, pp.11-26.

Garber, Marjorie. *Shakespeare Afterall*. Pantheon Books, 2004.

Gates Jr. Henry Louis. "The 'Blackness of Blackness': A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey" *Critical Inquiry*, vol.9, no.4, 1983, pp. 685-723.

Ghazoul, Ferial J. "The Arabization of Othello" *Comparative Literature*, vol.50, no.1, 1998, pp.1-31.

Gunner, Liz. "Resistant medium: the voices of Zulu radio drama in the 1970s" *Theatre Research International*, vol.27, no.3, 2002, pp. 259-74.

Hattaway, Michael. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Heschel, J. *Who is Man?* Stanford University Press, 1966.

Heuman, Gad. *The Caribbean*. Hodder and Arnold, 2006.

Holderness, G. *The Shakespeare Myth*. Manchester University Press, 1988.

Holodny, Elena. "Africa's largest oil producer has been dethroned" *Business Insider Uk*, May 16, 2016. 25 Sept 2016. www.businessinsider.com.au/niger-delta-avengers-nigeria-oil-production-crash-2016-5?r=US&IR=T

Hsu, Elisabeth and Chris Lowe. *Wind, Life, Health: An Anthropological and Historical Perspective*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

Hyden, Goran. *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Ibitokun, M. Benedict. *African Drama and the Yoruba World-view*. University of Ibadan Press, 1995.

Idika, Mba. "Osu" *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, edited by Adegbola, E.A, Daystar Press, 1983, pp. 23-5.

Idowu, Bolaji. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. Longman, 1962.

Ifa Karade, Baba. *The Handbook of Yoruba Religious Concepts*. Samuel Weiser Inc, 1998.

Iji, E. Edde "From Mythology to Materiality: Osofisan's Reincarnation of Moremi Myth in *Morountodun*" *Emerging Perspectives on Femi Osofisan*, edited by Akinyemi, Tunde and Toyin Falola, Africa World Press Inc, 2009, pp. 423-42.

Irele, F. Abiola. "Tradition and Yoruba Writer: D.O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka" *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*, edited by Abiola Irele, Heinemann, 1981, pp.174-97.

_____. *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

Irobi, Esiaba. "A Theatre for Cannibals: Images of Europe in Indigenous African Theatre of the Colonial Period" *ntq*, vol. 22, no.3, 2006, pp.268-82.

Izevbaye, Dan. Foreword. *Femi Osofisan: Interpretive Essays I*, edited by Muyiwa Awodiya, CBAAC, 1996, pp. 8-11.

_____. Introduction. *Black Dionysus: Conversations with Femi Osofisan*, edited by Olasope Olakunbi, Kraftgriots, 2013, pp. 1-28.

Jeyifo, Biodun. *The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre of Nigeria*. Nigerian Magazine Publication, 1984.

_____. Introduction. "Mythopoiesis and Commitment" *Wole Soyinka: An Introduction to His Writing*, edited by Obi Maduakor, Garland Publishing Inc, 1986, pp. ix-xv.

Johnson, David. *Shakespeare and South Africa*. Clarendon Press, 1996.

Johnson, Samuel. *The History of the Yorubas*. CSS Bookstores, 1923.

Jones, L. Joni. "Yoruba Diasporic Performance: The Case for a Spiritually-and Aesthetically-Based Diaspora." *Orisa: Yoruba Gods and Identity in Africa and the Diaspora*, edited by Falola Toyin and Ann Genova, Africa World Press Inc, 2005, pp. 321-331.

Kidnie, Margaret Jane. "'There's Magic in the Web of It': Seeing beyond Tragedy in *Harlem Duet*" *African-Canadian Theatre*, edited by Maureen Moynagh, Playwrights Canada Press, 2005, pp. 40-55.

Kingdon, Zachary. *A Host of Devils: The History and Context of the Making of Makonde Spirit Sculpture*. Routledge, 2002.

