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**Beyond the Yoruba Cosmology:  
A Contestation of the Africanness of Wole Soyinka's Submission in  
*Myth, Literature and the African World***

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### **Abstract**

A great part of the early works of African writers and critics dealt with the issue of re-defining the African culture which, to a certain extent, was seen not to have been properly presented or represented by foreign writers. Another level of this scholarship was the response of African scholars to the attempt to universalize western culture by the West. Nevertheless, some Africans in their response to the West made postulations and generalized submissions, using a microcosm of a single African culture to stand for the whole, and thus repeating the same universalising tendency which Western scholarship had been guilty of. This paper attempts to challenge the assumed 'Africanness' of Wole Soyinka's Yoruba cosmology in *Myth, Literature and the African World*, which he uses to propose a universal African literary and tragic aesthetic.

### **Introduction**

In every part of Africa, people of diverse origins and geographical entities and ethnic configurations are founded, bound and live together, propelled by amongst other things, their belief systems. Several instances attest to the validity of this essence of humanity, and of the relationship of the people with their past, their understandable but sometimes mysterious inexplicable worlds. Therein myth, legends, history and the like come handy in man's attempt to comprehend his immediate and remote environments.

There is probably no single subject which ethnographers, anthropologists and theatre scholars, concern themselves more than attempts to understand and interpret the belief systems of peoples of Africa and how these are reflected in their lives, (both here and hereafter) and in their works. It should be noted however, that in Africa, the men who made the greater contributions to our earlier thoughts about the

African belief systems were not themselves ethnographers; they did not know Africa and their peoples at firsthand and therefore could not have done appropriate justice to their writings about Africa. Take the age – long debate on the concept and practice, of African theatre and drama or African literature for example. The issue of Africa and its history received same skepticism from the West. At a point the entire Africans were seen as animists. To the Western world, animism was in fact an analytical system for organizing the data of African religion(s), and not a folk or operational system for organizing ritual activities and their underlying beliefs. However, animism, to put it in its simplest terms, is the attribution of soul or spirit comparable to the soul or spirit of man, to non-human animals, to plants, and even to things and abstract concepts. Paul Bohannan (1971:311). The resultant effect has always been that the facts of indigenous religion, belief systems and cosmologies lie hidden in a vast morass of misconstrued, misjudged and albeit, misunderstood theorizing. Mudimbe V. Y. cited by Margaret Thompson Drewal (1992: xiii) observes that,

Until now, western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories, which depend on a Western epistemological order. Does this mean that African traditional systems of thought are unthinkable and cannot be made explicit within the framework of their own rationality?

Soyinka, W. (1976: x) thinking along this assertion also submits that,

We black Africans have been blindly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonization - this time by a universal – humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of their world and their history, their social neuroses and their value systems. It is time, clearly, to respond to his new threat.

African scholars responded to this threat in various forms, which included Negritude, Pan-Africanism and other literary and theoretical responses by Africans. Soyinka (1976: xi) asserts that,

When ideological relations begin to deny, both theoretically and in action, the reality of a cultural entity, which we define as the African world while asserting theory even to sublimate its existence in theory, we must begin to look seriously into their political motivation.

This assertion could be seen to have propelled Soyinka (1976: xi) into his submissions in Myth, Literature and the African World, which he opines to be,

...engaged in what should be the simultaneous act of eliciting from

history, mythology and literature, for the benefit of both genuine aliens and alienated Africans, a continuing process of self – apprehension whose temporary dislocation appears to have persuaded many of its non-existence or its irrelevance in contemporary world reality.

For Soyinka, the reality of the Yoruba can most probably and conveniently be exemplified in his structured three worlds of the Living, the Dead and the Unborn.

### **Soyinka's Yoruba Cosmology**

The Yoruba, like most African peoples, have a very rich culture. Myth plays prominent roles in the understanding of cosmic arrangements and the issue of who occupies where, in maintaining cosmic peace. Every society has myths about what it does not understand, about, if one may say, its mysteries. Yet the myths are kept nurtured by things more tangible; the recurrent events in which they are played out with greater or lesser symbolic nicety. Accompanying every set of myths, there are sets of activities that garnish the belief system of the people through which attempts are made to understand both the unknown and those mysteries of human existence.

