

# ADAPTATION AND GLOBALISATION IN MODERN AFRICAN DRAMATIC TRADITION FOR ACHIEVING CULTURAL LITERACY IN A DEVELOPING NATION

By

IGBOAMUCHEY, G. M. O and EZE IFESINACHI

## ABSTRACT

*In the past, Africans attach value to the transmission of their values and norms to their younger generation. This was done through oral traditions such as storytelling, songs, lullabies, riddles / plays and lots more. This emphasized continuity and cultural preservation. Cultural transmission aims at producing a generation who will sustain the community's values with honesty, perseverance, diligence, good community and brotherly relations. Globalization in the context of this work is the integration of culture and values among nations. Literary artists act as agents of powerful globalizing of cultures of various regions of the globe. This paper therefore discussed some African authors who are perfect hybrid of English and African traditions thematically and in essence who have successfully drawn very derivatively from some global plays to establish meaningful dialogue with scholars within the society and globally. Thus, the impression of this paper is that globalization and adaptation is inevitably desirable since it promotes increasing global awareness and interdependency and the emergence of transnational civil society.*

**Keywords:** Adaptation, Globalization, Dramatic, Tradition, Cultural Literacy.

## INTRODUCTION

Popular accounts of globalization have tended to dwell on speed, extent and debt of the world-wide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from trade and financial flows to culture, entertainment, crime and spiritual matters. This has given the dominant impression of globalization as inevitable, indeed desirable since it promotes increasing global awareness and interdependency and the emergence of trans-national civil society. The literary artists therefore act as agents of powerful globalizing of cultures of various regions of the globe.

Etherton (1982) Observed that:

*“Most of the artists did imbibe African culture haven grown in this setting but is influenced by the western culture so much that apart from their writings, seems to incorporate much of what has come to be seen as globalised literature, they have drawn sometimes very derivatively from these global literary works. Magical realism which began as a recognizable signature form Asian and Latin cultures over-time has come to seen almost normal as it has been embraced by African writers”.*

Back in the 19th century when we saw an earlier wave of ‘globalized’ writings, European writers travelled to foreign places and were seen to have done a kind of violence to the people and places they were writing about. The argument, therefore, is that there are possibilities to avoid or at least to mitigate the marginalization of peripheral cultures and their scholarship and to establish meaningful dialogue with scholars within a particular society and globally too.

Today, through literature, we can watch writers confront all the strange and different communities that we come in contact with each day. This is achieved through the technique of adaptation.

### **THE TECHNIQUES OF ADAPTATION IN MODERN AFRICAN DRAMATIC TRADITION**

Snodgrass (1988) defined adaptation as the process by which something changes or is changed so that it can be used in a different condition; it is an act of reshaping an existing order, form, structure; scope, time; a kind of an adjustment; an innovation so as to suit the interest of the person changing it and the people that the change is meant for.

In the literary composition, the technique and concept of adaptation means reworking plays of other cultures bringing in certain things so as to suit the society and the purpose of the playwright. This is usually done through translation, transposition and adaptation. Through these processes, texts generally (texts of different genres of literature) have become part of a great tradition. By these, traditional aesthetics is refined and revitalized. African playwrights therefore have shown great concern in reworking great dramatic works of the past to keep alive traditional aesthetics and or historical perspectives that they believe is sill relevant in remolding the people with a well-defined traditional aesthetic principles thereby globalizing cultures of both the

original work and the adapted version and in the process promoting literacy of both cultures.

In reworking any literary work be it plays or novels, there may be some changes and these are meant to make the text relevant. These changes may occur either in names of character, places and Tittles, the period or the setting; the story and the themes etc. Etherton (1982) opined that "to adapt a play and or a text involves superficial changes of detail and sometimes a radical recasting or rewriting of the entire play." The approach notwithstanding, the important thing is that there are mostly usually traces of the influence of the original work.

