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A NATIVIST'S APPROACH TO ÒKÉDÌJÍ'S CULTURAL RESTORATION IN *SÀNGÓ*

By

Hamzat, Saudat Adebisi Olayide

Introduction

The issue of culture has always been an area of interest in sociology (Fádípe, 1970), theology (Ejizu, 1973), economics (Goodman, 2001), literature (Ìsolá, 1995, Ogúnsínà, 1995 and Ilésanmí 2004), politics and anthropology (Lamnitz and Ember, 1995). In all, culture is seen as the basis of man's life in any society. Ironically, this aspect of African life in general, and Nigerian society in particular, is what colonial master has successfully rubbished for his own economic gain. The result of this is the hybridization process that subverts traditional cultural values for foreign practices.

The thrust of this paper is to explore how Òkédìjí (1987) has successfully reconstructed history and thereby reinvents those values that the colonial masters have tried to destroy. The study achieves this by using the nativist model of the postcolonial theory as propounded by Williams and Laura (1994) in Adeyemi (2003) to probe the writer's style and techniques in the task of cultural reorientation. The aesthetics of Òkédìjí's historical drama, *Sàngó* is examined to highlight how the author reconstitutes or reinvents history, and reorientates the hybridized Nigerian society to have a good understanding of the values inherent in traditional culture vis-a-vis the role it played in the organization of the Yorùbá society in the pre-colonial period.

Literature Review

Geertz's (1973) definition of culture as adapted by Muhammed and Adékanyè (2003:92) says much about the important place of culture in the life of a people. He defines culture as: A system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitude towards life. Culture determines so many things: our outlook about life, our views about virtues and vices, how we see ourselves and how other

people see us, and most importantly how we develop our knowledge about life. Therefore, our life depends on culture. This explains the reason why there is always a psychic disruption in the life of a people when any change occurs in their culture. This is because the ideology of the people, that is; 'any set of shared assumptions and beliefs seen as in some sense governing how people think and act' (Milner, 1996:41) would have been altered. This, according to Said (1973), in his study of Asia society, is what happened in nations formerly under colonial rule.

Said's (1973) view on orientalism serves as the springboard for the postcolonial theory. While probing the effect of colonialism on Asia, he affirms that Europe successfully perpetuated "hegemony" over others with the power and knowledge they possess about them, creating a dichotomy between themselves as "masters" who occupy the centre of the world and 'others' who are in the periphery. The West has always spread the gospel of superiority over others with the civilization mission. He argues that the colonialists used this ploy to rubbish the culture of "others", a "feat" they achieved through Western education and religious teachings. To him, colonialism affects other nations' psyche to the extent that we see ourselves the way colonialists portray us.

Scholars such as Ògúndípe-Leslie (1977), Chinweizu (1978), Wa Thiong'o (1981 and 1986), Ògúnsínà (1995), Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (1995) and Adéyemí (2003) have held diverse opinions on the embracing issue of colonialism. Most of these scholars view colonialism as a deadly virus that has destroyed many traditional values, and has violently disrupted indigenous African ways of life. The result of socio-cultural changes among these nations is psychic disruption of those nations that experienced colonialism. The result is a hybridized African society that pays more attention to Western culture than to its indigenous culture thereby loosing track of the rich values inherent in their culture. Such is the experience of African society in general, and Nigerian society in particular. Chinweizu (1978) and Wa Thiong'o (1973) opine that the West embarked on the civilization mission to have control over the economic and political lives of others. These scholars, therefore, emphasize the need for a reorientation of the African psyche from their state of hybridism.