In his treatment of the three worlds in Yoruba cosmology, Soyinka makes it clear that the gods are the final measure of eternity as humans are of earthy transience. The living does not fail to distinguish between himself and the deities, between himself and the ancestors, between the unborn and his reality, or discard his awareness of the essential gulf that lies between one area of existence and another... which must be constantly diminished by the sacrifices of the rituals, the ceremonies of appeasement to those cosmic powers which lie guardian to the gulf. Soyinka (1976: 144). This way, the three worlds (the Living the Dead and the Unborn) are constantly in a continuum of relationship as they compliment each other for cosmic tranquility. That is why, in Soyinka's Yoruba cosmology, the past belongs to the ancestors; the present belongs to the living and the future to the unborn. This could sound strange to some other cosmologies in Africa, however, to the Yoruba, these different levels have no mysteries. Soyinka (1976:149) submits that the future (the Unborn) though unknown, is nevertheless, a mystery to the Yoruba but co – existent in present consciousness.

Soyinka's presentation of the Yoruba cosmology provokes so many questions. Has Soyinka in his treatment actually captured the essence of the cosmology of the entire Yoruba people and their belief system? Can Soyinka's response to the non-African postulations as submitted in the Yoruba belief system be said to be African? How broadly African is Soyinka's submission? What are the meeting points and areas of contradictions in comparative cosmologies of other Nigerian (and African)

belief systems? Is there any singularity in African worldview? How appropriate therefore can the Yoruba worldview stand for the entire African worldview?

Some scholars of Soyinka's position in Myth, Literature and the African World are critical of him for taking the issue of the multiplicity of cosmologies in Africa for granted. Kwame A Appiah (1992: 79) summarizes these reactions when he observes that,

...we should ask what leads Soyinka astray when it comes to his accounting for his cultural situation. And part of the answer must be that he is answering the wrong question. For what he needs to do is not to take an African world for granted but to take for granted his own culture – to speak not as an African but as a Yoruba and a Nigerian.

As dynamic as Appiah's submission is, even in Nigeria, a country with multidimensional cosmologies that are at times similar, yet in broad instances, antipodal to each other, a single voice representing these multiplicities, can never put forward any balanced representation. Raising a view towards this observation, Kwame A Appiah (1992:80) says that

The right question then, is not "why Africa shouldn't take its traditions for granted?" but "why I shouldn't take mine?" the reason that Africa cannot take an African cultural or political or intellectual life for granted is that there is no such thing; there are only so many traditions with their complex relationships, and as often, their lack of any relationship to each other. Even when addressing other Africans, he can only take for granted an interest in his situation and a shred assumption that he has the right to speak from within a Yoruba cultural world. He cannot take for granted a common stock of cultural knowledge. (For this will amount to)... a kind of Yoruba imperialism of the thought world. (emphasis mine)

We had observed earlier the crucial role of the belief system of a people in the understanding of their cosmology. In spite of the multiplicity of African belief systems, there are meeting points. However, because of the uniqueness and distinct individual identities that seeming universality of the areas of similarity can never submerge, talking with absolutism on a matter like this amount to some level of indigenous colonialism or cultural imperialism by Soyinka.

A lot of scholars who respond to Soyinka's Africanisation of his Yoruba cosmology, at some instances, see his work from the point of view of cultural imperialism, rather than cultural influence. While cultural imperialism promotes, distinguishes, separates or even artificially injects the culture of one nation or people into another or others; in this instance, Soyinka, over other cultures in Africa, cultural influence can be seen as a process that goes on at all times between other cultures that have contact with each other. African musical traditions for instance, influenced African

American music, which in turn influenced American popular music. In cultural imperialism, it is far from the issue of influence, but a state where one culture is imposed on or dominates a great majority of other cultures.

