

**CONFLICT AND EMPOWERMENT IN SELECTED PROSE OF WOLE SOYINKA  
AND SEMBENE OUSMANE**

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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that the research work for this thesis and subsequent preparation of the thesis were carried out under my supervision

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this work is the product of my own efforts undertaken under the supervision of Professor Kanchana Ugbabe and has not been presented elsewhere for the award of a degree or certificate. All sources have been duly distinguished and appropriately acknowledged.

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## **DEDICATION**

To the Almighty God for giving me the strength

To my dear wife Mrs Alice Omowunmi Barnabas

To my children; Shola, Sunkanmi, Tunde, Tope, Damola and Muyiwa

To my Father and late Mother; Mr. and Mrs. B. E. Barnabas

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## **Abstract**

Political conflict and empowerment are crucial issues that have not been studied in a comparative manner in Wole Soyinka and Sembene Ousmane's writings. The disparity in the consideration of the female gender by the authors in question has also not been given crucial attention by critics. In view of the foregoing, the objectives of this research are to explore the thematic affinity and disparity between the two writers and to embark on a comparative analysis of their selected prose. The connection between them revolves round conflict and empowerment. Hence, the authors reflect how a coterie of individuals, in desperation for power, makes surreptitious moves to retain leadership by further relegating the marginalised. Again, there exists conflict between traditional African and European cultures. A deliberate artistic device employed by Soyinka and Ousmane to promote healthy cultures is to ridicule traditional or modern methods that are incongruous in our technological age. While the marginalised are empowered in the first conflict, cultures that should not go into extinction are glorified in the second conflict. These authors equally pay attention to the women by empowering the female characters in their works. In undertaking this research, primary sources, critical works from the library and the internet provided relevant materials that enhanced the understanding of the works. The researcher has made reference to articles and embarked on detailed reading and content analysis of the works. An eclectic critical approach using Marxism, New Historism, Socialist realism and Feminism has been adopted. The study reveals that while Soyinka relies on the intellectuals to effect a positive change, Ousmane believes in the strength of the workers. Soyinka advocates for a democratic option for a social change; Ousmane believes in a dialectical materialistic option. The two authors do not conform to the romantic idea of negritude. It is worthy of note that authors from different social and cultural backgrounds respond similarly when they are confronted with similar situations. What makes the difference is the approach.

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Conflict is innate in nature; it abounds in every sphere of human endeavour. There is conflict in the family, contractual disputes between people who hitherto had mutual working relationships, disagreement in worship places and in the neighbourhood among others. Similarly, conflict is inherent in every piece of literary work; external and internal conflicts do exist in every literary work. External conflict takes place between the protagonist and antagonist; it is man versus man or the society. On the other hand, 'internal or psychological conflict arises when a character experiences two opposite desires; usually virtue or vice... (Fleming:1).

This research is however concerned with political conflict and empowerment of the marginalised as portrayed by Soyinka and Ousmane. Political conflict in Africa can be traced back to the pre- independence era. The struggle or contention was between the Colonizer and the Colonized. The clash was over resources and political power. The oppressed Africans who were marginalised fought to regain self-rule. It was a racial conflict, which was triggered by socio-economic and political factors. "White folks and black folks fight each other about who owns what"(Mazrui: 2). Notable among the first generation writers who reflect this conflict between the whites and blacks are Soyinka, Ousmane, Peter Abrahams, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, to mention just a few. In *A Grain of Wheat* [1967], for instance, the Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiong'o explores the political conflict between Kenyans and Europeans. The theme of power conflict in Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* is seen in the Mau Mau revolt by the Kikuyu against the British administration in Kenya. Colonialism is the object of attack, and the author is on the side of the freedom fighters that agitate for

political emancipation. The clash between the Kikuyu and the white settlers is both economic and political. The conflict becomes inevitable when the colonialists begin to acquire land from the black men who are fully aware of the economic importance of their lands. The imperialists deprive the Kikuyu people materially and the blacks have to fight for their land and freedom. The Kikuyu are also aware that they are part of a worldwide struggle against oppression and colonial domination. Gakwandi maintains that:

The political conflict in the novel is polarized along racial lines. The Kikuyu see their suffering to be a direct result of the privileged position of the white settler community. [2]

Again, the theme of conflict between the colonialists and the colonised is the main preoccupation in Peter Abrahams' novel, *Mine Boy* (1963). It strongly condemns the apartheid system of racial discrimination that was then the practice in South Africa. Ngugi and Abrahams are committed to emancipating the oppressed Africans. Hence they engage in the process of empowerment by investing the deprived and oppressed blacks with the power and confidence to fight for their rights. These authors are committed to the cause of the marginalised.

Since the independence of many African nations, the conflict has been between ruling elite and the electorate. For example, the conflict among Africans is evident in Achebe's *A Man of the People* [1966] where Odili puts up a strong fight against Chief Nanga. The level of political awareness of the oppressed is significant in this regard. Odili is aware that Chief Nanga is an oppressor. Achebe empowered Odili with the confidence to challenge Chief Nanga. The writer demonstrates the reaction of the younger generation to the failure of the politicians to meet the promises and

obligations of nationhood. The oppressed Africans demonstrate their disenchantment with the ruling class that took over from the colonialists. What the African writer reflects in this struggle therefore is the high hopes aroused by independence and the disillusioning experience of statehood – dictatorship, repression and suppression of the weaker folk. These writers respond faithfully to these conflict situations as would be seen in the selected works of our chosen writers.

Ngugi, in *A Grain of Wheat*, also condemns African leaders (in Kenya) who do not protect the interest of the proletariat, those who made the greatest sacrifice during the struggle (war) for liberation. Ngugi is on the side of the weak and neglected masses. For instance, Gikonyo tells Mugo that people who ought to have been the first to taste the fruits of independence are marginalised. Rather, those who did not take part in the struggle for independence ride in long cars. Ngugi indicts the political elite that appropriate privileges to itself while the people who actually bore the burden of the struggle remain deprived.

The thrust of Francophone literature is culture conflict; it is political protest against colonial rule. The leading figure is a Senegalese poet and statesman – Léopold Sédar Senghor. He developed the ideology of negritude which emphasises the importance and values of African culture. One of the major themes of Francophone literature is the conflict between the rich African culture [tradition] and the European doctrine [modernism]. Mongo Beti's *The Poor Christ of Bomba* [1956] depicts this conflict. Beti, in this text asserts the beauty of African culture. The Whiteman's evangelizing mission in Africa fails to yield any positive results. Father Drumont's evangelizing mission in *The Poor Christ of Bomba* is a fiasco. The Talans still rejoice when their daughters have children out of wedlock. They still wear

charms around their necks. Beti heightens the tension created by the importation of the Catholic mission and the colonial presence in Africa. He deals directly with the threat that colonialism poses to African culture. Father Drumont, the white missionary, custodian of the colonial system comes into conflict with African traditions like polygamy, procreation outside wedlock and traditional African dances. The conflict is evident each time Father Drumont attempts to stop a dance, punish unmarried mothers or destroy musical instruments. Colonialism, the modern political structure in Cameroun conflicts with tradition. Beti's message in this instance is clear. Africans still hold tenaciously to their belief despite the presence of the missionaries. Beti's preference for African custom is demonstrated in the clash between Father Drumont and Sanga Boto, the sorcerer. Mildred Mortimer is of the view that:

Father Drumont's initial victory is overshadowed by his subsequent near drowning, an event that Sanga Boto later boasts as his doing.... Whenever the missionary believes he has gained control of people and events, he finds the victory to be an illusory one.(50).

Ferdinand Oyono, in *Houseboy* (1966) condemns the stupidity of Africans who turn their back on traditional life. Toundi runs away (from home) to a mission on the eve of his initiation, thus abandoning a traditional environment, which would have given meaning to his life. Corrupted and destroyed by the western values, Toundi is caught between the European and African worlds. His adventure into the modern world (away from tradition) ends in frustration because the protection that he gets from the white world is not genuine. The true protection, as he realizes later, lies in his father's house (tradition). It is thus obvious that the traditional African root,

which he avoids, is better than the foreign ways of the imperialists. Oyono, like Beti resuscitates African values when Toundi begins to appreciate his ancestors. He remembers that the ancestors were wise when they said a woman is a cob of maize.

The motif of father – child relationship in Oyono’s and Beti’s *Houseboy* and *The Poor Christ of Bomba* respectively is a deliberate artistic ploy. The master – servant; exploiter – exploited; colonizer – colonized relationship is hereby emphasized to reflect the class antagonism in a society that perpetrates power and culture conflicts.

Other novelists like Chinua Achebe and Elechi Amadi reflect the unity and importance of the extended family system. They mirror how the people of the village live harmoniously with one another, having a role to play and how everyone expresses natural warmth and sympathy for others. The people’s cultures are strong unifying factors. This aspect of African culture serves to ensure the survival of the family as a unit. It equally promotes communal living. No man is left alone to solve his problems. Festivals, such as the New yam festival, in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* [1958], are meant to bring all and sundry together. Everyone eats from the same plate. This is significant because it shows the African spirit of sharing which is in conflict with Western individualism.

Another major conflict explored by African writers is gender conflict occasioned by gender imbalance. Women writers in Africa have portrayed different forms of gender inequality with a very deep sense of commitment. Female writers maintain from subtle to strong ways that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. Foremost among these writers are Mariama Bâ, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa and Zaynab Alkali among others. The major thrust of their

writings is a vehement opposition to the gender discrimination that is often found in African culture. For instance, the conflict in Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* [1974] is obvious. Despite all odds, Ada, the central character, struggles to become fulfilled by taking a very bold step to travel overseas. In the end, she comes out triumphant because of her determination to succeed. Historically and traditionally, men and women in Africa have never been given equal rights. It is against this backdrop that most of the female writers project women with much more complexity. Most of them also respond to some African male novelists like Achebe and Amadi who portray women as domestic hands in their earlier works. These African male novelists corroborate what Tenshak sees as 'the traditional given role of the African woman as an obedient, silent, unquestioning hand' (161). However, the focus of this discourse is on male writers who promote the image of the African woman. Soyinka and Ousmane empower the female gender by presenting female characters with highly developed skills and abilities. They give the women control over their own lives and situations.

The study, therefore, reveals how Soyinka and Ousmane expose attempts by the privileged class to deny the marginalised opportunities to become fulfilled. Our chosen authors imbue the less privileged with the capability to cause positive changes in the society.

## **1.2 BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHORS**

### **1.2.1 WOLE SOYINKA**

Born in 1934, Wole Soyinka is beyond dispute, Africa's foremost literary artist and winner of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986. He has his roots in Yoruba culture but his experience extends much farther afield. In his early works, he takes a deep and scholarly interest in the culture of his people. His passionate and



desperate concerns for his people are demonstrated in his novels, poems and drama. Soyinka grew up in the heart of a flourishing Yoruba culture under Christian parents. By virtue of his origin (ethnic), Soyinka is an embodiment of the culture and world view of the Yoruba people in particular and Africa in general. The Yoruba culture can be seen as a microcosm of African culture just as the Igbo culture is a microcosm of African culture in Achebe's works. The content of Kola's Pantheon in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* [1965] is an allusion to the Yoruba creation myth. The Yoruba believe that the world was created by their supreme deity, Olodumare.

Ojaide agrees that, Soyinka takes "African world as synonymous with the Yoruba world; hence reference to his traditional African influences is essentially Yoruba" (96). However, Soyinka is not only influenced by the African culture; his Western education exposed him to Western tradition and cultural values hence cultural diffusion. The research explores the conflicts between these two cultures – traditional African values and Western values. Soyinka has had contacts with the Judaeo – Christian and Western literary traditions. Therefore, the biblical influence on him is strong as he often uses biblical allusions in his works. This point is buttressed in *The Interpreters* where he alludes to characters like Lazarus and Noah. This biblical influence is also present in *A Shuttle in the Crypt* [1972] especially his biblical allusion to parables in some of the poems.

Furthermore, the concern and speed with which he translates ideas into action put him so often at odds with institutions and government. He is often described as a 'unified personality suggesting that the artist and the man are one'. (Jones: 2) Soyinka believes that the society is constantly in need of salvation. This salvation can only be brought about through the vision of the individuals who always pursue their

aspirations in spite of opposition from the society they seek to save. They always end up as victims of the society that they seek to save. Soyinka maintains that salvation of the society depends on the individual's will. The society should allow the individual to express his will freely, and suppression of this, will amount to political repression and conflict.

Wole Soyinka often reflects the clash between the individual and the society. For any development or progress to take place, the individual with a vision should be able to pass his message freely. But, ironically, the vision usually remains misconstrued before the message is understood. However, a true visionary should persevere. Soyinka is impressed with the strength conveyed by the group of Igbo prisoners in *The Man Died* [1972]. He is a prominent human rights activist who believes so much in the fundamental human rights of the Nigerian citizenry. Hence, he writes to denounce leaders who assault the defenceless in the society. His vision for Nigeria is of a society where the individual will live without any fear of oppression.

In addition, the Nobel laureate craves for a society in which Man would be allowed to express himself freely. In *The Man Died*, he wonders why one individual could hold the power to limit the rights of others. Soyinka states that:

One individual could hold the power to limit you in your movements, all in his own right, without the need to justify his action to you or to the society of which you are both a part, that such a power exists to stultify your private life by circumscribing your movements and jeopardizing your livelihood (*The Man Died*: 49).

For Soyinka, the security of life is also paramount and every citizen is entitled to it. This security, he emphasises, should not be violated. He condemns the act of setting whole buildings on fire during the Nigerian Civil War in *Season of Anomy*. This is further exemplified by *The Man Died* where Soyinka frowns at the spate of killings.

In essence, Soyinka possesses a unique capacity to express his social and political commitment through concrete social action that is directed towards the creation of a humane and just society. He has a consistent vision which includes empowering the oppressed, commitment to social justice, freedom and human dignity from his earliest to his most recent works.

### **1.2.2 SEMBENE OUSMANE**

Sembene Ousmane discusses the evils of political domination and oppression with the same passion as Soyinka. He demonstrates his concern for the proletariat, the oppressed and the weak that are constantly being oppressed. What he portrays in the Senegalese society is the generation born after independence. Sembene Ousmane, like Soyinka, reflects a society in which a few rule and dominate the majority. He assumes his social responsibilities as a critic by refusing to be a passive observer while social injustice in post-colonial Africa persists. His works constitute a revolutionary crusade aimed at empowering the marginalised and exposing the unjust system that perpetrates exploitation.

Ousmane, a Senegalese writer is well known for his historical – political works with strong social comment. He was also a renowned film maker and director. Ousmane sprang from a very humble fisher folk background. Later, he worked as an apprentice mechanic and a bricklayer. His early and later life was one of struggle and this greatly informed the nature of his art.

Moreover, Ousmane's call to liberate France from Germany and the active role he played when he went back to Dakar in the midst of charged social and political activism is manifest in his works. His activities as a member of the construction workers trade union and involvement in the workers' strike that paralysed the colonial economy points to the trend of his political activity. For instance, *God's Bits of Wood* is based on the long railroad strike in Dakar in 1947. His participation in several protest movements like the one organised by the French communist party also dictates the tone of his works. His life was that of protest, struggle, conflict and concern for the oppressed. He struggled for revolutionary changes and was devoted to the emancipation of the wretched of the earth.