Adaptation and globalization of culture therefore will not be properly addressed in literary perspective without a rendition or a chronicle of African playwrights and the works that emerged as a result of this exercise, thus the inherent need to talk about the following stares us on the face; E. Sutherland' *Edufa* and marriage of Ananewa' adapted from Euripedes A'lcestics' and Shakespeare's merchant of Venice, respectively, Zulu Sofalas' 'wedlock of the Gods' adapted from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet; Ola Rotimi's. The gods are not to blame' adapted from Sophocle's 'king Oedipus' Athol fugard kani and Ntshona's play 'The island' Soyinka's The Bachae of Euripides adopted from Sophocles' 'Eurpides' the Bachae'.

## **EFUA T. SUTHERLAND'S MARRIAGE OF ANANSEWA: AN ADAPTATION OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARIFS MERCHANT OF VENICE**

### **BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY:**

Merchant of Venice: an early Shakespearian comedy also classified as one of the problem plays of the author is a rendition of two ancient folktales woven together. It is a piece involving vengeful greedy creditors who attempted extracting a pound of flesh from his victim and the other tale where a suitor is confronted with a difficult task of making a choice from three chests. Shakespeare in his chest -choosing device built the play around a Christian heroine "Portia". The actress steers her lover Bossanio toward the correct humble casket and then successfully defends his bosom friend Antonio from shylocks horrid law suit. Far away in Belmont, a ridiculous scene is depicted when portio because of her father's wealth is in the centre of controversy arising from who will win her hand in marriage. Her father in his will stipulated that whoever that wills his daughters hand in marriage must choose from the 'three Caskets made of gold, silver

and lead respectively. One of the caskets contains the portrait of Portio. The mystery that is to be revealed is the three vices of greed, lust and ostentatious life and the virtue of tolerance, humility and contempt; the urge to have a humble: and fair beginning and instinct to be swayed by luxury and wealth.

In the first suitor, the prince of morocco, luxury and money obsessed character is explored grossly. Basking in the myopic reasoning that: since all men desire to have Portio, she is as precious as gold casket. He is attracted to a choice guided by an outward appearance. He failed, thus an allusion to the biblical injunction that "not what goes into a man defiles a man but what comes out of him". The content of the casket illustrated thus, a few gold coins and a skull with a scroll containing the famous verse.

*All that glitters is not gold Often have you heard that told Many a man his life hath told But my outside to behold Gilded tombs do worms enfold Had you been as wise as told Young in limbs in judgment old Your answer had not been inscrolled Fare you well: your suit is cold (Act 2 scene 7)*

The second suitor is egocentric. He is thinking big and great. He went for a killer; to be outstanding; not to be like others in choosing gold and to be an ordinary man by going for lead which he assumes too common and not glamorous. Rather he went for the silver casket with the inscription.

"Choose me and get what you deserve"

But the content beat his imagination; the picture of a court jester's head on a baton and a demeaning remarks

*"What a grinding idiot? Did deserve more than this? than a scroll reading some there be that shadow kiss some have but a shadow 's bliss talk what wife you will to bed I will ever be your head"*

This verse was making fool of him impressing it on him that he was

Foolish to imagine that a pompous man like him could ever be a fit husband for portio, and that he was always a fool and that his choice of silver casket demonstrates his foolishness and deciding to play a second fiddle means he is a weakling.

The last suitor; the patient dog that eat the fattest bone is Bassaino. He applied Wisdom reasoning that marriage is a gamble which unfolds with time and therefore deciding to choose the lead with the inscription.

"Choose me and risk everything you have got" To him marriage is a pendulum which may swing either Way; ushering one into negative or positive turning in life. He Won the gamble thus portio's hand in marriage.

The casket episodes in the merchant of Venice and the confusion therein in the similarities of the caskets is grossly down played by Efua Sutherland creating in the famous trickster of Ananse; the spider, an outstanding and delightful romantic comedy with a charming wit relying heavily on man as a kind of Breditan chorus.