The issue of cultural imperialism is a global phenomenon that has attracted attention for decades. At the global level, America, using her entertainment industry has received heavy criticisms. Hollywood has remained America's most vibrant tool in global cultural imperialism. Countries of the world, both the developed and the developing, have been very critical of Hollywood and its incursion on other cultures. The Indian writer, Baburo Patel (1951) cited by Toby Miller *et al* (2005:74) summarises global reactions to Hollywood when he wrote in his article, "Rape of our Heritage" about the Indian experience thus;

The movies... pictures after pictures were sent to India that taught us to kill and steal, pictures that taught us devilry and divorce. Hollywood stripped our women of the beautiful *cholis* and *saris* and wrapped them in shirts and slacks. Hollywood turned our seashores into bedrooms of illicit romance. Hollywood robbed our men of their character and gave them guns to rob others. Hollywood ruined our homes and built clubs and dance halls on their ruins. Hollywood debauched the sanctity of our married life and glorified the illicit thrills of free love. Hollywood destroyed the philosophic fibre of the East and turned us into a frenzied mob of neurotics. Hollywood has violated our food, water, air, arts, music, culture, costumes, philosophy, life and human relations. Whatever Hollywood touched was contaminated.

This kind of sustained critique assisted in the development of a cultural imperialism thesis during the 1960s. It argued that the US, as the world's leading exporter was transferring its dominant value system to others with little or no restraints or resistance. Apart from the US, other governments and individuals have been engaged in this deliberate attempt to legitimize their culture over others. Though Soyinka's case may not be as damaging as Hollywood reported here, nevertheless, his work has had an overbearing dominance on Africa to the extent that some scholars in Africa see no reason to look inwards and study their cosmologies, falling back on the Soyinka Yoruba cosmology as all embracing. This equates what Jack Lang (1982) in Mallelart *et al* (1988:20) tags "intellectual imperialism" and cultural conquest; which according to Paolo Freire (1972:122) leads to a lack of cultural authenticity of those who are invaded. By this invasion and seeming capture of the multiplicity of cosmologies in Africa, Soyinka used his Yoruba culture to dominate the broad based scholarship on African worldview for a long time.

### Select Cosmologies of Nigerian Ethnic Groups: Similarities and Contradictions with Soyinka's Yoruba Cosmolog

"African world" issues were raised by Soyinka in the text under consideration. However, because the emphasis of this paper is on Soyinka's Yoruba cosmology, let us consider the cosmologies of a few independent Nigerian ethnic nationalities in the Middle Belt Region, just one out of the six geo-political zones, for further illustration.

#### The Igala People

The Igala believe in the world of the Living (*Ef'ile*), the Dead (*Efoj'egwu*- inhabited by ancestors, some of which are deified as intermediary gods) and the world that is the abode of the Supreme Being, *Odo*ba *Oga'gwu*- *Ojo Chamachaala*. The supremacy of the Supreme Being over both the Dead and the Living in Igala cosmology is unquestionable. He is *Ojo*; the Creator, the Father, the Protector, the Giver of all, the all-powerful. The *Igalaman* is always conscious of *Ojo* everywhere and in all human endeavours. He is the giver of children, hence names given to some children have *Ojo* as prefix thus; *Ojonoma* (God owns children), *Ojonimi* (God owns life), *Ojochogu* (God is medicine – or God heals) *Ojoma* (God knows), to mention just a few. Days of the week are also prefixed *Ojo*. *Ojo aladi* (Sunday), *Ojo imonde* (Monday), and so are the other days of the week. Important days also bear *Ojo*; e.g *Ojo aja* (market day). At daybreak, the *Igalaman* says *Ojo munwa* and at sunset he says *Ojo'du*.

These portray the prevalence of *Ojo*, who though lives very high above, is yet constantly present with man. *Ojo's* position which is the highest in the *Igalaman's* cosmological order is followed by the world inhabited by the *Ab'egwu*- the Dead, and then the Living who *J'efile* (inhabit the earth). Since the living are the lowest in the cosmological order, they live in complete obedience to *Ojo* and the ancestors who act as intermediaries between *Odo*ba *Ogagwu-Ojo Chamachaala* and the living. Unlike Soyinka's Yoruba cosmology, the world of the unborn is of no significance in the *Igalaman's* understanding of his cosmological order. Emmy Idegu (1988:21).