Ousmane was a trade union leader who participated in several workers' demonstrations. He was committed to the cause of the proletariat and was a spokesman for their rights. His criticism of the African bourgeoisie who separate themselves from the masses is obvious in *Xala*. He occupies a very special place in African literature because of his strong commitment and urge for a just society. Ousmane propounds salvation through revolutionary action. His embattled protagonists struggle for economic, political and cultural empowerment.

Finally, Ousmane's concern for the womenfolk is demonstrated in all his works. Being an ardent critic of oppression, he believes that women should be given the right to participate, just like men, in political and other engagements that determine the future of Africa. His female characters do not assume roles that prevent them from attaining self fulfilment. He craves for a society where there will be social equality and not one in which women will always be lorded over by men. It is in this regard that most of his female characters are empowered to play crucial roles in the

development of his plot. Female characters like Maimouna and Ramatoulaye play a crucial role in *God's Bits of Wood* as we see them in the forefront of the demonstration.

### **1.3 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

It is imperative to delineate some key terms that will enhance our understanding of the work. The concepts are conflict, empowerment, culture, the weak, power and gender.

#### **1.3.1 Conflict**

Mario Pei defines conflict as: 'A fight, struggle or combat; controversy or quarrel; active opposition; contention; strife or incompatibility'.(Pei 213). In conflict situations there is opposition or hostility between two or more groups. They often contend or struggle for control of power and better living conditions. There is usually incompatibility between the different factions, and they are always at variance.

#### **1.3.2 Empowerment**

Empowerment refers to 'increasing the political, social or economic strength of individuals or groups' (<http://en.Wiki pedia.Org/ wiki / Empowerment: 1of 5>). Sometimes it addresses groups that have been excluded from decision making because of social discrimination based on sex, race or ethnicity. Those who are discriminated against are marginalised and they are perceived as lacking desirable traits. Therefore, the strong or privileged ones ostracized them as undesirables. Empowerment is therefore the process of thwarting attempts to deny the marginalized opportunities for fulfilment. Those who are being empowered are given the ability to make decisions about their personal or collective circumstances and the ability to be

assertive in decision-making. In addition, they have the capability to bring about positive changes.

### **1.3.3 Culture**

According to Dalli (1997) culture could be divided into two components; material and non-material. He says that:

Material culture comprises tools, weapons, buildings, clothing, food, crafts and all man-made objects. Non-material culture on the other hand, consists of beliefs, customs, language, music, dances and a host of others that are transmitted from one generation to another, within a social group, community or society ..... (Dalli:10). It is the way of life of a people. ‘Culture is ..... conceptualized as a way of life of people in a society ..... (Ejikeme: 1). It is learned and shared way of life.

### **1.3.4 The Weak**

Simpson and Weiner consider the weak as “wanting in power or authority over others” (35). The weak are usually pitted against the strong opponent in any struggle; they are victims of neglect or oppression. The weak are often oppressed or overpowered. To oppress, therefore means to treat the weak unfairly overpowering or restraining them from utterance. They are victims of unjust systems.

### **1.3.5 Power**

On the other hand Mario Pei defines power as: ‘... political strength ... the possession of control or command over others; dominion, authority or influences ... one who possesses or exercises authority or influences’ (747).

### **1.3.6 Gender**

Simone de Beauvoir says that gender signifies, “The socially constructed differences which operate in most societies and which lead to forms of inequality, oppression and exploitation between sexes”. (16)de Beauvoir also states that, “Both femininity and masculinity are socially constructed and invested with various qualities, values ... which shape and determine people’s attitudes and lives”(17).

## **1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

An eclectic approach using the following theories has been adopted:

1. Marxism;
2. New Historicism;
3. Socialist Realism and
4. Feminism

### **1.4.1 Marxism**

Marxism began with Karl Marx, the nineteenth century German philosopher who worked with Friedrich Engels. Karl Marx was aware of the deplorable condition of the workers during the industrial revolution. Ousmane, like the early Marxist critics, is equally conscious of the workers’ appalling socio-economic condition. Karl Marx considered human history to be a series of struggles between different classes. Conflict is usually between the oppressed and the oppressor. The socio-economic and political exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeois class culminates in power and class conflicts. In essence, literature reflects class struggle.

The basic method is Dialectical Materialism which involves the redistribution of wealth. There exists a situation whereby the privileged bourgeoisie rely on the proletariat that worked hard to produce the wealth. Marx theorized that when there is

no re-investment of profits in the workers and more factories are created instead, workers get poorer. At the crises point, restructuring of the system becomes inevitable as there is bound to be a revolt. The three principles that explain Marxist criticism are economic determination, Dialectical Materialism and class struggle. The only two classes are the dominant class (the bourgeois) who control and own the means of production and the subordinate class who don't own or control the means of production. These two classes actually engage in hostile interaction.

Hence, we shall carefully examine issues of power, the author's analysis of class relations, how characters overcome oppression (empowerment) and whether the main characters resist bourgeois values. Ultimately, the oppressed (factory workers) or proletariat are incited to revolt. The art is revolutionary and aims at social liberation through empowerment of the less privileged class. Though Soyinka is not an advocate violent revolts like Ousmane, his work is an exposition of class conflict between the bourgeois and less privileged class.

#### **1.4.2 New Historism**

Stephen Greenblatt an advocate of New Historicism deals with extrinsic methods of interpretation of literary texts. The work is understood through its historical and cultural context. It is a theory that is based on the paradigm that literature should be analysed within the context of the writer's historical and cultural background. In reaction to the text-only approach advocated by the new critics, the new historicists acknowledge the relevance of the literary text and equally analyse the work with an eye of history. The New historicists have an eye to history while analysing the work; their attention is partly on literature's historical content as they base their thoughts on the link between the art and the historical situations. The work



is less the product of the writer's imagination than the social circumstances of its creation. R.C. Ransom and George Lukacs also belong to this school of thought. The new historicists believe that we should not completely dismiss the writer's experience in the criticism of his work. Knowing the conditions that prompt the writer may enhance our interpretation. We need at times to look at the situations guiding the production of the text. History is not completely irrelevant, but we should not rely on it solely. The writer must have been influenced by external factors or upbringing. The society often influences the writers. What he sometimes reflects is actual experience, as we can see in Soyinka's text, *The Man Died*.

Again, the 1947 workers' strike is largely the scenario in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*. The literary artist has a way of responding or reproducing history imaginatively. This is often done to correct certain anomalies. He is in fact responding to contemporary realities of his time. For instance, power and class conflicts are current issues in Nigeria and Senegal. They take on various configurations in corrupt African societies which the writers reflect in their works.

### **1.4.3 Socialist Realism**

Revolutionary thinkers like Frantz Fanon and Jean Paul Sartre propose socialist realism. The works of a socialist realist are works of social vision because they speculate on the nature of the evolving society. Socialist realism is concerned with the creation of a new social order; hence truthful depiction of reality is central in his work. He believes that the world is changeable and not static. In addition, they have a positive vision in the revolutionary aspirations of the downtrodden and they believe that hope for change lies in the hand of the less privileged ones.

In addition, socialist realism is committed to the cause of the proletariat. It identifies the oddities in the society and further proffers panacea to the socio-economic problem. It is an ideology of emancipation that relies on the downtrodden to bring about the desired change through revolution.

#### **1.4.4 Feminism**

The feminist theory extends feminism into theoretical discourse. It is a sociological theory that analyzes the status of women and men in order to empower the female gender; the theory seeks to emancipate the female gender. The feminists believe in the political, social and economic equality of both sexes as they often criticize male supremacy; they fight for equality of women and insist that the female gender should share equally and enjoy the same rights as men.

Foremost and leading feminists include Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, Kate Millet and Shulamith Firestone among others. Feminism typifies the 'Women's Movement which drew attention to the glaring inequalities in the way society treated men and women' (Ugbabe: Mark on the Wall: 12). Feminist writers question the stereotypical roles assigned women by custom and tradition. They do this by allowing the female gender assume certain roles hitherto 'reserved' for their male counterparts. Women struggle against all odds to be released from the shackles of patriarchal oppression. What the writers present is a New Woman, a feminist ideal that emerged in the nineteenth century. Consciousness raising (empowerment) by feminist writers has changed the notion and behaviour of women who now feel they can be more relevant politically.

Thus, the female gender is more confident, assertive and able to take control of situations that affect their lives. The feminists demonstrate the importance of

women in a patriarchal society and they reveal that historically women have been subordinate to men. The theory gives a voice to women and highlights the various ways the female gender has contributed to the society.

## 1.5 METHODOLOGY

The study relies on primary and secondary sources. Critical works, mostly from the library and the internet, have provided the researcher with information concerning the authors. Reference is also made to relevant articles and interviews granted by Soyinka and Ousmane. The research is further based on detailed reading and content analysis of selected works of Soyinka and Ousmane. The study has considered the following works of Soyinka: *Season of Anomy* (1973), *The Interpreters* (1965), *Ake* (1966), *The Man Died* (1972), and *Isara* (1989). We have also chosen five of Ousmane's works viz *God's Bits of Wood* (1970), *The Money Order with White Genesis* (1965), *Xala* (1974), *The Last of the Empire* (1981) and *Tribal Scars and Other Stories* (1962).

It is pertinent to state that conflict and need for empowerment have been presented symmetrically because they are two different issues. In any conflict situation, the strong often oppress the weak that the writers, in this case, empower. Hence, Soyinka and Ousmane develop the skills and abilities of the oppressed in order to empower them. As we shall see, most of the less privileged (in their works) are imbued with the confidence to act as a force against marginalisation. It is interesting to note that our chosen authors adopt the same method of empowering the masses as stated above. Female empowerment is not discussed in a different chapter: the researcher introduces it in the same chapter as conflict and empowerment. The study reveals that female empowerment is a much more predominant motif in Ousmane's

works than in Soyinka's prose. Ousmane is more concerned with the plight of women (as revealed in his works) than Soyinka.

## **1.6 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The two first generation West African writers Soyinka and Ousmane have received attention from many researchers and critics alike. However, these scholars have not compared the crucial issues (conflict and empowerment) that are central to a study of Soyinka and Ousmane.

Again, the two authors in question demonstrate concern for the female gender and gender-related issues. Nevertheless, Ousmane is more passionate about the plight of the female gender than Soyinka as exemplified in their writings and this has not received any critical attention either. The conflict between Africa's past and present; between indigenous and foreign; between tradition and modernity is a dominant motif in research and critical works. However, critics have not pointed out the values that are progressive and the ones that inimical to progress. The tenets that ought to adapt to contemporary realities have equally not been suggested. This researcher is therefore motivated to fill the lacunae that have been identified.

## **1.7 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

**1.7.1** The aim of this study is to analyse selected prose of Wole Soyinka and Sembene Ousmane in order to elucidate conflict and empowerment

### **1.7.2 The objectives of this study are:**

1. to explore power conflict in selected prose of Soyinka and Ousmane.
2. to examine class conflict in the works of the selected authors.

3. to draw into focus the need for empowerment as portrayed in the works of the writers

4. to explore conflict between modern and traditional values

5. to identify cultures that are progressive and the ones that are inimical to progress as reflected in the works of Soyinka and Ousmane

6. to undertake a comparative analysis of an Anglophone writer (Soyinka) and a francophone writer (Ousmane).

## **1.8 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY**

In their bid to create egalitarian societies, Soyinka and Ousmane explore political conflicts, oppression, injustice and need for empowerment. Since the study discovers the similarities and differences between two literatures of different cultural or political origin, the choice of these two scholars from different background is appropriate. Unlike other Francophone writers who devote time to negritude, Ousmane has little time for it. He seems to have more in common with Anglophone writers than with his Francophone compatriots. The passion with which Ousmane reflects the evils of political domination puts him in line with Anglophone writers like Soyinka and Achebe, Ousmane says:

Speaking for myself, here in Senegal, the very centre of negritude, I shall say frankly that I do not know... If we look at the social situation in Senegal today... nothing seems to have been achieved at all... Negritude seems to me to have nothing solid about it.( Killam:149)

Hence, Soyinka and Ousmane share a similar view about Negritude. Though the researcher is aware of other Francophone and Anglophone authors who could be

compared with regard to other issues, (among other similarities) the choice of Soyinka and Ousmane is informed by their avowed disregard for negritude. Soyinka does not support the romanticism and idealism of Negritude literature. He ‘dismissed Negritude as futile narcissistic contemplation and Ousmane maintains that nothing seems to have been achieved by negritude.

It is imperative that we look at the difference between Anglophone and Francophone literatures. The Anglophone authors were not terribly affected by the negritude movement because they did not experience the same historical realities (policy of assimilation) as the Francophone writers. The policy of assimilation was first adopted by the great philosopher, Chris Talbot in 1837. The idea was to expand French culture to French colonies in order to change the natives to ‘White-men’. The indigenes were stripped of their traditions, religion, livelihood and land. The purpose was to turn the African natives into Frenchmen by educating them in French language and culture. The natives gave up their own heritage and adopted the White-man’s (French) culture. However, the black people who gave up their culture were not given equal rights and other privileges promised by the whites. The Anglophone authors were locally educated; hence they were not as alienated and disillusioned as their counterparts (Francophone writers). The Francophone authors

Were much more assimilated into French culture than the Anglophones were into Anglo-Saxon ... Whereas the pragmatic British concentrated on their objective in Africa, namely economic exploitation, the French had dreams of extending the French empire by, among other things converting Africans into Black ‘Frenchmen’( Aire; Africa and the African Diaspora:51-52)

Therefore, the Anglophone writers were more objective and realistic than Francophone authors. On the other hand, the Francophone writers who were alienated from their cultural roots wanted to rediscover their roots and lost identity. Senghor, Aime and Damas among others fought for the affirmation of authentically black personality and values. Consequently, they were not pragmatic in their reflection of the black African life; they blind themselves to African values that are not progressive. However, Soyinka and Ousmane are objective and realistic in their reflection of European and African tenets.

## **1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This research points out the inadequacies of tradition and modernity. Soyinka and Ousmane promote healthy cultures and denounce the ones that are inimical to progress. The chosen authors appropriate materials from oral tradition to validate African culture. The study explores the modern lifestyles that Africans should embrace and also suggests those cultures that ought to be modified or adapted for the present time.

Moreover, the work promotes the image of the female gender since the writers reflect the womenfolk with much more complexity. The women are today far better represented in published African literature than they were prior to independence. The research is significant because it shows how the wide gap between the different classes of the society is bridged through the empowerment of the weak.

### **1.10 SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

This study explores conflict and empowerment in selected prose of Soyinka and Ousmane. The main thrust of the research is political conflict between those in power, who make frantic efforts to retain power and the marginalised. On the one hand, the study examines the political and class conflicts between the political elite and intellectual elite in Soyinka's writings. On the other hand, it draws attention to the same conflicts between the political elite and the workers and masses in Ousmane's prose. As earlier stated in the methodology, the researcher has considered ten selected works (prose) of Soyinka and Ousmane

Soyinka and Ousmane, as demonstrated in this research project the women as a potent force in the society, though Ousmane is more passionate about the plight of the female gender. The conflict between Africa's past and present; between indigenous and foreign; between tradition and modernity has been given critical attention. The research emphasises conflict, oppression and need for empowerment in their novels. These preoccupations provide a strong affinity and thematic nexus for the two novelists.



## CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### 2.1 SOCIO-POLITICAL AND CULTURAL ISSUES IN SOYINKA'S WORKS

Many critics have embarked on the study of Soyinka's works from different perspectives. For instance, Abiola Irele comments on Wole Soyinka and the 1986 Nobel Prize for literature. In his submission entitled "The Significance of Wole Soyinka" Irele observes that:

Wole Soyinka is significant because in his works, he has been responding to the situation, in his time and place ... This situation is also ours and he is doing the responding for us so as to awaken in us the very essence of our humanity. (68).

Soyinka has often responded to almost every situation in which he finds himself for humanity. This is usually done with the primary aim of letting us know the essence of our existence. Hence, he is concerned with socio-political issues that border on human rights. He is very committed and concerned for the truth, and his protagonists stand for this and they are often uncompromising. Ofeyi, the social reformer, in *Season of Anomy* remains unwavering, while Soyinka in *The Man Died* decries genocide. In an interview with Goodman, Soyinka bares his mind on why we should not resort to war to settle conflicts. For him, it is politically unwise and morally reprehensible. Soyinka also denounces conflict and purposeless wars in *Madmen and Specialist*. The text is an exposition of man and war. The consequences of a purposeless war on humanity is revealed by the metaphor of Bero, 'a metaphor in which a son commits the greatest abomination against his father and against humanity' (Adejare: 135). Hence purposeless wars destroy humanity physically, economically and morally. In *Madmen*

*and Specialist*, nothing good results from the conflicts. It only creates madness; the characters in the play exhibit one form of madness or the other. It is therefore evident that wars only wreak havoc and instability on man. Basically, Adejare has examined Soyinka's works with reference to the consequences of purposeless wars on humanity. The point he has made about conflict is strikingly different from the view of this researcher who emphasizes political conflict and empowerment.

Olawale Awosika believes that 'Soyinka's recurrent views about the spiritual degeneracy of mankind are always enacted against the background of a rejected past' (68). In *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy*, the rejection of the present is predicated on a number of contemporary social issues. Among them are corruption and greed which frustrate the efforts of sincere and well-meaning citizens. Soyinka rejects both the past and the present in *The Interpreters*. This is epitomized in Egbo's dilemma. 'Egbo is faced with the necessity for a choice between an unexciting career in the foreign office and the challenging one of leading his traditional community into the modern world' (Anyadike: 37). He encounters two choices: the kingdom of Osa with a vague mystical attraction (the past) and staying back in the foreign office (present) which is also ugly. Here, Soyinka portrays the conflict between the past and the present. The link between traditional and modern experience is presented in a way which implies some kind of criticism of both the past and the present. Soyinka exhibits a sense of disappointment with both traditional and modern values. Leaders with the strength of character are needed to link the past with the present, "the material with the spiritual, the human with the divine" (Kathleen:70). In the disordered upheaval that the nation is going through, this upheaval is 'a perilous transitional gulf from colonisation to independence, from a rural to an urban culture;

from tradition to modernity' (70) The researcher supports the views expressed by Awosika and Anyadike but goes further to consider those traditional values that are retrogressive.

Awosika contends that the seminal role of art in a political revolution is a subject of interest in Soyinka's novels. He argues that Soyinka

reflects the practical function of art in bringing about the desired change. In *Season of Anomy*, the intellectual revolutionary, Ofeyi uses art as a tool to enlighten the masses. Ofeyi's subversive posters on the pillars depict an opulent glutton with a mouth wide open to cram into it a mammoth sized slice of cocoa pod (74).

In this case, Ofeyi uses art to agitate for better living conditions. The conflict here is between the individual and the society. *The Interpreters* presents the Nigerian society after independence as seen through the eyes of a group of graduates. It is the disillusionment of post independence Nigeria that is reflected. Bruce King thinks that Soyinka, in *Season of Anomy*, presents a 'nation violently ruled by a corrupt elite, business interests and army misusing authority and governmental powers to enrich themselves and stay in office at all cost'.(95)

In *Season of Anomy* Soyinka presents a dictatorial regime that consists of civilians supported by the military to ensure the perpetuation of the ruling class (the cartel) in power. The fight between the individual (represented by Ofeyi, Iriyise and the Dentist) and the ruling class is a very serious one because the oppressed (Ofeyi and the Dentist] resort to violence. Just like Soyinka's cartel, there is a ruling class in Nigeria, which constitutes itself into a formidable force, which cannot be easily shaken. This ruling class is determined to remain solidly in power. This is achieved

through intimidation, bribery and other corrupt means. It is this force that social reformers like Ofeyi and the dentist attempt to resist. King is equally of the view that in *Season of Anomy*:

Ofeyi enlists the support of Aiyero to undermine the ruling cartel. The resulting repression, wave of terror, massacre of the people of Aiyero in the Cross River, and Kidnapping, rape and imprisonment of Iriyise ... allude to the events in Nigeria beginning with the Western Region crisis, the military takeover, the massacre of the Igbo in the north...(95)

Therefore, the event recorded in the text is a replica of the goings-on in Nigeria. Since independence, there have been power conflicts, instability of government and crisis. What is often experienced is crisis among the different ethnic groups, all bidding for power. The result of this quest for leadership is often devastating because it usually culminates in conflict between the parties involved. *Kongi's Harvest* depicts the struggle for power between the traditional Danlola, the dictator Kongi and the new breed Daodu. The play explores political life in contemporary Africa and the career of African dictators. It is a comment on political life in modern Africa. The central theme is political power and 'judging by the way this power is exercised and its consequences, the message can be summarised as dictatorship destroys a nation' [Adejare, 170].

King's views on the use of force by the political class to suppress the less privileged class is in line with this research. King decries excessive political ambition which is equally condemned in this discourse. The empowerment of the

oppressed class which often falls prey to the political actors is being considered in this study which is a different approach from the one adopted by King.

On the other hand, Jeff Thomson in 'The Politics of Shuttle: Soyinka's poetic space' affirms that: Soyinka confronts "the social and political ramifications of power, especially the abuse of power" (98) Thompson also maintains that Soyinka writes from the deepest of privacies, a political hell of solitary confinement. Soyinka reaches out to the people offering what he has witnessed as a treatment, both of 'what he endured and of what others suffered ... Soyinka's private self becomes the salvation of a public group' (101). Soyinka has often been arrested and jailed for being vociferous. He has a vision and a mission and of course this could only be realised when he has reached out to the people. Realising this, means endurance, which at the end brings hope for the people. Soyinka is a fierce democrat and has a very strong and uncontrollable urge for a democratic option.

Soyinka's avowed interest in a democratic system is echoed in *The Man Died* and *Isara* where this study draws attention to his preference for a democratic option. Conscientisation of the less privileged in any democratic dispensation has been given adequate attention in the analysis of Soyinka's prose. Thompson writes that Soyinka's works are meant to rescue the oppressed that this researcher feels should be conscientised and empowered. While Thompson's article centres on rescuing man, we have considered the need for empowerment in the political conflict between the privileged and less privileged.

Moreover, the imposition of any ruler on the people is a vicious violation of fundamental human rights and Soyinka frowns at this. He has never supported any military regime. This is reflected in *The Man Died* where he makes scathing remarks

about military dictatorship. To Soyinka, the text is a personal testimony for a public purpose. It is for the less privileged, and also an attempt to end the rule of terror. He criticises the vicious and cruel conditions of his incarceration and the injustice of the judicial process whereby people are dumped into jail without trial. He is a visionary at a time when the people's heroes are harlots and philistines. Soyinka is often preoccupied with the problems facing man in society. He usually reflects what the ordinary man goes through in the hands of the ruler. The political undertone in his works is obvious and one cannot deny the fact that Soyinka is a politically forceful writer in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Adewale writes on 'Who is Afraid of Wole Soyinka: Essays on Censorship' and succumbs to the view about Soyinka that:

The torture, the oppression, the corrupt exercise of power, the lunatic private world of the privileged be brought to an end... The Journalistic writers on the frontline of Africa's struggle must be free to speak out (121).

African writers have a great task ahead. Soyinka and other critics of selfish leaders are poised to break this monopoly of power by the opportunistic few who have carved a niche for themselves. The progressives [in Soyinka's texts] in the mould of the critic himself are determined to carry out this. These protagonists would not join the corrupt train. The interpreters, Ofeyi, Iriyise, the Dentist and a host of others have resolved to end the lunatic private world of the privileged. In addition, Maja-Pearce contends that: "as a Nobel prize winner Soyinka can beard high-ranking officials in the Nigerian regime with impunity."(121).

Maja-Pearce's essay bears witness to Soyinka's uncompromising criticism of dishonesty and injustice. Issues of dishonesty, injustice, oppression and empowerment

of the less privileged are highlighted in Soyinka's works. The cartel in *Season of Anomy* is a business conglomerate made up of men who are not honest or loyal; men who are not fair in their dealings; corrupt individuals and unpatriotic party men; the likes of Batoki. Stewart Creham points out that the spirit of negation in Soyinka is 'restless, mercurial and strongly masculine often humorous ... always alive to incongruity... ( 17). The spirit of negation springs from Soyinka's impulse to oppose. 'Where an idealistic search for life's meaning ... is constantly defeated ... a contrary movement sets in (Creham 18). In this case, idealism turns to cynicism. The interpreters in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* are impatient with the slow pace of change. The urge for a free society drives them to go against the barriers of power. Sekoni and Sagoe are classic examples of the alienated heroes. They want a turnaround in the economy, but the odds are overwhelmingly against them. Their vision to transform the society meets a brick wall. Egbo is another alienated hero suspended between the past from which he has become estranged and a bleak future.

Creham's exploration of alienation in *The Interpreters* is worthy of note as he reveals the frustration of the intellectual elite in post independence Nigeria. From a different prospective, this research explores the empowerment of the alienated heroes. The researcher notes the irony in *The Interpreters* where a group of graduates in conflict with the political elite and having the empowerment are not able to cause notable political change.

In like manner, Gates, in his article, 'Censorship and Justice: on Rushdie and Soyinka' believes that Soyinka has called upon all of us to 'remember that freedom of expression lies at the heart of the enterprise in which we are all engaged'.(Louis:139) Suppressing this freedom is a serious violation of fundamental human rights. Soyinka

expresses himself freely in *The Man Died*. His arrest was as a result of his protest against the use of violence for resolving conflict. Olaniyan says that Wole Soyinka comes out as usual in his text, *The Interpreters* as ‘The master exorcist, exorcising social folly through derisive laughter... he sees nothing as sacrosanct from critical, satirical inspection ... (103). No social malaise should be beyond the writer’s critical remarks. Soyinka’s works are aimed at sanitizing the Nigerian society especially resolving power tussle and oppression. Society can be sanitized if the suppressed individuals persevere in their revolt and quest for improved living conditions. Soyinka maintains that ‘The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny’ (*The Man Died*:13) Soyinka, in *The Man Died*, perseveres until his release. His release from gaol is symbolic, for it marks his freedom from the oppressors. What Soyinka suggests in this instance is that steadfastness is the surest way to freedom.

*The Interpreters* presents a society in which almost all the members-upper, middle and low class are not capable of fashioning a way out. This is neatly reflected in the following lines:

The upper crust is corrupt including Egbo’s grandfather who aids smuggling; the middleclass the class of the interpreters – is impotent; while the urban and rural masses are violence bound (they want to lynch Noah) or gullible (they do not believe Sekoni ... (Jones:103).

The word that best describes the conflict in *Season of Anomy* is anomy. It is a state of cataclysmic normlessness. Violence, a feature that is very typical in crisis situations in Nigeria, is portrayed in *Season of Anomy*. We often experience violent reactions after every election. Loss of lives and properties worth millions of Naira is what one witnesses before and after the conduct of any election. The rate of violence and



insecurity recorded in *Season of Anomy* corroborates this fact. Biodun Jeyifo focuses on Soyinka the satirist, iconoclast, mythmaker and political activist. In his words:

It was as a literary icon that young Soyinka burst on the critical scene... this is quite distinctive of his critical voice, differentiating his peculiar tone and accents from those of other writers, critics like Achebe, Clark, Ngugi...The literary artist, like all other artists, has an inherent sensibility which should inform and guide his vocation as a writer, which should shape his craft and vision and which above all else, he should protect from both external encroachments and more important, self-manipulation (133).

*The Writings of Wole Soyinka* by Obi Maduakor provides insights into Soyinka's *Ake*. Maduakor's book confirms our view of Soyinka as a non conformist and defender of the defenceless .Soyinka's character was formed early in life .His parents were very strict and rigid .Soyinka's rebellious nature 'appeared to be a... means of sheltering himself from the rigid regimentations of his home' [Maduakor,154].Soyinka considers this as injustice; he feels there was no justice in the adult world. This concern for justice remains with him as he grows up. It is therefore not surprising that most of his works border on injustice, conflict and empowering the oppressed which is the thesis of this study. Wole Soyinka reflects on issues that matter. He often reflects on the fate of man in his environment and his struggle and the cost of survival. Eldred Jones aptly summarizes Soyinka's contribution thus:

A serious dramatist in the Aristotelian sense; his plays deal with things that matter; things that are worth troubling about. They are concerned

eventually with the fate of man in his environment; the struggle for survival; the cost of survival; the real meaning of progress; the necessity for sacrifice if man is to make any progress... (65).

Beneath the humour in his plays, what one notices are political elements of rebellion and change. There are attempts to create awareness in the largely traditional gullible and retrogressive society. In *The Swamp Dwellers*, for example, the concern for change is obvious, and the challenge for change is also portrayed in *The Lion and the Jewel* (1958) and *Kongi's Harvest* (1961). Catherine Acholonu's contribution is in line with the current discussion. In her review captioned 'A Touch of the Absurd; Soyinka and Beckett', she upholds that "Soyinka's existentialist plays are populated by the old, the ailing, the disabled or people nursing wounds ... it is a device to demonstrate the sordid plight of man..."(15). The literary icon often writes on the almost hopeless condition of man in society; a condition in which hope for escape is very limited. This is because of the problems man creates for himself as a result of his evil. The only chance for man is to denounce this evil

. Again, Juliet Okonkwo's paper – 'The Essential Unity of Soyinka's *The Interpreters and Season of Anomy*' corroborates Soyinka's impression of the ruling class in the society. Okonkwo states that: "The corrupt, excessively materialistic world of the establishment, which already existed in *The Interpreters*, is represented by the cartel" (112). This alliance of politicians and the military controls production, marketing and prices. The 'alliance' as demonstrated in the text is a superstructure of robberies. *Season of Anomy* and *The Interpreters* are united through their common theme of the role of the intellectual in the possible reconstruction in a society that is

afflicted with excessive socio-economic and political malaise. Okonkwo further asserts that:

Whereas in *The Interpreters* the passivity of the intellectuals results in paralysis and a stultification of the creative genius, his combativeness in *Season of Anomy* takes up the challenge of revolution and reform. Even though the road is painful, bloody and uncertain, it is offered as the only sane course for the future ... (113).