### **EFUA SUTHERLAND AND THE MARRIAGE OF ANANSEWA**

In the marriage of Anansewa, we saw a depiction and celebration of the famed wit of Ananse; the famous trickster who uses his wife to outwit other bigger creatures. He is very greedy and thirsty of luxurious life. Accosted by lack, the trickster resolved to auction his daughter to four wealthy suitors so as to raise money for her school fees. He intends to maximize the opportunity to extort money from each of the four suitors; Mines, Togbeklu IV, the chief of Sapa and chief-who-is-chief. He sings praises for each of them addressing them with their various praise names. This spurs each to doll out money without suspecting that he has a rival, Hear him address chief-who-is-chief.

*Oh! Fire- extinguisher, fire -extinguisher, you have caused flame flashes to darken. You have caused I'm irreversible to come to a full stop (p. 16)*

Meanwhile, his trick, antics and intention is not known to his daughter Anansewa initially but on realizing her father' plot, she bursts out with anger.

My father is selling me alas/alas/...

I will no let you sell me like some parcel to a customer (p.20)

At this point, Ananse became entangled in a web of controversy and difficulty as all the chiefs who all the while was dealing with the man as if they were the only suitors decided to come and offer the head-drink which will confirm each as the husband of Anansewa at the sometime and the same day. With the bubble about to burst, Ananse

has to fall back once gain on his trick and antics. This will prove the one who is genuinely in love with his daughter. He asked the daughter to pretend to be dead and subsequently sent message across to the chiefs announcing his daughter's death. All the chiefs responded by sending a condolence team to console Ananse but one of them; chief-who-is-chief believed that she love Ananewa dearly and that they are as good as married. He is therefore supposed to be bereaved and one to foot the bill of the funeral. Ananse and his daughter were grossly impressed with the genuine disposition of love by the chief and his generosity to pay for the food he have not tasted.

In reciprocating this kind gesture, he decided to raise the daughter from dead and did not only give his consent to the marriage but persuaded his daughter to go ahead and marry the chief-who-is-chief. Hear Ananewa and her father speak.

Ananewa: father, I could hear a chief-who-is-chief calling me Ananse: he was indeed calling you. His love has won a victory for us all (Page 91)

### **THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME BY OLA ROTIMI: AN ADAPTATION OF KING OEDIPUS BY SOPHOCLES:**

The Greek playwright Sophocles in his King Oedipus, the first play in what is referred to as a "trilogy" known as the theban plays deals with the crisis in Oedipus's family at a time when political life in Greek was very sophisticated form of democracy and intellectual life very high-minded, humanist and rationale; a time when the whole society was socially and economically underpinned by slavery, At this time, Sophocles in line with Anthencian society was in support for the democratic institutions and expressed a patrician point of view; a piety and a sense of duty towards the gods who were unanimously acknowledged formally rather than spiritual by the citizenry.

He projects practically a man's attempt to escape from reality; from his awful destiny prophesied at his birth to Laius the king of Thebes, The prophesy emanates from a curse for a crime, a revenge and a punishment from the gods in the lineage of Cadmus. The attempt to escape from the prophesy at birth that the first son to Lauius would kill his father and marry his mother leads to its fulfillment.

First, the parents for the fear of committing infanticide decided not to destroy the baby rather they pierced his feet bound and abandoned him on the side of a mountain. A shepherd rescued him and gave him to the king of Corinth whose marriage was childless; The king adopted him as his son and named him Oedipus meaning 'pierced

foot'. The boy grew up to hear of this awful curse and decided to avert its fulfillment by fleeing from his purported father and mother but was caught in the web of fulfilling the prophesy. On his way, he encountered a stranger, fought and killed him because the stranger abused him. On entering Thebes, he, applying his native wit and intelligence destroyed a fabulous beast, the sphinx that had brought a plague upon the city. In return, he was rewarded with the throne and the widowed queen who now become his wife. 'He had a successful reign and within these peaceful years had four kids from the queen (his mother). The die is cast, it is therefore not an issue of committing a crime; fulfilling the prophesy but that of realizing that he has actually killed his father and is marrying his mother and raising children with her.