Kinthead-Weekes, Mark. "The Interpreters—A Form of Criticism" *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*, edited by James Gibbs, Heinemann, 1980, pp. 219-38.

Knight, G. Wilson. "Soul and Body in Shakespeare" *Shakespearean Dimensions*. The Harvest Press, 1984, pp. 3-21.

Knowles, Ric. "The Nike Method: A Wide-Ranging Conversation between Djanet Sears and Alison Sealy Smith" *Canadian Theatre Review*, 1998, pp.24-30.

_____. "'Othello in Three Places" *Shakespeare in Canada: A World Elsewhere?* Edited by Brydon Diana and Irena, R. Makaryk, University of Toronto Press, 2002, pp.370-94.

_____. *Shakespeare and Canada: Essays on production, translation and adaptation*. Peter-Lang, 2004.

Lawal, Babatunde. "'A Ya Gbo, A Ya To': New Perspectives on Edan Ogboni" *African Arts*, vol.28, no.1, 1995, pp. 36-49+98-100.

_____. "Aworan: Representing the Self and Its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art" *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 83, no.3, 2001, pp.498-526.

_____. "Divinity, Creativity and Humanity in Yoruba Aesthetics" *Before Pangea: New Essays in Transcultural Aesthetics*, edited by Eugenio Benitez, Sydney Society of Literature and Aesthetics, 2005, pp.161-74.

Leggatt, Alexander. "Roman Plays" *Shakespeare: An Oxford Guide*, edited by Wells, Stanley and Lena Cowen Orlin, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp.231-41.

Levine, Lawrence. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, 1988.

Lima, Robert. "The Orisha Chango and Other African Deities in Cuban Drama" *Latin American Theatre Review*, 1990, pp.33-42.

Maguire, E. Laurie. *Studying Shakespeare: A Guide to the plays*. Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

Mason, John. "African Religions in the Caribbean: Continuity and Change" 19 March 2015. www.kislakfoundation.org/millennium/mason1.pdf

Massai, Sonia. *World-Wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance*. Routledge, 2005.

Maurin, Alain et al. "Measuring the Size of the Hidden Economy in Trinidad and Tobago between 1973--1999" *International Economic Journal*, vol.20, no. 3, 2006, pp.321-41.

Mavrogordato, J. Olga. *Voices in the Street*. Imprint Caribbean, 1979 & The University of Virginia Press, 2008.

Mazrui, Ali. "Shakespeare in African Political Thought" *The Anglo-African Commonwealth: Political Fiction and Cultural Fusion*. Pergamon Press, 1978.

_____. "Shakespeare in Africa: Between English and Swahili Literature" *Research in African Literatures*, vol, 27, no. 1, 1996, pp. 64-79.

McKinnon, James. *The Dramaturgy of Appropriation: How Canadian Playwrights Use and Abuse Shakespeare and Chekov*, 2010. U of Toronto, PhD dissertation.

_____. "'Playing the Race Bard': How Shakespeare and *Harlem Duet* Sold at the 2006 Stratford Shakespeare Festival" *Outerspeares: Shakespeare, Intermedia, and the Limits of Adaptation*, edited by Daniel Fischlin, University of Toronto Press, 2014, pp. 290-318

McLuskie, Kate. "Macbeth/uMabatha: Global Shakespeare in a Post-Colonial Market" *Shakespeare Survey*, vol.52, 1999, pp.154-65.

McMurtry, Mervyn. "'Doing Their Own Thane': The Critical Reception of uMabatha, Welcome Msomi's Zulu Macbeth" *The Critical, Ilha do Desterro Florianopolis*, vol.36, 1999, pp.309-35.

Melville, J and Francis, S. Herskovits. *Dahomean Narrative*. Northwestern University Press, 1958.