Gikandi thinks that *The Interpreters* is an example of a new type of prose that interprets the present in terms of human characteristics of an African community without reference to the past. The present predicament that bedevils African states cannot be explained in terms of external factors. The novel ‘captures ... the decadence and sterility of contemporary social and political set up in many African countries’ [Gikandi,66]. The interpreters are alive to the social realities and through them, Soyinka exposes the social ills. The young group of intellectuals dislikes the situation in the country. Hence, there is social conflict or antagonism between the intellectual elite and the political elite. The role of the literary artist and the critic is akin to that of the intellectuals reflected in these two texts. As a critic, the artist is expected to first of all interpret the condition of man and proffer possible solutions out of any socio-economic or political malaise. Tunde Adeniran is of the view that Soyinka’s:

exposure to anything in print coupled with the nature of man he exhibited at childhood prepared him for a revolt against established traditions, against the prevailing systems and against the common run of things – leading to non-conformism as a philosophy of life... (30)

In essence, Soyinka's works often mirror a revolt against unpopular power or protest against injustice. For example, *The Man Died* demonstrates his disenchantment with the people in power. As reflected in his works, it is evidently clear that Soyinka must have been further influenced by writers like Euripides who wrote the patriotic play titled *Heraclidae and the Trojan woman* – an indictment of war. Euripides dwells on problems and conflicts in the society. He exhibits a rationalist and an iconoclastic stance. Just like Euripides, Soyinka is often preoccupied with resolving problems and conflicts in the society. He is inquisitive, and has a fanatical urge to honesty. He is apt to giving free rein to his creative urge. Adeniran points out that only through cleansing torrents of art can the world ever become a decent place to live in. Therefore, he asserts that Soyinka plays a vital role in Africa, a continent that has experienced different forms of oppression, feudalism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism.

It is in this regard that this discourse examines conflict and need for empowerment. Soyinka's works are tools for empowerment. His art is aimed at liberating the suppressed. The main characters in his works are designed (educated) to create the awareness in the gullible society. Soyinka contributes to the liberation of Africa and the empowerment of the dispossessed and deprived people of the continent. He has often contributed towards the opening of portals for their upliftment and their placement along the right path of dynamic development. His writings are often geared towards empowering the dispossessed and deprived people of Africa. His novels, plays, poems and articles are political tools designed to bring about a just society, a society where Man will be very free. It is also hoped that his contributions

through his works will set the dispossessed free and also give them hope in life.

Savour the flavour of the following lines:

Soyinka... is black, he is African and he is a human being. To be a black man and an African requires a black and African consciousness, an involvement in the type of literary creativity through which creative actions are processed for effect through the written word. The process will entail an intense imaginative return into the African cultural matrix, an imaginative return capable ...of synthesizing ... also of appreciating and interpreting the whole body of myths, customs, legends, rituals, taboos and other beliefs which have always held the communities in African villages together and provided a sense of shared experience and belonging (Adeniran: 50).

Traditional African customs, beliefs, and rituals that hitherto held us (Africans) together have been replaced by other ideals which now set us apart. These ideals rather promote individualism and discourage communal living. So we should hold on to tradition which gives a sense of shared experience and belonging. This will rather discourage corruption and other dishonest practices. Man should therefore be his brother's keeper.

However, Adeniran does not look at the dark side of traditional African customs which is the approach adopted in this study. This research is also concerned with African values that set us back. Among these values are polygamy and consultation of the oracle. In *Ake* (1966) and *Isara* (1989) Soyinka '... brings together the tradition of Europe and Africa. The 'Africa' of Abeokuta is quite different from the 'Africa' of Isara and Soyinka moves between the two' (Gibbs: "The Years of

Childhood”:100). In Abeokuta he moved between the parsonage and the market and between Abeokuta Grammar School and the Alake’s palace, worlds apart within a single town. At Isara, he moves between the Odeme’s court and the farm, between his grandfather’s hut and the forest. Soyinka was alert to these varieties and he captures the experiences vividly. Gibbs observes that *Ake* is carefully arranged by ideas and themes rather than chronology or genealogy. It communicates ‘the experience of growing up, of expanding horizon, of encountering contradiction, of watching change’. (Gibbs: ‘The Years of Childhood’:102)

Raymond Lee writes that the seemingly fatal conflict between Magician Anthony Peter Zachary and the wizard in *Ake* epitomizes the conflicts between Nigerian culture and westernization. Kate Cook adds that ‘*Ake*’: *The Years of Childhood* explores the complicated and difficult nature of change while Erica Dillon is of the view that Soyinka decries ‘those things that are now gone, or have changed irredeemably: the moods of the town the smells’ (Dillon:1) . In a related development, Popoff contends that with Soyinka’s simple declaration that the smells are all gone in *Ake*, the author begins his construction of a subtle dichotomy between the past and the present. Soyinka prefers the past despite its flaws. He presents the present as a degradation of the older more traditional *Ake* which he recalls. The smells which belong to past are all gone; in place of the smells is the noisy present. Cook maintains that the child’s ‘jeremiad against the products of a global waste industry also reveals his preference for the colonial era of his childhood’ (Cook :1)

The juxtaposition of the smells and sounds signifies the conflicts between the past and the present. The opening pages depict a strict demarcation between Christianity and Yoruba traditional religion. The narrator struggles with the conflict

between western and Nigerian tradition. He uses the idea of boundaries and guests to buttress his points. Elora Raymond insists that:

The canon's square, white building was a bulwark against the menace and the siege of the wood spirits. Its rear wall demarcated their territory, stopped them from taking liberties with the world of the humans. Canon's home is shown as a bulwark, or a fortress of Christianity and the delineator of a boundary between Christianity and Yoruba beliefs (Raymond: 1)

Therefore, Soyinka adopts Western traditions: Christianity, the English language, Western education and African culture. He mingles these diverse traditions in his work.

Jason L. Sperber (1997) believes that Soyinka's 'understanding of the Christian traditions of his family and the non-Christian beliefs of the surrounding towns folks meld the two into a new creation...' (Sperber:1) Soyinka's conflation of Christian icons and native ancestral spiritual figure becomes illustrative of how beliefs systems clash and meld in order to survive the colonial condition. The Christian figure with the white robes in *Ake* meets the Egungun criterion of being dead and in robes. Of course this is a non – Christian tradition which arises from his position as a child. His lack of understanding of the boundaries between the two belief systems underscores the adaptation and syncretic cultural productions performed by colonized people under a colonizer's political and cultural regime. Such mixtures of beliefs shape the lives of children and adults in *Ake*. A case in point is the story about Uncle Sanya being a supernatural being and that of Rev. Ransome Kuti who drives off such beings into the woods.

The mingling of Christian and Yoruba Tradition in Soyinka's works is ascribed to childhood experience in Ake and the traditions which he witnessed in Isara. Reid Abra examines the customs and myths of Soyinka's family background which have been instrumental in forming the direction of his later writings. Koch argues that:

Soyinka casts the new and modern town of Ake in a negative light. Whenever he contrasts the Ake of today with the "old" Ake of his youth, there is a sense of loss as if all that made the town dear to him, in his childhood and in his memory, has disappeared and been replaced by things new and somehow false.(Koch:1)

There is nothing real about the new modern technology that has come to Ake, nothing is real about the sound that merely filled the streets, sounds that have replaced the old and familiar smells. It is a "medley of electronic bands and the raucous clang of hand – bells advertising" ...imported wares (*Ake*: 149). The familiar smells are gone, and in their place mostly sounds and even these are frenzied distortions of the spare intimate voices of humans... (*Ake*:149) and these sounds seem fake and less human than the old sound such as the' measured chimes of the tower – clock or the parade of egungun... market cries or bicycle bell. (*Ake*:149) Soyinka is nostalgic for the past, the good old days. He compares the new modern but false sound of the blare of motor horn with the real old time when life was simple.

Obi Maduakor treats some of the major and minor themes in Soyinka's works from another angle. He maintains that a recurring theme in most of his works is the theme of power, which is very obvious in *The Interpreters*. Egbo's Osa heritage is linked up with the theme of power. Kingship in the Osa dynasty is a position of



power. Kola takes up the question of power at the beginning of chapter 15 and examines its various implications. For Egbo, the main consideration is political power. Also, there is conflict between traditional (past) and modern (present) values in this situation. Egbo is caught between the past (tradition) and present (modern). He is faced with the problem of choosing between a traditional appointment and a modern one. This quest or thirst for power leads to conflict and oppression. In a grandiloquent way, Obi Maduakor says that in *Season of Anomy*,

The cartel is both a political power and an economic force; it manages the nation's wealth and controls the production and disposal of those natural resources from which that wealth is derived. Cocoa is mentioned in recognition of its former status as the nation's most important economic product. Soyinka makes the vital point that in post independence Africa, politics is just another business, a profit-making concern. People go into politics not to serve the nation but to swell their purses by cheating and exploiting the masses. Cocoa becomes a metaphor for the human commodities that are also 'sold' and exploited by the ruling oligarchy (86).

The ruling party today is a replica of the cartel discussed in *Season of Anomy*. They are in control of the nation's wealth, and they also distribute and manage it as it pleases them. Chief Biga, in *Season of Anomy* represents the ruling Oligarchy on account of his flamboyant lifestyle. Chief Biga is also one of the powers behind the cartel. While the oppressed group openly condemns the exploitation and oppression of the less privileged in *Season of Anomy*, those in *The Interpreters* remain inactive. Kola, Sagoe and Egbo 'withdraw from life: Kola into painting, Sagoe into

drunkenness and Egbo into his isolated river sanctum. (Morrison:68) which Maduakor refers to as apostasy. The interpreters are fully aware that the system is corrupt yet they acquiesce to it. The theme of alienation is explored in this case as the interpreters are alienated from the academic and civil service arms, and are also alienated from themselves eventually. Maduakor puts it this way,

The interpreters are ‘apostates’ in the sense that they are unfaithful to their own social convictions; they lack the moral courage to live up to the image of the ideal society they envision. They recognize that the system is corrupt but they acquiesce in it... they recognize the need for change but they are unwilling to try to bring it about: “Too busy” Egbo said in self – mockery (117).

Soyinka also uses poetry and drama to promote a truly democratic spirit. Some of his poems are based on his personal experience. *A Shuttle in the Crypt* contains an example of one of the poems in which Soyinka protests against the injustice and inhumanity that kept him in solitary confinement. Similarly, his plays convey political elements of rebellion and change. *Kongi’s Harvest* is a typical example. The play is a reaction to the fact that African leaders are becoming tyrannical and denying their citizens political liberties and human rights. Kongi, the main character is autocratic, regressive and ambitious.

Moreover, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006) is an indictment of how mediocrity triumphs over reason and vision. Adebayo says that Soyinka’s memoir is a stinging indictment of “how mediocrity and greed have triumphed over reason and vision in post independence Nigeria... power and control remain the plaything of imbeciles, psychopaths and predators”(Adebayo:20). The memoir describes the

painful 42-year-old journey that Nigeria embarked on since 1960. There is no political stability after 47 years of attaining independence. The overriding interest of the leaders is power and control. This strong desire for power results in conflict.

Kolawole Ogungbesan looks at the different categories of the female gender in Soyinka's works. He categorises the female characters in *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy* into three outstanding stereotypes- Ogungbesan states that:

The masculine group consists of radical domineering women playing the role of conquerors over men... the second group includes... females who are feminine to the point of trivialisation... the third group is composed of subdued female protagonists who fall short of fulfilment and achievement (57).

The radical woman is portrayed in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*. Mrs Bankole is an example of a female character in this category. She is grouped under the radical women because of her stubbornness and pride. The female character in this category is repulsive. The second category includes the so-called heroines who are seducers or tempters of men. Simi, in *The Interpreters* and Iriyise in *Season of Anomy* fall into this category. They are symbols and commodities for satisfying men's desire. In this case, feminism (in this group) is equated with cheap exploitation of beauty in the texts. The third category reveals women as subdued persons who are not capable of asserting positive influences. They lack strength of character to lord it over men. They are passive caricatures. Biye, in *Season of Anomy* and Mrs. Faseyi in *The Interpreters* fall within this category. These groupings, according to Ogungbesan, suggest Soyinka's ambivalent treatment of females. He concludes that Soyinka's handling of women is not entirely flattering.

This discourse does not categorise the female gender into stereotypes. Rather, this researcher explores female empowerment in selected prose of Soyinka and Ousmane. The study draws attention to the impressive function of the female gender. The chosen authors give the women folk bold and forward looking roles at a time when writers like Achebe and Amadi portray women as subservient.

James Gibbs maintains that Soyinka's *Ake* is a fascinating world full of contradictions and conflicts. In describing the power conflict in *Ake*, Soyinka reports the transformation of the women's union from 'a bevy of fashion conscious gown wearers into a power conscious adult literacy class of wrapper wearers (Gibbs: *The Years of Childhood*: 100). Awonuga also highlights the thematic significance of the portrayal of some women in Soyinka's works. He is of the view that Soyinka portrays female characters with positive orientation and some of them contribute to the development of the plot. For instance, Monica, in *The Interpreters*, refuses to retire upstairs at the Oguazor's buffet dinner. The point about Monica's refusal is that 'it highlights the absurdity of the idea; the buffet...is modelled on an outworn English social tradition.' [Awonuga;19]

The review of the pertinent literature has so far shown that many scholars have explored various themes in Soyinka's works, and having looked at what these critics postulate, we now turn our attention to Ousmane.

## **2.2 SOCIO-POLITICAL AND CULTURAL ISSUES IN OUSMANE'S WORKS**

Sembene Ousmane, the Senegalese writer has been a vehement champion of human rights. He took part in the workers struggles against French colonialism in Africa and he denounces the African privileged class that emerges. *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) is about the mobilization of a whole people into political awareness.

“His interest in workers and their problem dated back to... early years and to what he saw of the poor condition of the masses everywhere he served...”(Adebayo: 57).

The conflict between the workers and their employers is reflected in some of Ousmane’s works. The workers, in *God’s Bits of Wood*, struggle for a better condition of service.

Class struggle exists as workers show their disgust in their white employers’ exploitative and oppressive gimmicks. The strike action in the novel is a result of class struggle. As the whites are conflicting with the blacks, so also the oppressors and the oppressed are at loggerhead with one another. Furthermore, the bourgeoisie always resists the open confrontation from the proletariat (Balogun: 8).

Adebayo and Gakwandi draw attention to the poor condition of the workers. They also explore the class conflict between workers and their employers. The political conflicts and empowerment of the employees have been considered in the analysis of *God’s Bits of Wood*. We see Ousmane as an objective chronicler of his people and one who speaks the truth. He mobilises the workers into a formidable force in order to fight for their rights. Conflict is between the “haves” and the “have nots”. The progressives in Ousmane’s texts are usually committed. In *The Docker*, the conflict is between the poor and the bourgeois overlords. We have Falla who represents the poor and the bourgeois woman who represents the bourgeoisie. Through Falla, Ousmane reflects the dogged struggle of the weaker folks with the dominant class. The heroes are empowered and placed in conflicting situations in which they challenge forces of reaction in their bid to liberate the less privileged.