With another plague raving the town, the truth is sought for and revealed. The pathetic situation is that an attempt to prevent himself from fulfilling the prophesy lead to the prophesy being fulfilled; a crime committed in total ignorance. Still out of ignorance, more terrible crime is committed; he banished his wife's (mother) brother creon and abused the old and blind soothsayer Tiresias believing that they are working against him. Hear him speak out guided by rationality no doubt.

*For I can tell you\ no man possess the secret of divination and I have proof. An oracle was given to laws ... That he should die by the hands of his own child. His child and mine what come of it? Louis, it is common Knowledge, was killed by outland robbers at a place where the three roads meet...*

The mother cum wife Queen Jocasta was ignorant of the true situation. The more attempt she makes to reassure her husband and son and give him confidence in his search for Lauis; killer and to unveil his own identify, the closer she brings both herself and Oedipus to the realization of their true identity and relationship; mother and son'.

Before now she brings to his knowledge about the event of the past; a child abandoned at the 'mountainside to die and about the fact that the prophesy after all may not be true and off course that a dead child couldn't have lived to kill his father but something too struck Oedipus and he retorts. My wife, what you have said has troubled me.

My mind goes back..... And he searches his mind

He once killed a man at a place where the three paths meet. Perhaps he is the killer of Lauis a stranger and he exclaimed. "Ah; wretch I, am I unwittingly self cursed".

The queen was first to discover the truth and the sacrilege and unable to withstand the shame hangs herself. Oedipus represents nobility, intelligence and moral integrity but this is in sharp contrasts to his fate and the fact that he has been doomed from birth such that his determination to discover the truth marvels the audience who actually know his identity. This is ironical and explains why his situation attracts unprecedented sympathy.

His resolve to fish out the murderer and his laying of curses on the culprit and the sentence of excommunication automatically implies that he is cursing himself. So when we confront a man of reason; a determined man to discover the truth no matter what it means personally; a logical mind who desperately struggled against an ordered fate and its awful fulfillment, we are undoubtedly confronted by a true nobility of his soul.

Rather than committing suicide, he decided to inflict upon himself the more severe punishment of blinding himself. The excruciating pains and agony looms large when he said.

I will not believe that this was not the best that could have been done. Teach, me no other lesson. How could I meet my father beyond the grave with seeing eyes; or my unhappy mother against whom I have committed such heinous sin. As no mere death could pay for... No I Hearing either! Had I any way to dam that channel too, I would not rest fill I had prisoned up this body of shame in total blankness For the mind to dwell beyond the reach of pain were peace indeed.

He reasoned that the best is to discover the truth. It is still this his reasoning and logical mind that determines a harder Way forward than suicide (which in his society would have been more Honorable) but by following this course which though is noble but yet painful agony, he is able to Work out his redemption on earth because his intelligence, nobility morality and determination is in direct opposition of his fate and this primarily made the fulfillment of his destiny wholly undeserved.

### **THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME**

Through a prologue, Rotimi introduce his audience to an account of the events of an entire strange setting (a Greek model and the Greek myth) imposed on a rural Yoruba background or setting. As the events unfold, the mood of both the major characters and the audience changes. The birth of the child; a would be king brought joy; a short-lived joy which died immediately there is a prophesy by Apollo that the child is cursed and is

going to kill his father and marry his mother but joy was restored again with the birth of Creon; an uncle to Oedipus. The audience and the king once again became engrossed in despair and pains when the king cursed the murderer and by extension himself, one pronounces the sentence of excommunication on the culprit.

Rotimi blended his own play very well that for the pride and arrogance of Oedipus, he replaced with a king who is kind, good, caring; a king with vigour and purposefulness and inspired confidence and when he blends these qualities with that of reason and the desire to know the truth of the original Oedipus, he lessens the injustice of Oedipus's fate.