- Moyers, Bill. *A World of Ideas*, edited by Betty Sue Flowers, Doubleday, 1989.
- Msoni, Welome “uMabatha” *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A critical anthology of plays from the seventeenth century to the present*, edited by Fischlin Daniel and Mark Fortier, Routledge, 2000, pp. 164-187.
- Mutran, Khalil. ‘*Utayl (Othello)*. Dar al-ma’arif, 1976.
- Naremore, James. Introduction. “Film and the reign of adaptation” *Film Adaptation*. Rutgers University Press, 2000, pp.1-16.
- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Nnaemeka, Obioma. “Feminism, Rebellious Women, and Cultural Boundaries: Flora Nwapa and Her Compatriots” *Research in African Literatures*, vol.26,no.2,1995, pp.80-113.
- Nukunya, G.K. “Traditional Cultures and Modern International Boundaries: A Study of the Ewe and Their Eastern Neighbours” *African Unity: Cultural Foundations*, edited by Sunday Ali Zaccheus, CBAAC, 1988.
- Obafemi, Olu. *Contemporary Nigerian Theatre: Cultural Heritage and Social Vision*. CBAAC, 1996.
- O’Brien, Michael. *Mad Boy Chronicle*. Playwrights Canada Press, 1997.
- Oguntola-Laguda, Danoye. *Determinism and the Activities of Esu in Yoruba Traditional Religious Beliefs: A Philosophical Appraisal*, 2005. Lagos State University, LASU. PhD dissertation.
- Okafor, Clement. “Igbo Cosmology and the Parameters of Individual Accomplishment in *Things Fall Apart*” *Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart: A Casebook*, edited by Okpewho Isidore, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp.67-81.
- Okafor, G. Chinyere. *Ikeji Festival Theater of the Aro and Diaspora: Gender, Mask and Communication*. University of Lagos Press, 2015.
- Okonjo-Ogunyemi, Chikwenye. *Africa Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women*. University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Olajubu, Oyeronke. *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere*. State University of New York Press, 2003.
- Olaniyan, Tejumola. *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American and Caribbean Drama*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Olaniyi, Rasheed. “Approaching the Study of the Yoruba Diaspora in Northern Nigeria” *Yoruba Identity and Power Politics*, edited by Falola Toyin and Ann Genova. University of Rochester Press, 2006, pp. 231-50.
- Olatunji, O. Olatunde. *Beyond the Spoken Word: An African Language Literature Experience*. University of Ibadan Press, 1993.

Oluwole, Sophie. "African Philosophy as Illustrated in *Ifa* Corpus" *Imodoye: A Journal of African Philosophy*, vol.2,no.2,1996, pp.1-20.

_____. "Why are (we) the Yoruba?" Keynote paper delivered at a Pre-word Philosophy Conference, Lagos, 2007.

Opefeyitimi, Ayo. *Women in Yoruba Culture: A Dozen of Academic Articles*. Penthouse Publications, 2009.

Orangun, Adegboyega. "What is Man?" *Destiny: The Unmanifested Being*. African Odyssey Publisher, 1998, pp. 43-79.

Orkin, Martin. *Drama and the South African state*. Manchester, 1991.

_____. *Local Shakespeares: Proximations and Power*. Taylor & Francis, 2005.

Osofisan, Femi. "Ritual and Revolutionary Ethos: The Humanist Dilemma in Contemporary Nigerian Theatre" *The Nostalgic Drum: Essays on Literature, Drama, and Culture*. Africa World Press Inc, 2001.

_____. *Insidious Treasons: Drama in a Postcolonial State*. Opon Ifa Publishers, 2001.

_____. *Wesoo, Hamlet! The Resurrection of Hamlet*. Concept Publications, 2012.

Osundare, Niyi. "Wole Soyinka and the *Atunda* Ideal: A Reading of Soyinka's Poetry" *Wole Soyinka: An Appraisal*, edited by Maja-Pearse Adewale, Heinemann, 1994, pp.81-97.

_____. "Yoruba Thought, English Words: A Poet's Journey through the Tunnel of Two Tongues" *Thread in the Loom: Essays on African Literature and Culture*, edited by Brown Stewart, Birmingham UP, 2002.