#### The Idoma People.

They are in Benue State of Nigeria. Jenkeri Okwori (1998:10) summarises the Idoma cosmology when he documents that,

The Idoma recognize the existence of an all-powerful God, *Owoicho*, who is physically separated from the earth and who can be reached through plenipotentiaries. One of his biggest plenipotentiaries is the *Aje* (earth)

and the *Oche* (who) by virtue of his being the religious head, is the *Ond'aje* (owner of the land). The *Aje* is one of the biggest manifestations of *Owoicho's* presence and it must have acquired such importance because of its life – giving force. The people depend on the land for their survival in terms of shelter, food and the place they return to when they die. Though their physical bodies return to the earth, their souls return to another level of existence, the ancestral home, where they become ancestral gods. *Owoicho* through his plenipotentiaries the *Aje* and the ancestors combine to form the religious base of the Idoma people, running their affairs and partaking in their activities to ensure the existence and the continuation of the people.

Like the Igala cosmology, the Idoma recognize the world of the living, the dead and the space occupied by *Owoicho*, the Supreme Being. But unlike the Yoruba belief system where the creation of man and woman is a combined effort of *Obatala* and *Edumare*, in the Idoma cosmology, like the Igala, *Owoicho Manchala* solely created man and woman from the earth. The God of the universe is manifested on earth because it is only through the earth that we see the mystery of *Owoicho Manchala*. Jenkeri Okwori (04-07-06).

On the world of the dead for the Idoma cosmology, Jenkeri Okwori (04-07-06) submits that if you have lived a meaningful life and you die very old, you progress into ancestorhood. Once you become an ancestor, you are deified with godly qualities and empowered by *Owoicho Manchala* to liaise with the world of the living. But on the world of the unborn he concludes that “the Idoma people do not have the concept of the unborn inhabiting a different world. Rather the ancestors can reincarnate and come out as children. Every child is believed to be a reincarnation of somebody who has died. It is more or less like coming from the ancestral world into the world of the living. Strictly speaking, we do not acknowledge the world of the unborn where children are said to come from as in the Yoruba submission”.

#### **The Bassa – Nge People.**

They are a migrant group of the Nupe people (in Niger state) who live in Kogi State. Samuel Kafewo (2006) asserts that,

Basically there are parallels in the African belief systems but they also have local peculiarities. The Bassa – Nge people believe in the world inhabited by the *Soko*, the Supreme Being, that is God. Below Him are the smaller gods, after which are the *Akuchi* the (ancestors) then the Living that inhabit the earth. The Bassa – Nge believe *Soko* created man and He exists somewhere from where He controls all the actions of men. But for the Living to interact with *Soko*, they need to do so through the lesser gods and the ancestors. The *Akuchi* (ancestors) are believed to always hover round the living to protect them. That is why when you give somebody

water or wine, the first thing he does is to pour some on the ground appealing to the sprits of his *Akuchi* who are sometimes trapped in stones and other material forms in and around compounds.

Reacting to the issue of the place of the unborn, he admitted that the Bassa Nge have no special world for them. It is believed that every child that is born comes from some old relations that are dead. This accounts for why children are named after their dead relations. Basically the Bassa – Nge share a striking similarity of the reincarnation act with the Idoma. However, like the Igala and the Idoma people, the Bassa – Nge have no space for the unborn in their cosmic arrangement.

#### **The Birom People.**

They are in Plateau State. They believe in the world inhabited by *Dagwi*, the Supreme Being, the earth inhabited by the living and the space where the dead (ancestors) reside. Apart from their believe in *Vu Vwel* (the spirit of the dead), there are other smaller spirits called *Bevwo Vwel* and *Cheng* or *Chit*, who are part of *Vu Vwel*. While *Bevwo Vwel* are unharmed, untouchable and unhelpful, holy and good and from *Dagwi* (God), *Cheng* or *Chit* are categorized as evil spirits and they inhabit trees, thickets and isolated habitats (Erivwo in Edith Ihekweazu ed. 1985:98). *Cheng* or *chit*, are nevertheless also seen as guardian spirits of the village, protecting the people from harm. The spirits have a relationship with the living that they visit often. The Birom people do not bother to explain how the spirits came into being. Rather they claim that they see and know that spirits exist while they are not able to explain the precise connection between *Chit* and *Dagwi*, but they nevertheless acknowledge *Dagwi* as the Supreme Being who has power over *Chit* and that without *Dagwi's* permission *Chit* could not punish human beings who go wrong. Edith Ihekweazu (1985:99). The Birom cosmology therefore obviously acknowledges three distinct worlds; the world of the living, the dead and the world inhabited by *Dagwi*. The Soyinka Yoruba world of the unborn to the Birom is nonexistent.