Therefore, most of Ousmane's heroes engage in a do-or die struggle for economic liberation and restoration of the dignity of the rail workers. The conflict in *God's Bits of Wood* is between the rail-workers and the white authorities. It is a racial confrontation between the blacks and the white authorities. But the conflict is not only between the whites and the Senegalese. It is also a conflict between some privileged Senegalese often referred to as African bourgeoisie and the rail workers. One of such characters in the text is the Imam who supports the oppressive system of the colonial administration. Gakwandi maintains that the conflict is between capital and labour. He believes that *God's Bits of Wood* is a reflection of 'African society going through radical transformation as a result of a conflict between capital and labour' (120). Ousmane demonstrates the victory of labour over capital. He attacks the capitalist system that rates human beings according to background in order to create gaps between men. Ousmane illustrates the importance of common struggle and collective efforts of the workers. It is the zeal and anger of the people that sustains the strike, which culminates in the triumph of labour over capital.

Similarly, Ousmane's *Xala* (1974) set in post independence Senegal unravels the economic importance of the African bourgeoisie whose cure lies in the people. The bourgeoisie have taken so much from the less privileged and only a mobilized force of the proletariat can cure this *Xala* (impotence). Ousmane's *The Last of the Empire* also portrays the political conflict among African leaders.

Hariet Lyons adds that 'the contention that folk elements play an important role in modern African artistic expression seems obvious...' (319). To illustrate an argument, characters in African novels (especially elders) often lapse into folktales or wise sayings. Fa keita in *God's Bits of Wood* is noted for this. He uses wise sayings to

settle disputes. Ousmane employs the folklore and ritual themes in *Xala* to carry his message. Elhaj is made to perform certain rites that will cure the xala that represents the impotence of the Senegalese elite. Another element of folklore in Ousmane's work is the presence of the griot who sings the praises of men in high places. The griot defends the rulers against accusations by other people and also condemns or rebukes them of any wrong doing. By accusing their superiors, the griot purifies them from their sins. Their accusations could lead to

‘purification from sin, particularly violations of sexual restrictions and abuses of privilege... purification could thus be attained through submitting to verbal abuse from the lowly’. (Lyons:324)

Sembene Ousmane is like the griot that exposes the society of its wrong doing. Ousmane does this in order to bring about purification. He uses a female griot in *Xala* and a male griot in *The White Genesis* to rebuke the superiors for misdeeds.

Lyon's approach is different from the method adopted in our handling of the same issue (folk element). We are interested in the conflict between this traditional material and written literature. The study demonstrates the importance of folklore in modern art. The essence of transferring folklore to modern literature is to show that written literature is a continuation of oral literature. The researcher is of the opinion that Ousmane writes to promote both oral and written literature.

It is the responsibility of the weak to take up the challenge of liberating their oppressed groups. 'It is the duty of citizens of a given polity to fight and liberate themselves from exploitation' (Mathias: 60).The destiny of the downtrodden is usually in their hands and only sacrifice can help them in whatever they do. Thus, the struggle in *Xala* is between the less privileged, represented by the beggars, and Elhaji

who stands for the oppressors. Also, of significance are the collective efforts of the women group in Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*. Ousmane is interested in a society where there will be social equity between men and women.

Martin Bestman looks at conflict between modern and traditional values. He feels that in some of Ousmane's novels like the *The Money-order with White Genesis*, the head of the family is often narrow minded, fanatical and dogmatic making the children break the fetters of tradition. The research has equally looked at the conflict between traditional and modern values but it highlights the progressive modern values and explores the retrogressive ones. This study equally demonstrates how Ousmane promotes the healthy traditional values and decries African tenets that are inimical to progress. Bestman says that the conflict is more than a family matter.

“It symbolises the radical discord between the present and the past, the collision of two hostile incommunicable worlds; it is the expression of a profound social malaise” (141).

Though the children's quest for liberty may pave the way for social progress, the family structure – unity of the family -is threatened. The conflict between father and child in *White Genesis* begins from simple friction and later becomes a very serious clash when Tanor kills his father. Bestman further maintains that:

.... No society can develop its national consciousness... without the active and full participation of women in its cultural, political and intellectual life. Ousmane's writings show that in some traditional African societies particularly in those where Muslim culture has left its mark, women are relegated to the background. He criticises traditional



education which.... encourages a blind submissiveness and passive docility in women.(142)

Ousmane condemns some of the customs that are inimical to progress. As a critic of society, he emphasises that it is imperative to break with those customs that set us back. He is not in support of social parasitism. Ousmane feels that we should stop suppressing the women under the guise of religion. He thinks that no society can truly develop without the participation of the female gender. Ousmane sincerely examines both traditional and modern African society and insists on the necessity of adapting traditional practices to the needs of a fast changing world.

However, the conflict in *The Money- Order with White Genesis* is between truth and falsehood. Jonathan Peter says that the text is based on the values of morality. Man is often confronted with the problem of either being honest or dishonest. *The Money Order* seems to emphasise that honesty is a crime when Dieng decides to give up his truthfulness and honesty in favour of lies. Peter contends that:

The major theme in both *The Money order* and *White Genesis*... is on the conflict between truth and falsehood in human affairs... *White Genesis* is more tragic in its development but its end holds on hope that truth, in bondage over a long period, will again be resurrected (90).

Peter's handling of conflict in this text contrasts sharply with the conflict and empowerment espoused in this study. The study portrays the conflict between African communalism and western capitalism in *The Money Order*.

Ousmane's presentation of the female gender is a reflection of the socio-political significance of women in a dynamic world. Ousmane portrays them with much more complexity than his contemporaries like Achebe and Amadi. He believes

that women have roles to play beyond traditional roles as wives and mothers. Ousmane shows a startling departure from traditional stereotypes. His picture of women in Africa is striking. His women participate actively in the political and economic development of their country. Chukwukere points out that:

Ousmane's traditional "Moslem woman often recognises and questions the injustice of her situation. Together with her male counterpart, she fights the imperialist's burden of economic oppression" (81).

The revolutionary conscious woman is explored in *Xala*, *Tribal Scars* and *God's Bits of Wood*. The women of Dakar are stakeholders in the plan for the strike that successfully leads to a better condition of service for the rail worker. The women play very significant roles which seem to remind one of existing inhibition because the men feel that, the idea of a woman attending and making speeches at a gathering is disturbing. The strike is the necessary event that brings the women together first to support their men, and to act in their own right as individuals. Moreover, in the course of the march, the men become obedient to the orders of the women leader and they follow the women faithfully carrying water. The roles are indeed

'undergoing modification since it is Penda who wears an army belt... indicating her command and ... her fundamental sense of responsibility and authority (Case: 290).

With this kind of determination, neither the oppressive heat, nor the sudden violent manifestations of nature could deflect her from the goal. They also act against French imperialism. Significantly, the women's march to Dakar forces the imperialists to grant the workers' demand for better working conditions. The march brings victory,

and it also enables them to discover their great potentialities. They now realize that they have greater challenging roles to play than just being wives.

Also, it is important to state that Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* is an example of the authors support for a healthy modern way of life. The struggle for justice is an opportunity for the author to reflect how women rebel against capitalist exploitation and debilitating age-old conventions. In addition, Ramatoulaye symbolically kills the religious leader's ram and dares the agents of colonial oppression. "Her lucid level of consciousness is a prelude to actions that would eliminate the alienation that hitherto characterised all social relationships within the novel (Case 285). Mathias Nder agrees that Ousmane's *Xala* gives an instance where women take back their freedom. She maintains that:

Oumi N'Gone threatens Beye that she will go elsewhere... in the end both women desert Beye at the climax of his economic hardship and psychological tribulations. These women take back their freedom from their husband (50)

This clearly demonstrates the point the researcher posits about Sembene Ousmane's female characters: that no society can truly develop without the participation of the women. The impatience exhibited by these women is quite significant in this discourse. These women have power, vision and all it takes to stand firm in their resolve to break away. Ousmane seems to be in solidarity with radical feminist writers like Emecheta, Alkali and Mariama Ba. Ousmane pleads for a woman that will be fulfilled and who will not be an appendage to the man.

David Murphy lays emphasis on female solidarity. 'Polygamy is not portrayed as a uniquely divisive institution for women' (Murphy: 145). In *The Money-Order*,

Ibrahim's co-wives stand by each other, holding the family together during their husband's fruitless quest to cash his money order. In some cases, the strong bond between the wives is mainly to joke and laugh at their husband's shortcomings. A startling example of this is reflected in *Niwam and Taaw* where Aminata deals with her husband. Murphy's theme of female solidarity is also different from the researcher's motif of female empowerment. The dissertation discusses the positive image of the zealous and empowered African woman in a modern world and reveals how Ousmane redefines the role of the female gender in the political and historical development of Africa.

Furthermore, Ousmane demonstrates the effectiveness of traditional African medication. There are ailments that orthodox medicine cannot cure, and in such cases, people go for unorthodox treatment. Where modernity (science) fails, traditional healers often prove the supremacy of their local but potent and reliable herbs. This instance is shown in *Xala* when Elhaj could not find a remedy for his impotence in well-established hospitals. He was however cured by the marabout, Serene Mada. Maryse Conde stresses the significance of the journey to the marabout's home. She claims that 'The journey is an exhausting one reminding us of these quests, which abound in oral traditions' (98). Gloria Chukwukere suggests role reversal in *Gender Voices and choices*. Her interest is in the reappraisal of roles. She thinks that Ousmane attempts to reverse the traditional notion of the responsibilities of women who are basically seen as home administrators and mothers. Their primary duties are child bearing, cooking and keeping the home clean. This role expectation is transferred from mother to daughter. The woman's social status is often considered far below that of her male counterpart. However, Chukwukere reveals that:

Modernisation has weakened bonds and emancipated the African woman giving her some powers, choices and initiative... Christianity has encouraged the woman to choose her own spouse. Education has also enabled her to widen her knowledge.... And enhance her job opportunities (3)

Chukwukere and Nder have considered the positive portrayal of women in Ousmane's works. This discourse also explores female empowerment but it adopts a comparative method. We have compared Soyinka's handling of gender issues with Ousmane's and discovered that Ousmane is more passionate for the women folk. There are more female characters in Ousmane's prose than Soyinka's.

Significantly, modernity has brought a lot of awareness and has also increased the women's sense of independence. They are less dependent on their husbands because the majority of them now take up challenging roles, which were hitherto played by men. Women are now aware of their situations and the discoveries of their potentials prompt them to struggle for an improved status. This consciousness represents a breakthrough in the ancient role patterns. Rama, Elhaji's daughter, in Ousmane's *Xala* is an undergraduate in the university. Her education has brought remarkable exposure and awareness of the rights of the womenfolk. Therefore, she is in the forefront of women emancipation and she rejects the inhuman condition wrought upon her mother by Elhaji Beye. Her unflinching courage is equally portrayed when she opposes her father's plan to take another wife. She says: "I am against this marriage, father. A polygamist is never frank" (Ousmane:*Xala*;13) Oumi N' Doye is another female character in *Xala* who is confident, assertive and authoritative. Lennox adds that:

Offering a virile form of social status, the female characters in *Xala* represents various aspects of African culture, past, present, and future... The first wife- Adja is the matriarch; she dresses in traditional clothing, chews on a stick and reserves the respect and rights of an elder. The younger, fashionable, second wife- Oumi depicts an upwardly mobile class movement and relishes material wealth.... Educated modernist daughter, Rama negates the official French language for Wolof and is the clear inspiration to the independent Senegal. El Hadji's xala... represents the failure of self-serving men to satisfy the needs of their country and their people (1).

Moreover, 'the new age calls for a great deal of modification in traditional male-female roles' (Aire: *African Literature and Criticism*:25). The men in *God's Bits of Wood* no longer see anything demeaning in a male searching for water. This used to be a traditional female occupation but the men do it voluntarily. Aire says that there is a certain progression away from traditionalism, as we see most of his female characters take up roles hitherto reserved for men. Maimona, for instance is versed in traditional therapeutics and also predicts storms during the march. Ousmane also frowns at the traditional practice whereby a girl is simply given out to a man without her consent. This traditional norm, which hitherto was rigidly applied by local elders, is now being challenged in Ousmane's *Xala*. Yay Bineta arranges the marriage between Elhaji and Ngone without the consent of the latter .This marriage, however, faces a lot of challenges. In the first instance, it was never consummated and the marriage is the genesis of Beye's misfortune. In essence, the breakup of the marriage

is Ousmane's subtle way of rejecting this traditional value that has been transmitted from generation to generation.

In a related development, Charles Nnolim is of the opinion that there are male writers who belong to the feminist camp. These male authors champion the feminist cause in their works by casting the female gender in a positive and prestigious image. Sembene Ousmane is one of the male writers that Nnolim refers to as Gynacritics. 'The Gynacritics would be the equivalent of male gynaecologist who in the practice of medicine see to the health and welfare of women'.(Nnolim:118)

From this review, it is apparent that many critics have had a lot to say about Soyinka and Ousmane's works but no detailed study has been embarked upon comparing these two authors from different geographical locations. This research has thus contributed to the current discourse on Soyinka and Ousmane by looking at conflict and empowerment (as a whole) in their works

### CHAPTER THREE CONFLICT AND EMPOWERMENT

#### 3.1 POLITICAL AND CLASS CONFLICT IN SOYINKA'S WORKS

Nigeria and Senegal, since independence have often been bedevilled by various forms of conflict situations and the suppression of the weaker folks. In response to this, Soyinka and Ousmane express their concern for the weak by strongly denouncing the oppression, discrimination and injustices perpetrated by the privileged class against the less privileged ones. Femi Folorunsho maintains that Soyinka and Ousmane manifest the struggle of a people 'undergoing the painful process of transformation right from colonial through neo-colonial to wholly self determining nation'.(1)

One of the problems the writers had to grapple with was the fact that African leaders, often referred to as 'petite bourgeoisie', merely occupied the position the colonialists left without necessarily improving the lot of the people. For example, the focus in Ousmane's *Xala* [1974] and Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is on the 'petite bourgeoisie' who assumes power after the departure of the colonialists. The African bourgeoisie derives his sustenance or livelihood through acting as agents to the multinational bourgeoisie to ensure the exploitation of the peasant workers of many African countries. Independence becomes merely a ceremony because it is accompanied by neither liberation nor equality; there is no social justice and subsequent redistribution of wealth. The crop of African leaders who assume power are presented by Soyinka and Ousmane as pseudo-bourgeoisie or fake because they are inferior versions of the whites. This situation therefore leads to political conflict between the different classes in the society on the one hand and oppression of the masses on the other. Soyinka and Ousmane empower these masses by mobilizing



them into political awareness. They become aware of their rights, and they fight for them. For example, the beggars in *Xala* are given the confidence to challenge the rich. The conflict in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* [1965] is quite evident. This is between the interpreters and the politicians. Sagoe, one of the interpreters, strongly opposes Chief Winsala. In addition, the inordinate ambition of incumbents also results in power conflict and oppression. It is the desire of most political office holders to perpetuate themselves in office. Power tussle is therefore the order of the day. While the marginalised are bent on taking over the mantle of power, the ruling elite remain resolute not to pass on the baton. This usually culminates in suspicion and fear, hatred, general insecurity, political conflicts and wanton destruction of lives and properties which eventually results in instability.