Owomoyela, Oyekan. "Tortoise Tales and Yoruba Ethos" *Research in African Literature*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1989, pp.165-80.

_____. *Yoruba Proverbs*. University of Nebraska Press, 2005.

Pilkington, Ed. "Shell pays out \$15.5m over Saro-Wiwa killing" *The Guardian*. 9 June, 2009. 25 Sept, 2016. www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/08/nigeria-usa

Plastow, Jane. "African Theatre and Politics" *African Literatures in the 20th Century: A Guide*, edited by Klein, S. Leonard, Ungar, 1986.

Priere, K. Richard. *Myth Realism and the West African Writer*. Africa World Press, 1988.

Quarshie, Hugh. *Second Thoughts About Othello*. Chipping Camden, 1999.

Rampaul, Giselle. "Caribbean Tricksters at crossroads: Davlin Thomas's *Lear Ananci* and *Hamlet: the Eshu Experience*" *Shakespeare*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2013, pp.313-21.

Ray, C. Benjamin. *African Religions: Symbols, Ritual, and Community*. Prentice-Hall Inc, 1976.

Rosenberg, Donna. *Folklore, Myths, and Legends: A World Perspective*. NTC Publishing Group, 1997.

Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. Routledge, 2006.

_____. "Year of Shakespeare: *The Winter's Tale*" *Blogging Shakespeare*, 2012. 21 May, 2016. www.bloggingshakespeare.com/year-of-shakespeare-the-winters-tale

Savory, Elaine "Strategies for Survival: Anti-Imperialist Theatrical Forms in the Anglophone Caribbean" *Imperialism and Theatre: Essays on World Theatre, Drama and Performance*, edited by Gainor J. Ellen, Routledge, 1995, pp. 243-56.

Sears, Djanet. *Harlem Duet*. Scirocco Drama, 1997.

_____. Introduction. *Testifyin': Contemporary African-Canadian Drama*. vol.1, Playwrights Canada Press, 2000, pp. i-xiii.

Sekoni, Oluropo. "The Narrator, Narrative Patterns and Audience Experience of Oral Performance" *The Oral Performance in Africa*, edited by Okpewho Isidore, Spectrum Books, 1992.

Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare: The Alexander Text*. Introduction by Peter Ackroyd, HarperCollins Publishers, 2006.

Smith, Robert. *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*. 3rd ed, Wisconsin UP, 1988.

Soyinka, Wole. "The Writer in a Modern African State" *The Writer in Modern Africa*, edited by Wastberg Per, Africana, 1969, pp.14-21.

_____. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge University Press, 1976.

_____. *Ogun Abibiman*. Rex Collins in association with Opon Ifa, 1976.

_____. "Shakespeare and the Living Dramatist" *Art, Dialogue & Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture*. New Horn Press, 1988, pp.204-20.

_____. *The Credo of Being and Nothingness*. Spectrum, 1991.

Tamuno, N. Tekena. "Separationist Agitation in Nigeria since 1914" *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol.8, no.4, 1970, pp.563-84.

Taylor, Gary. *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1989.

Thomas, Davlin. *Lear Ananci*. CreateSpace, 2010.

Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. Vintage Books, 1984.

Tiffin, Helen. "Post-colonial Literature and Counter-Discourse" *The Post-colonial studies reader*, edited by Ashcroft Bill et al, Routledge, 1993.

Tompkins, Joanne. "Infinitely Rehearsing Performance and Identity: *Afrika Solo* and *The Book of Jessica*" *Canadian Theatre Review*, vol.74, 1993, pp.35-9.

Trivedi, Poonam and Dennis Bartolomeuz. *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation, and Performance*. University of Delaware Press, 2005.

Turner, Victor. "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*" *Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society for 1964*, edited by Helms J, University of Washington, 1964, pp. 4-20.

_____. *The Anthropology of Performance*. Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1987.

Uchendu, Chikezie. *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria (Illustrated edition)*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965.