As a reaction to colonialism, scholars see the need to reassess our culture to see the good values that could help humanity. This is what gave rise to the postcolonial theory. Such reactions are in different garbs and this has given rise to different models of postcolonial theory such as the Metropolitan, Eclectic and Nativist models (Adéyãmí2003: 103-4). The

Metropolitan model claims that "the native is historically mute, that they lack the language to speak, and are therefore incapable of speaking back" against the master. They therefore have to use English, the language of the 'master' to utter confrontational words against the "master". To Adéyemí (2003), this model is interested in promoting the inherited language of the master as well as creating a national identity for the literature of the periphery. It celebrates hybridism by encouraging marriage of traditional and European cultural and artistic features to reassert the periphery's pride of place. He adds that this model cannot work for the local masses whose language is the indigenous one. To him, the crusade of enlightenment about the struggle for cultural, intellectual, political and economic identity is better done in indigenous language for a better effect on the local masses, hence our choice of indigenous language play-text in this study.

We, therefore, adopt the Nativist model focusing on reinvention and reconstitution of traditions that the 'master' had tried to destroy. This model calls for a confrontation with the fact of history, an artistic celebration of cultural and political nationalism, and the promotion of traditional civilization as a way of subverting foreign cultural, textual and epistemological dominance. The theory is used to challenge internal and external oppression and it promotes the use of indigenous language in literary production. The extent to which Òkédìjí has gone in answering these calls will form our next line of discussion.

Òkédìjí's Cultural Rediscovery In *Sàngó*

The society provides the subject matters, characters, and worldview of any literary work. It also provides its forms of language. History, the product of changes that occur in a society as a result of challenges they face has always formed the theme of literary production among literary artists. A good example is the mytho-historical account about the fourth Alaafin, Sàngó, who ruled Òyó Empire in the eighteenth century.

Òkédìjí's play-text is not the first attempt at artistic representation of the historical king-Sàngó. His counterparts, Ladipo (1968) in *Òba Kòso* and Osofisan (1998) in *Many Colours Make The Thunder King* have also utilized this same legend in their plays. Osofisan treats the central theme of Sàngó's excessive ambition, by showing how Sango's attempt to surpass all his predecessors by marrying powerful women like Oya, Òsun, and Oba who brought socio-economic growth to his kingdom according to Abubakar (2006). Osõfisan focuses on how Oya gets rid of

her husband's good adviser and Obà in a ploy to have control over him in the co-wife rivalry. The tension between the king and his two warlords which features prominently in Osofisan's play is also Ladipo's focus. In a bid to get rid of his two warlords who are thirsty for war, Sàngó succumbs to Oya's ill advice and sets his warlords, Gbonka and Timi against each other. In the two plays, Gbönkà, who emerges as the hero kills Timi and asks the king to abdicate the throne for him. Ladipo concludes that Sàngó hangs himself in frustration haven lost everything in the fire he caused with his thunder magic.

This conclusion relies heavily on the earlier version of oral historical accounts, which was determined solely by the dominating foreign print media during the period of colonialism. This version painted Sàngó as a ruler whose inordinate ambition destroyed, and therefore had to hang himself in frustration (Johnson, 1927).

Òkédìjí's (1987) effort in the play-text, S*àngó* is to reorientate his people about this version of colonial masters' historical account in line with the features of the nativist model of the postcolonial theory, which calls for a restoration of African history. Òkédìjí recaptures the existential situation of his ethnic group, the Yoruba people, before it was punctuated by the arrival of the white colonialists. He preoccupies himself with the task of reinventing and reconstructing their oral history by recounting the beliefs about their ancestors. He starts from the progenitor of the Yorùbá race, then he reminds us of the turbulent rule of Sàngó's predecessors, kings Àjùwòn and Àjàká, under whose rule the powerful Oyo Empire had started paying homage to Olówu:

Sàngó: Òràn-án-yàn baba mi ló te ilú yìí dó.. Ibi tí Ifá júwe fún un ló dó sí...Léyìn Òràn-án-yàn ni Àjàká kókó delé, kó tó di pé Àjùwòn joba. Ègbón làwon méjèèjì jé fún mi. Èyìn Àjùwòn l'Àjàká wá gorí oyè léèkejì... Ifá ní so bí àwon asaájú mi ó ti se fún won. Èmi tí mo je omoleyìn fún won, mo fi ti gbogbo won sàwòkosé, mò n foro lo Ifá e ní mò n dá ijoba se, e ní mò n gún eyin ìjòyè mole. Àríyàwó koyálé ara yín se bí e ko gbárùkù tì mí nígbà tee yo Àjàká lòyé, tí e ní èmi ni n ó gbà yín nínú oko-arú Olówu tí Àjàká kóo yín sí! Àgbeje wáá gbà yín là tán, e ní kí won paá ní pánsá. (Pp.75).

Sàngó: Òràn-án-yàn my forefather founded this land...He settled where Ifá directed him to. After Òràn-án-yàn, Àjàká held fort before Àjùwòn ascended the throne. These two are my senior siblings. After Àjùwòn, Àjàká was enthroned the second time. Ifá usually directs the affairs of my predecessors. As their successor, I toe their steps, I make enquiries from Ifá, you accuse me of taking decisions alone, and you say I disregard the chiefs. You dump oldwife for new bride, you initially gave me your support when you dethrone Àjàká, when you said only I can save you from the yoke of Olówu that Àjàká has put you in. After I have rescued you, you will bite the finger that feeds you. (My translation)

By bringing the history of the Yoruba race to the fore, Okediji corrects the colonial impression that his race does not exist in the history of the world. This is why Sàngó justifies every action he takes with historical facts anytime he is challenged for his incessant quest for and use of power. Sàngó's response to the development of Yorùbá race shows his spirit of cultural and political nationalism. Sàngó is portrayed as a king whose hope and aspiration is to restore the lost glory of the Yorùbá race which has dwindle to its lowest ebb during the reign of Ajaka and Ajuwon,

Sàngó: ...Tipátipá, tipátikúùkù kí egbon-òn mi, Àjàká, fi n forí balè fÓlówu níjosí? Aláàfin tó n kérùkù fÓlówu! ... Se bí tìtorí re làwon Oyomèsì fi yo Àjàká lóyè,.. .Àtipó ko l'Àjàká kú sí, òun ko ni won fi níran irúù mi lórí ìte Aláàfin? Mo joyè tán, Olówu rò pé kíkéré tí mo kéré, òún lè fi yàn mí je. Ó n gbápá ganngan sí mi! Ó pè mí lómodé, ó pàrokò sí mi, ó ní kémi náà wáá wárí fún òun.. .Kò mo pé kíkéré tábéré kéré kì í se mímì adìe....

Was Ajaka my brother not paying homage to Olowu in the past by force? Alaafin ! paying Olowu homage! That is why the Òyomesi dethroned Ajaka .. Did Ajaka not die in exile, is that not how you remembered somebody like me for Alaafin's throne? After I ascended the throne, Olowu felt he can oppress me because of my young age. He sent me metaphoric message that I should be paying him homage because of my young age .. He does not know that the small size of a needle does not make it a hen's meal .. (My translation)

Òkédìjí's historical reconstruction has encouraged a better understanding of the challenges Sàngó faces as a king. History has thought him to face the peculiar situation he finds himself in a special way (pp.20, 26). Òkédìjí portrays Yoruba traditional belief that power and authority are derived from the Supreme Being, spirit and ancestors. To him, the king by virtue of his position ranks next to the divinities, he is, therefore, accorded the respect due to the divinities. This explains why the use of religion, magic, history and myth cannot be separated from politics. They are several aspects of culture that aid the ruler to achieve his goal. If Sango must regain his self-respect as a king and return the Yorùbá race to its past glory, he must exploit all possible means within his power, hence Sango justifies his use of magic.

...Séé bí n ò bá máa sòògùn... bí n ò bá máa sòògùn, láseèdabò, sé mo le fidí ijoba Yorùbá múlè dan-in-dan-in? Mo se le kàpà gbogbo aláàmù tó dòbálè, tá à mèyí tínú n run, láàrin otokùlú, láàrin ìjòyè? ..