#### **The Ngas (Angas) People.**

They are in Plateau State. They believe that *Nen*, the Supreme Being, created human beings and every other thing on earth including *Zigwol Rit* and *Zigwol Bis* (ancestral sprits). While *Zigwol Bis* opposes *Nen* by acting as a reservoir of wickedness from where witches derive their power, *Zigwol Rit* furthers *Nen's* benevolence and divine purpose for man. The Ngas are, according to Erivwo (1985:104), "satisfied to believe and know that there are spirits and divinities, that some of them are good while others are bad and aggressive, that they emanate from the spirit world to disclose themselves to men, that in some ways they function as ministers and

ambassadors of *Nen*. By the Ngas cosmology, three worlds are acknowledged; the world of the living, the dead (spirits) and the space occupied by *Nen*. Again, Soyinka's Yoruba crucial world of the unborn has no space here.

#### **The Taroh People.**

Like the Birom and the Ngas, the Taroh are in Plateau State. They believe that *Inan* is the Supreme Being and creator of all. The divinities, spirits, ancestors and the living are all subject to Him. He solely created them all. The humans offer sacrifices to the diversities, spirits and ancestors who thereafter relay these to *Inan*. To attain ancestorhood, Erivwo (1985: 109) submits that,

When a hero in the clan dies, he is remembered in the clan for many generations. Libation is poured in remembrance of him at his grave every year. If as the years roll by, his name is getting out of the mind of the clan folk, the head of the clan gets trees planted round a hut built at the place to facilitate his worship. In this way the clan keeps in touch with him and obtains protection, guidance, and blessings from him. In this way, the people are assured (or assure themselves) of receiving his help in times of trouble whenever they need his aid.

The Taroh cosmology, like others treated thus far ascribes creation to *Inan* the Supreme Being, who alone does the act of the creation of man, woman and everything. Here also, Soyinka's Yoruba world of the unborn is of no consequence.

In his analysis of the Yoruba cosmology, their gods and their different responsibilities, Soyinka's submission is contradicted by these cosmologies in the Middle Belt zone of Nigeria. For instance, according to Soyinka's Yoruba belief system, Obatala is the creator of man. Obatala made man out of clay. He molded man and woman and he asked Olodumare to put the breath of life into them. Ullie Beier (1980:14). This position was earlier shared by Soyinka (1976:15), by whose Yoruba world view, the making of man and woman is the combined responsibility of Obatala (who molds) and Olodumare (who supplies the breath). Soyinka (1976:140) refers to Edumare (another variance for Olodumare) as the Supreme Deity. Where in Soyinka's Yoruba three worlds does Edumare inhabit? Soyinka's Edumare who according to him is supreme, yet needs Obatala to make man whole, contradicts the belief systems treated above that have the Supreme Being as the Creator of man and woman without any complementary role of any other god.

We have not even considered the Igbo, Hausa, Ijaw, Kalabari, Efik, Ibibio, Urhobo, Tiv, and the over three hundred other ethnic nationalities and their diverse cosmologies in Nigeria; not to talk of other countries of

Africa. From the Igala, Idoma, Bassa – Nge, Birom, Ngas, Taroh, cosmologies referred to, their collective similarities with the Yoruba cosmology evidently is in two worlds; the world of the living and the dead. These collective six (C 6) share the supremacy of the Supreme Being and attest to Him as the sole creator of everything including objects and substances from which the Yoruba gods are said to have emerged. The (C 6) standing in for several other cultures, either rejects absolutely, or de-emphasizes, the world of the unborn which nonetheless, occupies a fundamental position in Soyinka's Yoruba cosmology. So crucial is the Yoruba world of the unborn that Soyinka (1976:144) admits succinctly that life, present life, contains within it manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn. All are vitally within the intimations and effectiveness of life, beyond mere abstract conceptualization. Adeoti G.R (2006) agrees with Soyinka when he explains that,

When Obatala molds the human form, Olodumare gives the breath before you can be born. But why this process is completed you will then go to a place where you choose your destiny. Whatever type of destiny you choose determines who you become after you are born. So even before birth, there is a level of consciousness which Soyinka terms the unborn.