*Ake* chronicles Soyinka's first stirring of a social conscience. He witnesses the turmoil: the women's uprising and their strong demand for justice. This autobiographical work reports the various influences that coalesced to feed Soyinka's "imagination from which later poems, plays and novels flowed; to detect the seeds which later flowed into ideas, themes and metaphors" ( Jones: 23 ).

Therefore, it is easy to deduce the circumstances of his upbringing from what he reflects in his novels. Soyinka was an eyewitness to the political conflict between the union of women and the colonial government over arbitrary demand for tax by the authority. As an insider, Soyinka is fully aware of the oppression of the weak by the colonial government through the local chiefs. Hence, political conflict is a predominant motif in his literary works. The political turbulence of Soyinka's childhood days framed his adulthood. All these facts make *Ake* an extraordinarily rich quarry and also inform our adoption of New Historism in the analyses of Soyinka's

prose works. *Ake* throws light on the writer's childhood experience and enhances our interpretation of Soyinka's other prose works. Oyin Ogunba's article entitled "*Ake* as a background to Soyinka's creative writings" confirms the general influences that frame the author's psyche. Ogunba maintains that the advice given to Soyinka by his grandfather in *Ake* never to turn his back on a fight and not to run away from a fight must be a pillar on which Soyinka erects his tireless pursuit of justice. 'Don't ever turn your back on any fight....Your adversary will probably be bigger, he will trounce you the first time. Next time you meet him, challenge him again....In the end, you will put him to shame' (*Ake*:148)

Ogunba says that:

It will be interesting to explore in detail the extent to which Soyinka's combative humanism, his ever-ready disposition to challenge oppression wherever it occurs... this advice must have been a pillar on which Soyinka has erected his unflagging pursuit of the cause of rectitude and fair play in the world and for which he has written notable works like *Kongi's Harvest* and *The Man Died* (4)

*Ake* therefore sheds light on his other works. Soyinka responds to contemporary realities. It is obvious that he is influenced by external factors or upbringing. Some of these experiences must have whetted Soyinka's appetite for his concern for the oppressed group in the society. The Egba women's uprising and the early political education that Soyinka received from Ransome Kuti are evident in his works. Ransome Kuti always makes Soyinka aware of the goings-on around him. He educates Soyinka on the subtle diabolical schemes of the imperialists against the blacks and urges him to be conscious of world affairs. It is therefore evident that:

With this kind of avuncular prodding so early in his life, it is not surprising that Soyinka...has kept a dire interest in political affairs...especially the fate of oppressed man in various totalitarian and demented regimes (Ogunba:7)

The education Soyinka receives from Ransome Kuti is important because it creates the political awareness in the writer who becomes interested in empowering the oppressed. Soyinka's personal development in his early days is noteworthy because his self reformation explains his concern for the marginalised.

There is political conflict between the women and the white men on the one hand, and another conflict between these women and the African collaborators whom the women see as their tormentors. These tormentors are just 'servants of the white man in Lagos' ( *Ake*: 182). The women's movement fights against the injustice meted out to the underprivileged and the ruthless exploitation of these less privileged. The oppressed women are saying "No More Taxation Demand". The union is also 'tangled up in the move to put an end to the rule of white men in the country' ( *Ake*: 200). Young Soyinka equally experiences the clash between the chiefs and the women's movement. Since the council of chiefs has taken a position against the women, this union of women agitates for a better living condition by revolting against the authority to register their displeasure. The women attack every Ogboni chief they encounter. This power conflict between the less privileged and the privileged armed Soyinka with the material needed for his creative endeavours. He is experienced in the nature of communal discontent and hence knows how to portray power and class conflicts.

Soyinka's rebellious nature as reflected in *The Man Died* and *Season of Anomy* is not unconnected with his experience during this period of rancour. In *The Man Died* for instance he rebels against the federal government by trying to halt the importation of arms while in *Season of Anomy* Soyinka uses Ofeyi to stop the senseless killings. In both instances he responds to contemporary realities. His childhood experience as reflected in *Ake* manifests in *Season of Anomy* and *The Man Died*. The education given to him by Ransome Kuti and his father not to turn his back on any fight is mirrored in these texts. He sees the deadlock between the Egba Women's union and the Alake. Jones submits that *Ake's* 'primary value is the light it throws on '...Soyinka's view of the world and the early impression which formed the imaginative storehouse that was to produce the later works' (32).

*The Man Died* foretells events that are reflected in *Season of Anomy*. The latter derives much of its materials from the former. An understanding of the prison memoir will enhance our interpretation of *Season of Anomy*, which depicts the author's predicament in *The Man Died*. It is therefore imperative to study *The Man Died* to see its connection with *Season of Anomy*. *The Man Died* recounts the circumstances leading to the Nigerian Civil war. These circumstances are the skeleton of the conflict in *Season of Anomy*. It is a work of imagination which is informed by occurrences, some of which the author himself experienced. 'There is no doubt that the circumstances leading to the Nigerian Civil war and his involvements in them are the skeleton of *Season of Anomy*'. ( Jones: *The Writings of Wole Soyinka*:25). The power Conflict reported in *The Man Died* is fictionalized in *Season of Anomy*. The account in the documentary book is more or less straight reportage. He reflects the conflict in *Season of Anomy* through the extraordinary compelling pictures of

senseless mass slaughter. One of such images is that of a nursing mother machine-gunned while her baby sucks at the breast. Images of death predominate both texts. Just as Ofeyi strives to stop the inhuman killings in *Season of Anomy*, Soyinka writes against the war that claims so many innocent lives in *The Man Died*.

In addition, *Season of Anomy* is a reflection of the serious power conflict between the Eastern part of Nigeria, populated by the Ibos, and Northern / Southern Nigeria. Soyinka reacts to the massacre of the Ibos in the North during the 1966 pogrom. The Military coup of January 1966 left the Northerners in doubt of the oneness of Nigeria. The coup sparked off serious rampage against the Ibos. Anomy is a very appropriate term to describe the power conflict of that period. There is absolute disregard for law and order. Soyinka recounts this conflict in *The Man Died*. Soyinka attempts to stop the war by halting the importation of firearms and openly condemning the genocide policies of the government. He was arrested and incarcerated because of these acts. Soyinka equally attempts to recruit the country's intellectuals within and outside the country for a pressure group which will work for a total ban on the supply of arms to all parts of Nigeria creating a third force to end both the secession of Biafra and the genocide policy of the army. This is equally reflected in *Season of Anomy* and *The Interpreters* where Soyinka relies on the the intellectuals to cause a positive change. Ofeyi and other members of the educated elite strive to halt the insensive massacre of citizens by the cartel. In a similar vein, the young group of intellectuals in *The Interpreters* attempts to expose the corrupt politicians.

The phenomenology of power is the thrust of Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*. This is revealed through characters that are power drunk. One of the major concerns of this researcher is to examine the politicl conflicts between characters that are

imbued with power and the progressives who desire a change. Those with absolute power make frantic efforts to sustain their position. The incumbents design programmes, schemes and make surreptitious moves to remain at the centre stage, but opposition groups often resist such plans. This struggle often results in political conflict and oppression of the less privileged that the author empowers. The cartel in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* is a very formidable political group that reflects the ruling political party of the day. Several attempts are made by other contending parties, just as Ofeyi and his cohort make concerted efforts to resist this cartel but this alliance of military and civilian suppresses Ofeyi's interest group. Each group is pursuing its own interests largely in disregard of other groups. The different parties select representatives to vie for power. Sometimes the struggle degenerates into serious conflict among the citizens. Every tribal group wants to rule and none is prepared to shift ground. This strong desire by the major tribal groups to be in power is what Soyinka reflects in *Season of Anomy*. The quest for power nearly disintegrates the huge conglomerate known as Nigeria. Lust for power was the major cause of the Nigerian civil war. Soyinka reveals in *The Interpreters* that the Nigerian nation has been cobbled together by squabbling politicians who see independence as an opportunity to carve a niche for themselves.

The plot of *Season of Anomy*

is inspired by the confrontation of violence with violence in the pursuit of social redemption and regeneration...Ofeyi and the dentist serve as the tip of the spearhead of the progressive people of Aiyero in an organized uprising against the forces of tyrannical rulers; Batoki, Biga and Amuri who are fully backed by multi-national socio-economic

interest referred to as the cartel. In the ensuing conflicts, the novelist shows up human greed and megalomania, the perversion of the political and judicial processes and the oppression of the people by a few self-serving persons; he also reveals altruism and heroism and points the way to hopes, of a new society built on the ruins of the old(Mamudu:4).

Currently, the army is not completely out of this struggle. The spate of violence, crisis and general insecurity see them intervening in politics through the declaration of state of emergencies. In *Season of Anomy*, the military is actively involved in the tussle that rocks Ilo-Ilo. In essence, Soyinka portrays Nigerian rulers that are inebriated with power. What he portrays is the delineation of power lust that the cartel is imbued with. The cartel is the ruling class and any attempt by well meaning individuals with foresight to introduce proper values is stiffly resisted by the powers that be. The author reflects this in Ofeyi's attempt to bring in or sow new and progressive ideas. Introducing proper and progressive ideas means displacing the ruling cartel, which has also mapped out strategies to perpetuate itself in power. The result of this is power conflict. The conflict in *Season of Anomy* degenerates into hatred, fear and wanton destruction of lives and properties. Ofeyi says that the storm was sown by the cartel and efforts must be made to turn the resulting whirlwind against this cartel. To end the new phase of slavery and suppression, Ofeyi requests the affective presence of Aiyero, the marginalised to undermine the cartel's superstructure of robberies.

Four men ably represent every region on the cartel. They are Zaki Amuri, Chief Biga, Chief Batoki and the commandant-in-chief, who represents the army (the fourth arm). These four constitute the power behind the cartel. The Dentist thinks that

the shortest and fairest means to destabilize them is elimination-selective killings. He plans to start by eliminating the power from the Cross River, Zaki Amuri. This act will bring the remaining members to their knees. The study explores the theme of power conflict in *Season of Anomy* through the two opposing groups-the progressives (represented by Ofeyi, the Dentist, Iriyise) and the power besotted exploiters who make up the cartel. None of these camps is willing to reach a compromise, and where there is no compromise agreement between two parties, the result is political conflict. The aftermath of this conflict is often a source of worry to Soyinka. This is evident from the author's reflection of the magnitude of the disaster. The conflict wrought untold hardships, wanton destruction of lives and properties. It hampers development and forestalls developmental projects. The workers suspend the Shage dam project because of the conflict. Ahime reports that:

...a man came from Shage...they had received warning from their river people themselves. They held a meeting, all of them and decided to stop work until the trouble subsided (*Season of Anomy*: 83).

In essence, conflict situations wreak serious setbacks. Ahime also says that old villages have been uprooted and he reveals the ruthless indiscriminate killings by the cartel. In addition, the gory picture of some of the victims given in detail by Soyinka is meant to reveal how inhuman the cartel is, and to condemn in every ramification the means of war to resolve conflicts. The picture of the pregnant woman and the unborn child reveals the inhumanity of man to man. How else can one classify the perpetrators of the following act:



...a woman was dragged from her bed, sliced open at the belly. She was not even dead when they left her guts spilling in messy afterbirth between her thighs. (:105)

This type of cold-blooded murder has made it difficult to settle the rift between the different groups. Healing the wounds caused by the war is often Herculean. There is fear and suspicion between the different parties. The existing challenge, therefore, is how to maintain a true and united nation. The heartless and mindless killing and maiming made the doctor in *Season of Anomy* wonder whether the country will hold together. In addition, once the centre cannot hold together, there is bound to be anarchy-conflict. Moreover, the result of tribalism is power conflict. The aftermath of the struggle or quest by the different tribes to run the affairs of the nation is violent conflict. The power conflicts (military coups) in Nigeria when Soyinka wrote *Season of Anomy* affect the writers' mood. The conflicts that wrought great bloodshed explain the grim mood of Soyinka. The brutal killings, military dictatorship and the suspension of normal democratic process manifest in *The Man Died* and *Season of Anomy*. Citizens were victimized and also deprived of all rights. Soyinka, the human rights activist is a victim of this system. He was arrested and incarcerated without trial.

Soyinka also gave gory details of the prison condition in *The Man Died* and reflects same in *Season of Anomy* where the inmates undergo a similar dehumanising condition. While the two soldiers who committed murder were regarded as important prisoners, (privileged class) detained Ibos encountered the most harrowing experience one could imagine. For instance, detained Ibos in *The Man Died* defecated in pails, even in the daytime and they had no chance of cleaning up. Moreover, they were

served in shallow aluminium plates, and these bowls were often slid under the iron doors. Nevertheless, the NNDP officials, whom Soyinka referred to as sartorially privileged and lords of the prison, lived comfortably. They had bathrooms, toilets, sinks and a lounging place. This comparison indicates the disparity and injustice perpetrated by the government. Such disparity and injustice often engender class conflict between the oppressor (the perpetrator of injustice) and the oppressed. Accordingly, Soyinka stated in the text that someone must speak, someone must protest the criminality. Furthermore, the class conflict between the prisoners and government representatives is obvious in *The Man Died* when the Ibos rejected their meals for the day. The prison governor said that it was an act of conspiracy and rebellion, which should be nipped in the bud. Soyinka's bitter experiences in the prison and his encounter with oppression of the marginalised manifest in *Season of Anomy*. Soyinka decries the use of force by the cartel to suppress the progressive.

The ploy by incumbent leaders to remain or stay in office forever is a contentious issue in *The Man Died*. It was a controversial problem that plunges the country into chaos. Fajuyi's revelation to Soyinka is crucial in the present discussion. He revealed that "...people never admit it to themselves when their usefulness is over. The politicians want to stay on for ever so they plunge the country into chaos". (Soyinka: *The Man Died*: 139) The plan is to get judges to adjourn election petitions and make the public believe that the cases had been overtaken by events. The aftermath of this act is power conflict, chaos, murder arson and rape. This desire by incumbents to keep power is portrayed in *Season of Anomy*. The cartel in *Season of Anomy* strongly desires to perpetuate its tenure which plunges the country into serious political conflict between the progressives and the reactionaries. *The Man Died*

addresses the marginalised, the ordinary citizens who do not enjoy the privileges of the power. Jones (1988) agrees that ‘the book is a first step towards unseating of such a class’ (Jones: 19). It is this privileged class that Ofeyi’s group strives to unseat in *Season of Anomy*.