Uwasomba, Chijioke. "A feminist Reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*" *The African Symposium, online Journal of African Educational Research Network*, vol.7,no.2, 2007, pp.19-26. www.ncsu.edu/aern/TAS7.2/TAS7.2.pdf

Uys, Pieter-Dirk. *MacBeki – A farce to be reckoned with*. Peninsula/Junkets, 2009.

Vaughan, Virginia Mason. *Othello: A contextual history*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Virahsawmy, Dev. *Toufann: A Mauritian Fantasy*. Border Crossings Limited, 1999.

Washington, N. Teresa. *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Aje in Africana Literatures*. Indiana University Press, 2005.

Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, edited by Roth Guenther and Claus Wittich, University of California Press, 1978.

Wetmore, Kevin, Jr. Introduction. "The Literary Doors of Classical Africa" *The Athenian Sun in an African Sky*. McFarland & Company Inc Publishers, 1996, pp.1-6.

Wheelwright, Philip. "Notes on Mythopoeia" *Myth and Literature*, edited by Vickery B. John, University of Nebraska Press, 1966, pp. 59-121.

Wilkinson, Jane. "Interviews with Dev Virahsawmy & Michael Walling: Staging Shakespeare across borders" *African Theatre: Playwrights & Politics*, edited by Banham Martin et al, James Currey, 2001, pp.109-24.

Wright, Derek. *Wole Soyinka Revisited*. Twayne Publishers, 1993.

Wright, Laurence. "Yael Farber's *SeZar*" *Shakespeare in South Africa* 13, 2001, pp.102-4.

_____. "uMabatha: Global and Local" *Studies in Africa*, vol.47,no.2, 2004, pp.97-114.

Yai, Olabiyi Babalola. "In Praise of Metonymy: The Concepts of "Tradition" and "Creativity" in the Transmission of Yoruba Artistry over Time and Space." *Research in African Literatures*, vol.24, no.4, 1993, pp.29-37.

Yerima, Ahmed *Otaelo*. Kraftgriots, 2002.

_____. *Fragmented Thoughts and Specifics: Essays in Dramatic Literature*. Bookplus, 2003.

Illustrations.

Fig.1. *Opon Ifa*.1000+ images about Yoruba/*Opon Ifa* on pinterest.736x732. 3 March 2015.www.google.co.nz/search?q=opon+ifa&biw=1920&bih=985&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0ahUKEwibh4rZI77RAhVCbbwKHcH6CtcQsAQIHg&dpr=1#imgsrc=Jrt52DkblW7xtM%3A

Fig.2. *Iroke*.444x540.*Imodara*. Web.3 March 2015.www.google.co.nz/search?q=iroke&biw=1920&bih=985&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjHqbmomb7RAhUJVLwKHVk2DAUQsAQIHw#imgsrc=rIVsC3v-R8z_bM%3A

Fig.3. *Medium Mahogany Opon Ifa, Divination Board, Tablero—Ifa Santeria Carved/Muurish Market/Pinterest/Orisha, Medium*.447x388. Web. 3 March 2015.www.google.co.nz/search?q=opon+ifa&biw=1920&bih=985&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0ahUKEwibh4rZI77RAhVCbbwKHcH6CtcQsAQIHg&dpr=1#imgsrc=qnfuo26CP2oUPM%3A

Interviews.

Alagba Iranloye, O. Personal Interview. 15 November 2014.

Alagba Salako, K. Personal Interview. 29 December 2014.

Ayodele, S. V. Personal Interview. 24 February 2015.

Babalawo Ifasogbon, A. Personal Interview. 21 January 2015.

Chief Oluawo Sofolabo, A. Personal Interview. 13 January 2015.

Chief Priest Fabunmi, A. Personal Interview. 15 November 2014.

Dr. Oguntola-Laguda, D. Personal Interview. 24 February 2015.

O/I Canon Adetayo Ifaniyi, B. Personal Interview. 13 January 2015.