Unlike in Oedipus, pride and arrogance made it appear that he deserves his punishment from the gods, in Rotimi's *The Gods are not to blame*. Oedipus's shortcoming is his temperament which is exceedingly flaring and when juxtaposed to his kindness, caring nature, vigorous, purposefulness and unparalleled confidence, the fate which actually was pre-destined is played down.

Generally, the Greek and Yoruba cosmology sees fate from the same viewpoint; that fate, a pre-destination can be changed either by appropriate sacrifice or by personal determination but in these two plays, the characters all made genuine attempts and are determined to change the awful fate yet the irony of it is that rather than averting the prophesy, the genuine attempts rather turned out to be concerted efforts to see it come to pass. Etherton (1982) rightly observed in Oedipus and commented thus:

He is thus driven by two wholly praiseworthy characterizes." A determination to discover the truth, no matter what it means personally and a logical mind. Both qualities it seems are contradicted by the God in his ordained fate and its awful fulfillment.

The same qualities are showcased in Oedipus in *The Gods are not to blame*. Pragmatically viewed therefore the fact that a person had to determine his own moral responsibility, is paramount in the two literary works, The two major characters Oedipus and Oedipus were able to redefine their moral responsibility by trying to escape from 'reality': the eventual result prophesied from onset but eventually has to embrace their fate and live through its implications when they become aware of the reality. When they discovered that their culpability; their sinful acts had -been committed before their honest search for the sinner, the validity of their courage and personal determination to

find out the truth as an agent of awful fulfillment of the prophesy become contradictory.

Oedipus is a product of generational curse, a kind of revenge and divine punishment for a misdeed by Cadmus and which was visited on Laïus, his father and the latest in the line of kings of Thebes. Actually, his fate was decided and sealed before he even became a man. To ensure that the prophesy is fulfilled, there is this overriding flaw imbued in him; pride and arrogance and which exerted tremendous influence over other virtues in him and incidentally causes his woes and downfall. So Oedipus feels no guilt for killing a man, it is only when he comes to realize who that man might be that he becomes horrified and surprised, thus inflicting pains and agony of blindness. Hear him.

*I will not believe that this was not the best that I could have been done. Teach me no other lesson. How could I meet my father beyond the grave with seeing eyes; or my unhappy mother, against whom I have committed such heinous sin. As no mere death could pay for?*

In the Gods are not to blame there is no proclaimed reason for such a curse to be handed on him. In the first place, his nobility, moral integrity, intelligence, kindness, vigour and purposefulness stand him out as a character that could ever commit patricide and incest. Yet his temperament which in all standards is very flaring pushes him to commit this sinful act against his moral integrity. When he kills a man, and comes to the realization of his crime, he feels guilt and when he discovered his identity and his crime, he regrettably and painfully reacted:

*No! No! do not blame the Gods, let no one blame the powers. My people, learn from my fall. The powers would have failed if I did not let them use me. They knew my weakness. The weakness of a man easily moved to the defense of his tribe against others. I once slew a man on my farm in Ede. I could have spared him. But he spat on my tribe. The man laughed, and laughing, he called me a man from the bush tribe of Ijekun. And I lost my temper...*

From any perspective we view the characters, and their predicament, one thing is obvious: The more Oedipus, Odewale and their parents sought by all means to avoid the curse and the awful fulfillment, they were unconsciously driven into getting the prophesy fulfilled.

While the fate of Oedipus lies on the Gods who laid a curse, a revenge and divine punishment and partly his downfall being caused by his pride and arrogance, the question in Odewale's case is Are the Gods indeed the cause of Odewale's downfall or is his temper and tribalism to be blamed for his woes? When we critically look at the fact that he wouldn't have killed his father if that awful prophesy had not actually taken place and he had grown up in his parent house for his hot temper in all assessment appears to be overwhelmed by his moral integrity, kindness, humility and caring nature then we can rightly disagree, with Rotimi who said that the Gods are not to blame. But if on the other hand, we believed in Odewale's projection that his hot temper and tribalism are indeed the cause of his downfall, we may begin to question the validity of the prophesy.