Again, Ofeyi and the Dentist in *Season of Anomy* are strongly opposed to the insensitive massacre recounted in *The Man Died*. They are opposed to the cartel’s control of the war machine and to Biafran secession. They strongly support a united Nigeria run by men of proven integrity. Their quest is also to recover whatever has been seized from the society by the political power (cartel); they are fighting the new brand of men who have usurped political power in post-independence Africa. These men came into control with the rise of military dictatorship and abolished democratic principles. The cartel is therefore an alliance of civilian and military dictators. It is characterized by the bloody trail that the men leave behind. Their humanity has been overtaken by the cannibalistic blood lust. The evil genius behind this power syndicate is Chief Batoki who represents the Western arm of the cartel. He often sows bullets, not grain. This alliance of corrupt militarism and rapacious mafia lacks all human qualities. Nothing short of anomy, political conflict and suppression can result from two opposing camps. The conflict is compounded when none is willing to shift grounds. The Dentist, for example, has no alternative to resolve the crisis but violence means. Ofeyi, though not in support of violence, will not pitch his camp with the cartel. Ofeyi and the Dentist disagree with what Soyinka mirrors as:

Bloated, ignorant armies hanging onto power until they drop like rotten fruit, a conspiracy of power-besotted exploiters across national boundaries,” (Soyinka: *Season of Anomy*: 100).

To this end, harnessing the latent strength of the masses is what Soyinka thinks is the best way out for the less privileged folk. Deposing the tyrannical rulers is Soyinka's resolve, and seeking the power to destroy them is fulfilling a moral task. A system that denies one justice or violates human rights with impunity is often bedevilled by class conflict between the oppressed and the oppressor. The evil that results becomes an organic force that the marginalised must vehemently resist. It is not only right but a compelling duty to resist such evil. In addition, where one is compelled to resist any evil, the result is chaos and conflict. An attempt by Soyinka to resist this evil-injustice and genocide- inevitably culminates in this conflict.

Again, class conflict may result in psychological conflict that is, the struggle within the oppressed individual to survive the oppressive system. The determination to survive the oppression empowers the less-privileged ones. At the maximum security prison where all lines of contact were cut, Soyinka realizes that he is at the mercy of the state propaganda machines. Therefore, he becomes 'obsessed with finding a means of renewing that contact. The conflict or the dual condition of Soyinka's mind is reflected in the following lines:

I watched, waited and schemed. My mind revolved a hundred schemes, scanned each warder, anatomized the trusty... delved into the soul of each inmate looking for the flash of collaborative recognition...my mind was racing when the chance finally came, a mere tantalizing flash of opportunity I managed to arrest that flash and make it serve.(*The Man Died* :142)

What the quotation suggests is that, once the suppressed person is trapped in a conflicting situation, he or she often struggles to free himself of his shackles. It is incumbent on the victim to either scheme his way out or confront the situation violently. Soyinka's mind in *The Man Died* revolved around a hundred schemes. 'His note took wings and flew into hope famished hands.' (*The Man Died*:143) At last, some newspapers found the courage to print his words.

Coming to Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, it examines the question of political power or power tussle. There is the struggle or quest by the Osa Descendant Union to install their choice-Egbo. The union sends a representation to urge Egbo to ascend the throne. They are 'bitten by the bug of an enlightened ruler'. Accepting this offer means relinquishing his position in the foreign office. The tussle for power, in this case, involves a group (the Osa union). The desire by this union to have Egbo occupy that position supports the researcher's opinion on power tussle. The quest in this instance is not personal, but a group or an association's quest to sponsor a candidate. The Osa union does this by urging Egbo to ascend the throne. Here, a union or group is struggling for power on behalf of an individual. In this instance, Soyinka reveals the political conflict between educated elites represented by Egbo and the uneducated rulers, the older generation (represented by Egbo's grandfather).

Furthermore, as Egbo makes the pilgrimage up the creeks, Soyinka reveals the quest by the individual for a desirable political power. To Soyinka, the individual should not aspire to leadership because of the immense power, wealth or sensual pleasure as seen in the leadership of Creeks. Unlike other inordinately ambitious leaders, who seek leadership positions because of the trappings of power, Egbo hesitates to avail himself of the offer by the union on moral grounds. Soyinka,

therefore, challenges opportunists who often use their position to enjoy all these trappings of power thereby oppressing the weaker folk. In essence, the issue of morality should be a strong determinant for the individual who aspires to accept a leadership role. The political conflict is between the interpreters and those in power. The young generation of interpreters includes Egbo, Sagoe, Dehinwa, Sekoni and Bamidele. This group has the dream of transforming the society. Sekoni's dream, for example, is to transform the society through technological innovation. However, the other privileged class made up of ministers, politicians like chief Winsala and other VIPs, annuls the dreams of the interpreters. It is a conflict between the visionary young generation and those who merely pursue their selfish interests against the collective advantage and progress of the nation. Sekoni's power plant at Ijoha is for the progress of the community, but the chairman calls it junk even before it was tested.

The oppression of the marginalised in this case takes the form of relegation. The chairman threatens Sekoni with relegation by assigning him to incongruous tasks like signing letters, processing applications for leave and so on. Soyinka demonstrates that those in power would not hesitate to frustrate anyone who stands in the way of their greedy schemes. The chairman suppresses Sekoni by bringing the so-called expert to kill his dream and this act results in political conflict between the intellectual and the ruling class. In addition, there is a similar conflict between Sagoe, the journalist, and the chairman. Sagoe strongly desires to transform the society by exposing corrupt leaders who engage in crooked deals. But, he suffers the same fate as Sekoni when the editor refuses to publish his articles. This is another ploy by the selfish group to suppress the young visionary interpreter. In his book entitled *The*

*Politics of Wole Soyinka* Adeniran thinks that when the individual's will is crushed, the individual becomes frustrated. He maintains that:

Sekoni's will is crushed, he is frustrated ...the suppression of individual will leads to Sekoni's untimely death...and to the death of other great ideas that could transform Nigeria technologically (Adeniran:150).

Hence, attempts by the interpreters to expose the ills of the oligarchy culminate in class conflict. It is interesting to note the frightening extent to which this privileged group goes in frustrating social change and initiative. The conflict, in this instance is between the individual and the state. The individual, represented by Sekoni and Sagoe, struggles for a better living condition. The conflict is between the ruling elite and the young disillusioned visionary graduates who had hopes. Nigerians have hopes in the elite but the hopes are shattered because the elite have failed to fulfil their promise of creating an egalitarian society. There is a division between the interpreters and the ruling class which frustrates the dreams of these progressive Nigerians. As earlier stated, Sagoe's write up is most incisive. This is similar to the method adopted by the intellectual Ofeyi who also uses education to stir up a dangerous awareness in the people in *Season of Anomy*.

From another dimension, Soyinka pictures a typical African society in *Isara*. The society is bedevilled by political conflict and the dispute that often ensues when a throne is vacant. The quest for power and position of the king sometimes leads to endless wars among the different contenders for power. Soyinka portrays African society in search of a leader. We are shown a society that selects its ruler based on origin and not merit or credibility. One of the credentials of the prospective or

potential king is whether the contender has the royal blood running in his veins. The question is whether his family is a branch of the aristocratic lineage or a member of the royal family. The contest for power is usually between members of the royal family, who consider themselves as the ruling caste and others who do not fall within this royal clan. Wole Soyinka's *Isara* (1989), though autobiographical is a more imaginative realization of actual experiences. Soyinka says that his 'decision not to continue with real names as in *Ake* is to eliminate all pretence to factual experience' (*Isara*; viii). Political tussle in *Isara* is over the throne of Isara, which is split into two factions – Jagun and Olisa. Each of these factions wants to produce another Odemo (traditional ruler) of Isara. Followers of Jagun strive to halt those who think that the throne of Isara is their father's. Soyinka suggests that power should not be monopolized or retained by a particular lineage. Soyinka tries to break the custom that perpetuates a particular family in power.

The division over the selection of the Oba culminates in a series of violent battles. Those who want a change represent the new breed and they struggle to ensure that an enlightened person with a definite vision occupies the seat. But Olisa and his people cannot imagine a 'lagosian' king sitting on the throne. Soyinka does not support violence for settling any conflict or dispute hence he allows a peaceful resolution. The only peaceful means is to allow the people decide who rules. The violence that Soyinka denounces in *The Man Died* and *Season of Anomy* is echoed in *Isara*. The seemingly unresolved power conflict was later resolved through a simple but open election.

Soyinka's reflection of two different groups, with varied opinions on how to settle disputes, is a deliberate artistic device. Each of the methods of resolving the



power conflict is explored. The violence means is fully exploited at the initial stage before the open election. Soyinka presents the two means in order to allow for a choice. The second option (open election) which is finally adopted is more suitable than the first one. Peaceful settlement of disputes through a democratic process is what Soyinka earnestly yearns for. The zeal with which the people search for another Odemo reveals that many parties are interested in power. The burning desire and zeal exhibited by the king makers reflect how Olisa's fellow chiefs are so fanatical about installing their choice. This enthusiasm demonstrated by the strong contenders for leadership reveals man's instinct for leadership position. In essence, it is the zeal or the urge to hold power that portrays man's quest for authority.

### **3.2 EMPOWERMENT IN SOYINKA'S WORKS**

In *Season of Anomy* Ofeyi empowers the Aiyero community that he wants to engage in ending oppression. The forces of progress represented by Ofeyi, Iriyise and the dentist embark on a mission of empowering the citizens of Aiyero. The process entails educating the people using art. It is an enlightenment program aimed at creating the awareness in the rural community of the need to bring about a positive change. The oppressive ruling cartel must be displaced. The first section of *Season of Anomy* suggests the sowing of the idea which is to grow and spread its roots throughout the entire country. This is the beginning of the attempt to infiltrate the country with the Aiyero ideal of moral and spiritual purity. Moreover, in the process of sowing the seeds of discontent and disseminating the Aiyero ideal, Ofeyi and Iriyise, through the various enlightenment programmes, empower the people. The second section also concentrates on the evangelizing activities. The cartel (the

powerful authority) now becomes uneasy and attacks the instigators (Ofeyi and the Dentist). Thus the journey- motif (evangelism) in *Season of Anomy* is quite revealing. Ofeyi and his cohorts are always on the move spreading the gospel of the Aiyero ideal. Most of the songs composed by Ofeyi during his campaign are powerful tools for empowering the people. He uses the songs to educate the community on the activities of the cartel. The following lines buttress our point.

What is the might of the cocoa farmer

matchet and hoe!

What is the cure for weed and nettles uproot entire.

Root out the climbers and rotten creepers. ( *Season of Anomy*:60 )

Ofeyi's campaign and crusade are aimed at empowering the Aiyero community. His mission is to create the awareness in the people of the need to undermine the cartel. Their vision is to so empower the community as to stir the consciousness in them. What they advocate is a drastic action to remove the decayed portion (cartel) of the society.

Moreover, the transformation of one of Ofeyi's companions (Iriyise) from a night-club girl to one of the society's moral agents is quite interesting. Her attraction to Aiyero during her first visit suggests her moral idealism. The forces (Ofeyi, Iriyise, Dentist) dedicated to bring about a positive change undergo this process of transformation. The abduction of Iriyise and subsequent quest in search for her are important events. Ofeyi embarks on a journey that is metaphorical. Like most quest tales, the traveller gradually becomes conscious of events. The more aware the traveller is the better. The journey is of great significance in empowering the forces of change. According to Ofeyi

... every man feels the need for himself the enormity of what is happening, of the time which it is happening...I realise that the search would immerse me in the meaning of the event, lead me to a new understanding of history (*Season of Anomy*: 218)

Ofeyi and Zaccheus travel through a very harsh, arid, barren landscape of disease, death and devastation. They pass through Hades (mortuary), see the harrowing sight of bodies in drawers. Temoko prison is equally a terrible sight to behold. As Ofeyi with his companion comes to realisation of this dehumanization and brutalization, they become determined to end man's growing bestiality. The metaphorical journey or quest is significant in empowering the progressives who are now aware of the dictatorial methods of those that are in power. They have therefore realised the need to bring about a change, and they pursue it vigorously. The survival of the progressive in the heat of the conflict seems to suggest that there is a ray of hope for the marginalized who move from the realms of death back to life.

In any conflict situation, Soyinka believes in the potential strength of the oppressed- the disadvantaged folk. There is that reassuring strength as he listens to the Ibo prisoners sing in *The Man Died*. Soyinka's documentation of his encounters with other suffering prisoners is deliberate. Such encounters often empower or strengthen the bond of the less privileged. In essence all the suppressed individuals in any conflict situation draw strength from one another and from such encounters. Members of this class often have a common experience which gives them the confidence to resist oppression perpetrated by the rulers. Soyinka thinks that the oppressed class are victims of an unjust system, and the restoration of justice should be the target of all the oppressed people. Soyinka agrees that:

Even among the lowlier servants of power there are those altruistic hounds of justice who, conscious of the evils of the system in which they are trapped, engage in surreptitious acts of decency and mercy and even support opposition to the regime. In alliance of such people lies hope for the revolutionary change, to which I have become more than ever dedicated. (*The Man Died* 12).

The empowerment process in *The Man Died* is similar to what is revealed in *Season of Anomy*. Just like Ofeyi seeks to empower the less privileged (through art), Soyinka equally increases the awareness of the oppressed by publicizing their plight. The Aiyero community that Ofeyi educates is the Nigerian society in *The Man Died*. The text is a move towards the dethronement of terror. Soyinka gives detailed reports of the prison condition and the inhuman killings such as the pregnant woman. All these details are given to strengthen the oppressed. These are steps taken by Soyinka to empower the readers.

The interpreters in *The Interpreters* have all the empowerment to effect a positive change; they are all university graduates and they are enlightened. The sharp intellects are fully aware of the prevalence of corruption, materialism, social inequality and injustice. They are equally conscious of the fact that all these social ills set the nation backward. They have the ability to exercise assertiveness in their decision to expose the ills of the society through their art work. We admire Sagoe's concern for truth and justice which make him champion Sekoni's cause when the latter is brutally treated by his employers. Sagoe demonstrates his ability of positive thinking to make a change when he registers his disgust at attempts by his boss and the proprietor of another newspaper to suppress the truth. Sagoe is empowered to

pursue the cause for justice, but he lacks the courage to follow up matters to a logical conclusion. Soyinka is disappointed at the inactiveness of the intellectuals in post independence Nigeria. Morrison adds that

As intellectuals and artists, the young protagonists of *The Interpreters* should harness the resources of their knowledge to seek the way ...for floundering members of their chaotic society to follow. Sagoe, Egbo and Kola are not able to do so because they are divided selves out of touch with the deepest resources of their beings ( 61)

But Sekoni is an accomplished artist. He is courageous, determined not to compromise his principles and refuses to accommodate the reactionary elements. Sekoni's art work and poetic language are meant to inform and educate the oppressed. He takes to sculpture when he returns from the holy land and also creates an object which is a symbol of power and strength. Sekoni uses a language that communicates this power. "Sekoni's wrestler is... a symbol of struggle and...of a grim determination to conquer in the struggle". (Palmer: 20) Sekoni had the perseverance to pursue his aspiration. Both Sekoni and his wrestler are symbolic of the struggle in which the generation is involved.