As acceptable as this whole process may be to the Yoruba, it does not fit into a number of belief systems even within the confines of Yoruba neighbours in Nigeria. The similarities between the Yoruba cosmology and the C 6 as one may argue for other ethnicities in Nigeria (or Africa), do not nonetheless give credence to using one of the several cosmologies as the singular platform to coin an African worldview. For as similar in origin, functions and responsibilities as Soyinka's gods in the Yoruba myth he popularizes are, Soyinka himself knows Ogun, Obatala, Sango, and the a thousand and one fragmented gods in the Yoruba mythology possess their unique individualities. The concept of the world of the unborn, and its irrelevance in the C 6, for instance, is a great absurdity in Soyinka's attempt to carve the entire African world from the peculiar Yoruba perspective.

Soyinka's response was principally, amongst other reasons, to challenge the intellectual arrogance of the West at a point. He was contesting a European attempt to globalize their culture, as one may add his reaction to a dominant intellectual debate of the period he wrote. Dapo Adelugba (2006) rightly attests that,

The first thing we must all accept is that Soyinka was not writing for all times, a theoretical paper. He was deliberating on the essences of African life and culture. You have to study that against the background of the dominance of European thought in the intellectual world. Soyinka's position then and now is that Europe has an intellectual culture but they are not the only holders of the key to intellectual culture. Intellectual culture can be found in other societies also. Soyinka used the Yoruba

paradigm but his aim was perhaps to reach out to a bigger African paradigm. I do not think the easy does that, but at least, it makes suggestions about the validity to the African belief systems and used the Yoruba, in my view, as an example rather than the African absolute truth. Because the Yoruba may after all not be rigidly homogenous, the question now arises as to whether Soyinka's submission covers the entire Yoruba territory. He is only one man making a proposition, basing his proposition on his personal experience of what he has comically described as the "Ijegba" culture.

Soyinka's deliberate down – playing of the place of the Supreme Being as the singular creator and the Almighty seen by the C 6 cosmologies may after all, be a reflection of his personal belief system superimposed on the Yoruba cosmology which he exported as African. Dapo Adelugba (2006) in his admission says that inevitably,

...each person has a point of view. We cannot run away from the fact that Soyinka's apprehension of Yoruba cosmology has been filtered through his own understanding, his own growth, his own experiences and his own eventual belief system. Soyinka is a Yoruba man who wants to explain everything to himself in the way he understands not in the way the people of the precious generations saw it. But the way he sees it (emphasis mine).

Though Soyinka's theoretical and mythical thrust was a response to a civilization that assumed and ascribed to itself absolutism in intellectual discourse, he may also consequently be seen in the same light as those he lampoons. In his reaction to Ali Mazrui's "Africa: A Triple Heritage", for instance, Soyinka (1991: 20) critiques Mazrui's documentary as,

A series, which we were informed, was designed to redress the appalling ignorance and misrepresentation of a vast continent ended up as yet another expensive propaganda for furthering the claims of the racial – religious superiority of two other structures of human superstitions which were imparted into Africa and forced down the throats of its peoples, and with an unembarrassed bias towards Islam (emphasis mine)

For Soyinka, because the two belief systems treated by Mazrui that he refers to here-(Christianity and Islam) do not share Soyinka's personal belief system, he refers to them as "two other structures of human superstitions". To subsume the two principal faiths (Christianity and Islam) as mere "human superstitions" exemplifies Soyinka's obvious ignorance of Mazrui's claims and his arrant theoretical and scholarly arrogance. Soyinka's reaction to Mazrui's presentation was rekindled in Soyinka (2006) where he took up again, on a religious activity, this time around, the Christian faith. Commenting on a great evangelistic revival in a restoration crusade organized by the United Congress of Mbaise Christians during which over one hundred shrines in the land were

destroyed after their worshippers got converted to the Christian faith, Soyinka (2006:13) referring to the organizers as “Christian pyromaniacs” rhetorically asks,

Have you deployed trained archaeologists, sociologists, ethnologists, indeed, pharmacologists or whatever to these shrines, those who have the training to discern whether the target of destruction may, or may not contain objects of archival value? Have you taken the trouble to separate the wheat from the chaff? Do you consider it part of our collective responsibility to ensure that this is done? (emphasis mine)