If I do not engage ceaselessly in charms, can I establish Yoruba Empire on a strong footing: Or what is one's pride in a weak nation? How can I overpower all invisible foes among bourgeois and chiefs ?.(My translation).

The priests, diviners and medicine men are never distant from the Yoruba political mainstream. It is the diviner, the symbol of Ifá oracle

who doubles as the medicine man and adviser that encourages and aids Sàngó in his ambition to move his political headquarter from Oyo Òùnkò to Oyokoro by researching into the thunder magic that empowers him to dominate his subjects. Sàngó also manipulates Èsù, the trickster god against the Oyokoro chiefs, and the result is their quest for the royal body marks, which Sàngó uses to his own advantage. He orders the marks to be cut too deep in order to render the chiefs useless in the impending war he is about to wage against them, thus through this cunning method the occupation of Oyokoro is made possible.

Òkédìjí also restates the role of verbal and non-verbal arts as another aspect of culture that reinstate the place and role of the individual in the community. Through arts, the society acknowledges and aid rulers. Arts play a great role in boosting leaders' ego. In this play-text under examination, drum language are used to communicate Sàngó's superior status:

À feni tí kogílá kolù,
À feni Èsù ó se,
Ló lè ko l'Èsù,
Ló lè kolu Sàngó,
A feni tí Sàngó ó ó pa (pp 116).

Only those who are possessed
Only those who Èsù will attack
Will dare challenge Èsù
Will dare challenge Sàngó
Only those who Sàngó will destroy. (My translation)

The drum language authenticates Yorùbá traditional belief in Sàngó and Èsù as benevolent and manevolent agents. Material culture like Sàngó's regalia of red àlàárì cloth and the bàtá drums which accompany his dancing steps transform readers encounter with the King from the physical to the metaphysical plane, the fear for these divinities are thus transferred to the King.

The verbal art employed by Okediji's rárà chant and Sango's wives are the royal bards or the rárà poets who perform the function of boosting Sango's ego with encoded oríkì (lineage praise chants) that reflects different messages.

Osun: Olúfinràn, okoo mi, kìnniún òkè tí í bú ramúramù. Sàngó o dá mi lorùn nígbà gbogbo, agùntásoólò, jogbodo tó sígbonle, tó sán-an-gun,
Asán an gun deyinjú (pp 10)
Eye Afíláyà bí okín
Erù bomo jeje.Ó moro tékèé n so lódò ikùn wúyewúye,
Abáwon jà má jebi (pp 12)
ojúuná abara wáwo wáwo

erù bomo jeje.
Ojaba jaàgùn, Ojaàgùn jaba (pp 30)
Agbo pógun n bo má náání
Àkàtà yerì yerì ekùn oko òkè
Kinniun òkè tí n bú ramú ramù (pp 10)
My lord, Olufiran. The lion that roars,
I adore Sango all the time
The tall, huge, elegant and strong one
With frightening nature
A bird with striped breast like peacock
He who is strong up to the eyes

He fights without being at fault
He who frightens all
He who knows the mind of deceitful people
The fire-brand with restless features.
With features that frighten
As he oppresses with magic so does he
Oppress with his royal status.
He who care less at the approach of war.
The great Tiger, King of the hills.
Lion of the hill that roars noisily. (my translation)

Òkédìjí employs *rárà* chants as a verbal art to enhance Sàngó's towering structure, his magical prowess and domineering nature but the oral artists do not only manipulate language to eulogize their clients alone; they criticize their excesses by expressing opinions that are critical of them in subtle but powerful language. Amuta (1989:56) in Abubakar (2006) notes that the royal bards or griots are the societal chroniclers, entertainers and collective conscience, they can use their arts to uphold or subvert feudal status-quo.