In all, there is an inherent need to scrutinize the negative traits imbued in both Odewale and Oedipus. So to whom the Gods want to destroy, they give absolute power." The Gods want to destroy these characters and they projected strong negative traits of hot temper, and pride and arrogance to work against their normal and peaceful life; a factor that actually destroyed them. Yet it is not far from the truth to believe that the Gods wouldn't have succeeded if the characters did not allow them to use them.

Finally, the Gods are not to blame was adopted because it suits the Nigerian situation. The play actually portrays the Nigerian civil war and the playwright perceived the Gods as the Europeans who sow the seed of discord among us and Odewale as the tribalism in Nigeria, Therefore, the simple conclusion is that seed of discord or no seed of discord, the Europeans wouldn't have succeeded if Nigeria did not breed, nurture and water the tribalistic phenomenon in them to germinate and flourish.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is obvious that western culture has a complex influence in modern African literature irrespective of the genre. This becomes more pronounced after independence primarily because of the education system that was introduced by the colonial masters and the impact it had on Africans and principally as a result of the urbanization and consumerism. Therefore, colonialism provided a platform that was fertile for adaptation of European literature particularly drama by African playwrights to flourish. The practice no doubts became fairly popular in African dramatic praxis. African playwright appears to have taken over the odious task of reworking the great European dramatic works of

the past so as to ensure that play-texts survive the process of history. Asqil (1980) observed this and commented thus.

*This exercise was facilitated by the fact that there seems to be similarity in culture of the Africans and that which the western play-texts dwelt on; the message; the theme which is being discussed is similar to what is happening in Africa generally and in Nigeria particularly. The message, therefore, is important to Nigeria situation.*

The aim of writing obviously is to send a message across to the audience in the society and globally too. Therefore, before one thinks of adopting a play, he must have an interest either in the culture or the theme he believes must have something to teach his audience. In this way, the concept of literature as an agent for globalizing culture emerges.

That some outstanding contemporary European plays are adapted to Nigeria cultures is an indication of the suitability of such plays to Nigeria Situation and that the cultural, political and social background is similar to Nigeria's political, social and cultural climate.

In the God's Are not to blame adopted from Sophocles' king Oedipus. The political climate is very much similar to the source of the adaptation though Rotimi deliberately counter-balanced his new version with his audience's expectations and knowledge of the original and this was received enthusiastically.

So also is the case in the marriage of Anesewa and merchant of Venice. The political situation which share, some similarity with that of the Greek methodology is that the people in Nigeria are looking for the cause of their problem without knowing that the cause of their problem is within them, in Oedipus de Rex, the king is searching for the cause of the problem of the kingdom when he is the cause of the problem. 'The hand that robbed the cradle is ruling the kingdom'.

Obidiya; a popular Igbo drama-text is modeled from Macbeth. The Island by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona from Antigone by Sophocles. Soyinka's Bachae of Euripides from Euripides by Sophocles. There have also been successful transpositions from folklore or Nigerian history by Nigeria playwrights. Soyinka and Rotimi mostly adopted their plays from history of the country. Imman: The carrier and the strong Breed are modeled to the history of the Yoruba culture. Death of the king Horseman and a dance of the forest are adaptation from Yoruba history or events that took place

in Yoruba's or the Yoruba culture. Death of the king Horseman and A Dance of the forest are adaptation from Yoruba history or events that took place in Yoruba kingdom in the past. Hill (1925) has this to say; the most interesting thing about adaptation is that there is a message the playwright wants to pass across which he want the audience to learn from. Moreso, adaptation is a ploy to sell the rich cultural heritage of Nigerians/Africans to the outside world or the rich cultural heritage of the west to Nigerians/Africa and in the process adaptation of rich platform of enriching the Nigerian drama with western and African 'cultural background is created'.

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