Considering Soyinka’s questions with his background, his focus is far from mere aesthetic values of the destroyed objects. The objects destroyed in the said shrines were not ordinary sculptors that could be put in museums. The same way Soyinka may never subscribe to the excavation of the shrine of Ogun, his patron god, into the national archive for any reason, even if the best professionals he listed in his rhetorical questions were on ground to supervise it. The objects had graduated from the ordinary aesthetic objects Soyinka calls them here to spiritually potent items. In this instance, not the kind of professionals listed by Soyinka except the evangelists who “have the training to discern” the spiritual implications of those shrines would have sufficed. As a scholar of the Yoruba cosmology and belief system, Soyinka should have known that what the United Congress of Mbaise Christians did was a spiritual cleansing dictated by the belief system within which framework they operated. As an advocate of the Yoruba belief system and a cross-cultural scholar Soyinka should accord respect to other belief systems and their adherents beyond his uncomplimentary reference to them as “Christian pyromaniacs”, people endowed with the morbid propensity to set things on fire, and rather unjustifiably.

For the Mbaise outing, Soyinka advocates for “our collective responsibility”. However, in his vocal Africanization of the Yoruba cosmology, he forgot to apply the same principle. He ought to have carefully studied other cosmologies across Africa, brought into the limelight their meeting points and thereafter based his submission on the collective consideration to arrive at the African worldview. It is this identifiable individualism in Soyinka’s approach that Kwame A. Appiah, (1992: 83) summarizes when he says that,

Soyinka, the individual, a Nigerian outside the traditional, more certain world of his Yoruba ancestors, struggles with the Soyinka who experiences the loss of that world, of those gods of whom (which) he speaks with such love and longing. Once again, the “I” seeks to escape the persistent and engulfing “we”.

Soyinka has over time, exhibited the “I” than a “we”-conscious

intellectual and theorist on several levels of study. He theorizes and writes most often, without taking into due consideration his readers. He once confessed that he writes,

...in the firm believe that there must be at least a hall full of people who are sort of on the same wave length as mine in every stratum of society and there must be at least a thousand people who are able to feel the same way as I do about something. (Yemi Ogunbiyi, 1981:39).

The “hall full of people” in which a thousand of them will reason on “the same wave length” with Soyinka, may, most probably not even be found in Europe, not to talk of Africa his base.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to appraise Soyinka’s Yoruba “African worldview” in his Myth, Literature and the African World laying emphasis on the Yoruba cosmology and as it relates either in agreement or divergence with select six cosmologies from one, out of the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. While acknowledging the “Africanness” in Soyinka’s response to European civilization, his theorized Yoruba view as an “African worldview” is suspect. A lot of questions will keep on arising. The summary of the questions can be found in Kwame A. Appiah (1992:80) when he asks,

What has Yoruba cosmology, the preoccupation of the first lecture of Myth Literature and the African World, to do with African literature; it is not enough to answer that Yoruba cosmology provides both the characters and the mythic resonance of some African drama – notably, of course, Soyinka’s. This (Soyinka’s submission) is no answer for the Akan writer or reader who is more familiar with Ananse than Esu – Elegba as trickster, and who had no more obligations to Ogun than he does to Vishnu.

Therefore, one man’s theorization need not be held as a kind of absolute for all parts of Africa. Even within the African continent as other scholars and philosophers have pointed out, there are lots of variables even in belief systems, cosmologies and so on. The Yoruba cosmology cannot even be wholly valid in the entire Yorubaland, not to talk of Igalaland and the other parts of Nigeria and the entire Africa. Dapo Adelugba (2006), opines that,

...it is not valid to say that one part (the Yoruba cosmology) is equal to or greater than the whole (other cosmologies in Africa), but one part can be an illustration of the whole. Soyinka’s essay seems to be an illustration rather than a law – given essay. It is just an individual apprehension of a greater phenomenon. We also can go into that stream and come up with

our own individual interpretations.

We live in a world that is irreversibly plural where culture is concerned. Nevertheless, a harmonious African panoramic view of cosmologies by sharing what is convergent and in mutual respect for what is divergent would have enriched Soyinka's submission. This paper's argument is based on the premise that the significance of any African cosmology differs from people to people and culture to culture, and that cultural identity (exemplified for instance, in the C 6) is the standard bearer of an alternative to the cultural imperialism of Soyinka.

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