This liberty is what is described as poetic justice. Mapanje and White (1983:129) explains that under this artistic freedom "sons may criticise fathers, wives their husbands, workers their employers and everybody the chief or officials, who rule them, so long as it is done through poetry or songs". Hence Sàngó's wives / artists capitalize on the immunity provided by the medium to express popular opinions and feelings about King Sàngó, and caution him any time he transgresses. A striking example is his wives use of rárà to chastise him for trivializing the motherhood of Elélùú, his son:

Obà: Aníbaba-má-níyàá.... Ó ní bá a bá ti mo baba omo, emi la tún fé mòyá è se! Olówó orí mi ò náání iyá; oun a bá ní ni ín kúkú jojú lójú eni. Baba Sàngó la mò, aà morúko iyá Aláàfin, Sàngó omo Òràn-án-yàn (p.12).

Obà: One who has father but no mother! He says once we know the father there is no need for mother's identity. My lord cares less about mother, it is what one has

that one values. We only know Sàngó's father, we don't know his mother's name, Sàngó, offspring of Oranyan (My translation).

Obà reveals the mystery behind Sàngó's motherhood to his annoyance and the allusion jolts Sàngó to unravel the riddle behind his motherhood. This is what gives room for a journey into the genealogy of the historical legend. The play is thus extended without monotony for historical recollection. The search for the name of the late queen mother takes his two slaves, Gàmbàrí and Tètú to Ìbàrùbá, in Tápà land; Gàmbàrí's for failure to get the late queen's name earns him the body marks. This punishment serves as the genesis of the royal body marks.

As the reservoir of knowledge in the community in terms of records of past events, history and images, oral artists keep dossiers on every citizen. Sàngó's wives display qualities of the courtpoets, griots or bards (namely: intelligence, astuteness, courage and truthfulness).

Confrontation is not limited to artist's performance alone. In the play-text, the Oyo-Òùnkò and Òyókoro people express their confrontational posture in speeches that show a deliberative use of language. They reject Sàngó's decision to displace them from their land in strong terms. First it is Oyo-Òùnkò masses that reject this displacement in powerful language:

Okùnrin II : Àwá ko ní tiwa o, kíko ni tàko. A ko tilé-tilé, a ko jálejále, gbogboo wa pátápátá la ko o !

Obìnrin I : Tokùnrin-tobìnrin la ko. Gbogbo Òùnkò ló ko pelú. A ti se le filú síle ká máa loo gbóko ? Odò ò gbodo sàn padà sókè. Àwá ko o ; tomotomo la ko pelú (pp 38)

Okùnrin II : We in particular reject, just like *àko*
We all reject, we reject vehemently/in totality.
Everyone of us reject it. (my translation)

Obìnrin I : All of us, men and women reject.
All Òùnkò people reject.
How can we vacate the city to live in the village.
A river does not flow back to its source.
We, including our children reject it. (my translation).

The people liken Sàngó's migration bid to reversal of fortune, and since there is never a reversal in the course of the river flow, the people reject the king's attempt to move them from urban to farm settlement. The play on the word, "ko" sounds incantatory, it stresses rejection and at the same time communicates their rage. Sango and the chiefs of Oyókorò also adopt oratorical style while communicating. They employ riddles, wise sayings and incantatory chants from Ifá divinatory poetry, each party manipulate words to make their wish come true, as it is typical in

incantation:

Sàngó: Onà kejì ni pé kí àwa máa kó bo ní Oyokoro. Kò le ni wá lára, nígbà tó bá je pé àse Ifá là o mú se .. Àwíse ni t'Ifá, àfose ni t'Orúnmìlà.

Baálè: Bée ni, Kábíyèsí, síse síse ni tìlákòse. Sebí Ifá alára ló so pé otooto là á jepà, otooto là á jemumu. Èmi ò tóo yín ín sí nídìí, n ò tóo yín ín gbà lálejò. Ká sòwòo tiwa lóto, ká le moye èrè tá ó je (Òkédìjí, 1987: 86).

Sàngó: The second alternative is for us to move down to Òyókorò. It will not inconvenience us, since it is Ifá's commands that we are upholding. Ifá's command must be heeded, Òrúnmìlà's command must be obeyed (My translation).

Baálè: Yes My lord, the command must be heeded just like ìlákose snail, but it is Ifá itself that says groundnut is meant to be eaten separately, "Ìmumu" is meant to be eaten separately. I am too small to ask you to move, and I am not fit to host you. Let's do our business separately, so that we can know our profit (My translation).

In another instance, the Oyokorò chiefs use proverb-laden speeches to tell Sàngó that he is not welcomed on their land. The simile and personification in the proverbs employed rejects Sàngó's displacement, and also reiterate their right on Oyokoro land.

Baále: A ì í kéré nídìí nnkan eni. Elépo ní epo ò tí ì tó òun, èèrá ní ó wo òun lójú ! Bí kò bá sekù, a se le rí fi tore ? (Òkédìjí, 1987 :87).

One is not too young to claim authority over what belongs to him. The palm oil owner says it's not enough, insects declare interest in it, if there is no remnant how do we dash out? (My translation).

Their choice of words is deliberative and this gives rise to an oratorical style that distinguishes Okediji from other authors. As expected of a play with a historical background, the author of the play-text, *Sàngó;* displays his competence in Yoruba oral traditions, myth, history and orature. He shows that the organization of indigenous society is based on preset rules and traditions, the chiefs and the citizenry can challenge rulers' excesses as Basörun points out to the king in his speech:

Basorun: ká so ojú abe níkòó. E e le dá ìlú se, kábíyèsí. Omodé wí, àgbàá wí: bokùnrín ti n wí lobìnrin náà n so; e ní kò da nnkan kan! Oníwá ò gbon, eleyìn ò dà! Ta wáá le fee máa joba ohún lé lórí ganan o?

To call a spade a spade, you can not rule in isolation, your highness. You refuse to listen to the opinion of both young and old, male and female. Who do you want to continue ruling? (My translation).

In traditional African communities, measures are put in place to ensure orderliness. Even though all cultural symbols and nuances are used in aid of rulers, indigenous culture provide stringent measures to curb leaders' excesses. Such measures regulate actions and activities of

the citizens to meet the collective aspirations of the communities. Through such belief and social norms the people are brought under control. A perfect equilibrum is thus maintained in human society. Òkédìjí's artistic celebration of African traditional socio-cultural practices, especially those aspects of indigenous culture that the colonial masters have tried to destroy like its belief system, its ideology about power and politics is done with the intention of correcting the negative impression that colonialists sold to us about the autocratic power of traditional rulers. They all play a prominent role in seeing that the political, social and economic life of the community and even the life of the individual are regulated to meet communal dreams and aspirations.

Conclusion

This work has shown how Òkédìjí successfully carries out the crusade of cultural nationalism. As an author, he does not only reconstruct history, he reconstitutes and reinvents those traditions that the colonial masters have tried to destroy; i.e. history, belief system, and oratures. Reading the play, one is aware of the playwright's insistence that he is engaged in educating the hybridized Nigerian on the misconceived idea about Sàngó's legend as a king. Okediji's work is not merely a celebration of traditional beliefs because he also challenges the exploitative nature of oppressive leaders. It is our opinion that Òkédìjí protests against a condition in which the society fails to see the values in traditional socio-cultural practices especially in the areas of history, religious belief and aesthetics. It is our belief that the postcolonial society can borrow from the wealth of oral tradition to enrich their social, political and literary traditions. The theory used in the analysis of this text-the nativist model of the postcolonial theory- is, therefore, suggested for the analysis of indigenous literature to fully appreciate the traditional aesthetic devices employed by writers, and also comprehend the African cultural values that bring out the humane nature; as an attempt to correct the current social practice of man's inhumanity to man.

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