In *Isara*, Soyinka is on the side of those who are not of the aristocratic lineage (followers of Jagun). Those who do not fall within the ruling caste (royal family) have realised that leadership should not be monopolised by a few. They are fully aware of their rights as citizens. Everybody should be given equal opportunity to rule. The struggle to produce another Odemo involves the Jagun faction that has developed confidence in their own capabilities to dethrone Olisa. Members of the Jagun faction are so assertive in their decision not to allow the perpetration of Olisa in power. The

ability of Jagun faction to make a change in the polity is an indication of its increasing political strength (empowerment). They are empowered by their rights to vote and be voted for. The desired change can be actualised if the marginalised are mobilised into political consciousness to vote for right leaders.

Moreover, Wole Soyinka is one of the African writers who have enlarged the sphere of the female folk. Women are not depicted as appendages in his prose. The new woman comes to the fore in Soyinka's works. The oppressive aspect of traditional marriage that does not grant equality to the female sex is not predominant in his prose. A few examples will suffice. Mrs Faseyi, in *The Interpreters*, is the only wife of her husband and Chief Batoki, in *Season of Anomy*, takes one wife. The use of the modern title (Mrs.) for these women and a similar title (Mr.) to address their husbands shows that men and women are counterparts.

Furthermore, the growth of the women's Union, in *Ake*, marks the period of transition from colonial consciousness to liberation politics. Soyinka systematically links 'personal growth of consciousness to political changes in class and patriarchal assumptions' (Lindeborg:56). The women's uprising against colonial government, and their challenge to patriarchal and secular power invested in the Alake dominate the last four chapters of the text. As the boundaries of the women's gatherings expand from health and literacy classes to political homecoming festival, they enter Abeokuta Grammar School to challenge the Alake in his carefully demarcated boundaries. They strip the patriarch of his authority and strip the Ogboni (in whom repose the real power of king and the land) of his clothes. The Women's Movement is a political demonstration that projects them towards political action challenging societal norms.

In addition, the communal march of the women reminds one of the March by women to the police station in Ousmane's *God's Bits of wood*. Such marches, as reflected by these authors are moves taken by women in conflict situations to demand for their rights. The women's march in *Ake* is a movement of political transition, which is similar to what is reflected in *God's Bits of wood*. The communal action of the women's Union in these texts reflects the birth of liberation movements in the societies that the writers portray Ruth H. Lindeborg agrees that

Women's uprising gives birth to the struggle for nationhood and stands at the centre of being for both Soyinka and Nigeria as a free state. Certainly the women disrupt colonial power... (Lindeborg: "Is this Guerilla Warfare":57).

By marching to the road next to the drill grounds and mimicking the armed police's action, these women succeed in sending the military authority back to their barracks. The women's participation in the political emancipation of Nigeria is what Soyinka portrays in this regard.

Thus, we are exposed to the impressive function of women in the fight for liberation of Africa from Britain. Soyinka is very much aware of the power that the female folk exert in the society. *Ake* is a classic example of women's struggle for emancipation. The Egba women refuse to accept the traditional women's role of home front. Instead of staying at home, the women come out to fight for their political rights. The political activity of these women is illustrative of the changing role of the female folk in a patriarchal society. Such daring women are equally represented in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*. Iriyise, in *Season of Anomy* takes an enviable position. She is one of the leading figures in the conflict between the progressives and the

reactionaries. The male characters - Ofeyi and the Dentist recognize her worth in their mission. Hence, they search for her when the cartel kidnaps her. The search for Iriyise is one of Soyinka's subject matters in *Season of Anomy*. Ofeyi refuses to abandon her because he is aware of her importance in educating the public on the corrupt activities of the cartel. Her function is not limited to domestic chores of caring for the home. Indeed, she is one of the 'men'. The role she plays is as important as that of the male characters. Iriyise says that she could do 'better than personal appearances at the homes of fat corporation swine' (*Season of Anomy*: 7). She is capable of speaking up being strident and assertive without effort. Soyinka's portrayal of a courageous and daring female character is interesting in this regard.

Iriyise's empowerment could be seen in her transformation from a club girl to a moral agent. She is a public relations woman and plays dynamic positive role in the conflict between the cartel and the progressive: she is strong and equally invested with the courage to be politically relevant and she is a tool for social change. It is in this respect that Kolawole submits that Soyinka 'carves a positive future role for Iriyise as regards a dynamic social change' (Kolawole:60). Iriyise is 'a woman who would reveal within her person, a vision of the unattainable' (*Season of Anomy*:80). Her disposition is such that all the male characters hold her in high esteem. As the cartel recognizes her power and political relevance and abducts her, Ofeyi is astonished at her transformation and unending capacity to learn. From merely singing at night clubs, we watch with admiration how she burgeons in unforeseeable direction. Thus,

She could even tell blight on the young shoot, apart from mere scorching by the sun. Her fingers spliced wounded saplings with the



ease of a natural healer. Her presence, the women boasted inspired the rains (80).

Iriyise orders Zaccheus who obeys her instructions by instantly changing his position. Similarly, we are impressed by Biye's will power. She leaves her husband's house and becomes so powerful in her father's 'empire'. She is strong and so assertive that her father entrusts her with much. Just like Iriyise, she is seen to be politically relevant. She manages public affairs as she advises Ofeyi not to associate with social failures. In this case, she could be described as a public affairs analyst when she highlights the repercussion of Ofeyi's moves. Mrs Batoki is another female character that is positively projected. She seeks transformation from limited or restricted position to a noble and respectable one. Thus, she struggles to be fulfilled and eventually, she has the pride of accomplishment as she makes her husband realize that she is not a slave. In essence, she is not just an appendage, but a counterpart to her husband. We admire her courage when she strives to take control of the situation. Her awareness of her rights as a wife emboldens and equally empowers her to mention all her qualities to Mr. Batoki in her words

I am no one's slave here. I wasn't brought in settlement of any debt and I am not a bastard. I didn't come here to pay off my people, you took me from the home of the kings. My birth title is Omofayiwa, Omofolasere, Mosunmoye, the daughter of Asiwaju Ibode- I am no two penny commoner, not to be trampled under by the man. (*Season of Anomy*:55)

In a similar vein, Soyinka's *The Interpreters* has a sizeable number of bold and confident female characters such as Dehinwa and Monica. These female characters

represent the new breed of educated African women and not the timid subservient ones. For instance, Dehinwa's domineering control over Sagoe is significant in the current discourse. In addition, Sagoe always listens to her views and respects her opinion. Soyinka demonstrates that even in a man's world of the 1970's and 80's, Male and female should complement each other. Most of Soyinka's female characters are educated and modern in their views, and these assets have enabled them to widen their knowledge. It is evident that the educated and modern Dehinwa is on a par with the interpreters. The western ideology, which was introduced by imperialism, has ironically uplifted womanhood. Dehinwa takes up more challenging roles like driving Sagoe home in the night. She is often in the company of other male characters and does not take up traditional women roles like cooking and taking care of the home. She assumes roles that are similar to the ones assumed by Iriyise in *Season of Anomy*. The women's exposure to urbanization implies that they have attained some form of social status. This group of academically emancipated women now poses a great threat to the men who have always considered themselves as superior to the women.

Soyinka is thus committed to the empowerment of the marginalised in the political conflict. Finally, it has to be borne in mind that Soyinka gave women strength of character and bold and forward-looking roles in the 1970's at a time when feminism was still in its early developmental stages.

### **3.3 POLITICAL AND CLASS CONFLICT IN OUSMANE'S WORKS**

Ousmane's works are far from being mere historical documentation. He constitutes socio-economic history through a fictional world informed by his African experience and ideology. Rather than highlighting social problems in isolation, he emphasizes historical

landmarks and a view of history in the perspective of conflict and class struggle, (Adebayo:58).

The conflicts in Ousmane's novels are economic and political as we witness characters struggling for political rights and better living conditions. Ousmane's characters are designed and worked upon (empowered) in order to prove a definite economic postulation. His characters often fall into two compartments of progressives and reactionaries. While the progressives, the 'have nots', are bent on bringing about positive changes, the reactionaries, 'the haves', struggle to retain power. Adebayo believes that there is no middle position, a character is either committed or not. The young protagonists in Ousmane's works are the ones who play the messianic role of delivering their people from colonial bondage. They are usually placed in conflicting situations in which they confront forces of reaction in their bid to liberate the masses. For instance, Bakayoko and other progressives in *God's Bits of Wood* battle against reactionary forces to liberate the rail workers from the shackles of colonial domination.

Sembene Ousmane's personal experience is to a certain extent reflected in most of his works. His first novel *The Black Docker* portrays his personal experience. It was as a docker that he published *God's Bits of Wood*. His leaning towards socialism is equally mirrored in his works. Being a trade union leader and having played an active role in several workers' strikes, Ousmane depicts power conflict between the deprived workers and the Whites. The class conflict is between the employers and the employees. While the employers are bent on retaining power, the employees struggle for the reverse - bridging the old feudal network. Through the actions of the workers on strike, Ousmane condemns racial oppression, injustice and

discrimination connected with colonial rule. Thus, inspired by the historic 1947 strike embarked upon by the workers on the Dakar Niger railway, Ousmane projects the interplay between political, economic and social factors in *God's Bits of Wood*. The major thrust of the work is economic exploitation and physical violence. It was the economic exploitation, injustice, and violence against the blacks by the colonial overlords that gave rise to the 1947 strike and the conflict between the colonizer and the colonized, the state and the people and the rich and the poor.

Again, Ousmane's background as a strong member of the workers' Union in his days is manifested greatly in *God's Bits of Wood*. Ousmane took part in the construction workers' strike that paralyzed the colonial economy. This strike ushered in the nationalist struggle in Francophone Africa in the 1940's. It is quite revealing therefore, that one of Ousmane's protagonists in *God's Bits of Wood*, Bakayoko, is the leader of the Union of workers. Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* is therefore a classic example of power conflict between the white man and the Blackman. The striking railway workers, the black folk agitate to regain control of their fatherland. It is a political protest against colonial rule. The study examines conflict and struggle for independence by Africans from France. The strike motif is established from the outset. The Africans have a strong and determined Union to back up their activity or struggle for a better living condition. The novel describes the resiliency of the masses as they face a management that is determined to perpetuate its domination and dehumanisation. Aire adds that:

The author who was himself a participant uses this situation as a device for educating the masses, from the children to the most reactionary of

the elders teaching them to take their destiny in their hands.( Aire:  
*Modern Language Studies:77*)

Furthermore, in every political conflict, there is often a point of disagreement between the parties involved. The workers in this case disagree with the white overloads over wages and conditions of service. In other words, there should be a difference between the separate groups, and failure to resolve the difference engenders conflict and suppression of the weaker folks. To the struggling and agitating black folks, it is either the conditions given to the whites are met or there will be a total strike. The white man's reluctance to give the rail workers their dues marks the beginning of conflict.

The conflict also revolves around racial confrontation involving the workers and the white authorities. Ousmane chooses characters like Bakayoko and the heroic Ramatoulaye to generate such passion and anger in the workers that could lead to the political conflict between the employer and the employee. The tension is between labour and capital, between the forces of progress and those of reaction. In addition, the powerful presentation and picturesque description of the railway junction of Thies are the results of the colonialists' exploitation.

Hovels. A few rickety shacks... walls of bamboo or millet stalks ... rotten fences. Thies... where all the rot of the city has gathered-stakes and crossties, locomotive wheels, rusty shelf... old mattress springs ... constantly hungry, naked children, with sunken chests and swollen bellies, argued with the vultures.... (Ousmane: *God's Bits of Wood: 1*)

The black folks of Dakar in Ousmane's novel are subjected to this degradation. The unpleasant experience is the strong unifying factor that brings the striking workers

under one strong union. What Ousmane presents is a determined people who would not be cowed into submission. The white authorities adopt several means to suppress the blacks. The white man's first expedient is to cut off all necessary supplies. For instance, the black man is deprived of water and food. Suppression of the blacks takes the form of arbitrary arrest and detention without trial. A case in point is the arrest of Fa Keita. The conflict between the employers and the employees degenerates into a violent one with the ill-treatment, brutalization, incarceration and killing of the black workers. While the white man's agents, the militiamen fight to perpetuate colonial rule, the striking black people are determined to break that monopoly of power.

The tension between the different existential poles is further heightened by the fact that all the blacks-the old and young including the women-agitate for better living conditions. While the young press for improved conditions of service, the old also have cause to join the strike. They ask for their pension. Many retirees, among whom are Samba and Abdoulaye, die without reaping the fruit of their labour. The surviving retirees therefore resolve to take what rightly belongs to them. Ousmane brings together a people who share the same feelings, opinions, aims and hopes. It is this common experience that makes the deprived workers take a unanimous position to stand against the whites. These workers would not give up under the most trying conditions. They decline to give in except on their own terms. They strongly disagree with the terms offered by the insensitive colonial administration. They rise up against a system of administration that perpetuates injustice and maintains an exploitative status quo. *God's Bits of Wood* synthesizes the struggles and hopes of the black worker and the black man's struggle. The black man's dogged pursuit of his rights causes the rift between the white and the black. Tension and power conflict are the

by-products of this struggle. The use of militiamen and soldiers by the colonial power to suppress the less privileged is a ploy adopted by those in positions of power to intimidate and kill the will of the individual struggling for a change in the society.

Eustace Palmer is of the view that:

The society Ousmane presents in *God's Bits of Wood* is a society going through political, social and economic evolution. The railway itself with its tremendous speed and power is both symbol and agent of change. (193)

The rise of the railway is connected with the drive toward political liberation. The railway, which is a symbol of change, is what brings this conscious new breed of men and women together. There is great awareness for change of power amongst the deprived workers. What Ousmane presents is a new breed of men who plan a strike without consulting the elders. There is bound to be power conflict in any society where the politically and economically deprived persons gain awareness and rise up in revolt. The workers are so politically aware that they are scornful of the feudal order. This new breed of men is so conscious politically that the combined forces of the militiamen and soldiers cannot suppress their will. The urge for liberation is spearheaded by this association of rail workers. In their desperate bid to bring about the much desired change, they force every machine within the domain to a halt.

Furthermore, Ousmane turns his attention on the rupture between the black workers and the collaborators. These collaborators, represented by the Imam and Elhaji Mabique, are the agents of the French Imperialists. These intermediaries are presented as ridiculous figures and stooges who combine forces with the imperialists to perpetuate the white man's tenure. The Imam in *God's Bits of Wood* finds

theological reasons to justify the perpetuation of colonial exploitation. The black workers strongly disagree with these collaborators. They consider them as stooges who are often in league with the white authorities. This group of unpatriotic opportunistic Africans has taken a position against the less privileged ones. While the African bourgeoisie are bent on perpetuating the Whiteman's rule by giving the white administration their unalloyed support, the deprived Africans have also resolved to cause a political change. The two are therefore at variance. The black workers strongly deplore the unscrupulous acts of these middlemen. The oppressed blacks-Ramatoulaye, N'deye Touti and Tiemako among others, rise up against the unpatriotic blacks whom Ramatoulaye calls fornicators.

To this end, the power conflict is twofold. The less privileged blacks fight to end colonialism and they are also against the collaborators. They are bent on deposing the colonialists and these collaborators. This strong determination informs the killing of Mabigué's ram by Ramatoulaye. The bold step taken by Ramatoulaye is significant. It is a challenge to the authorities of the white man and his stooge. The slaughter of the ram that constitutes another strand of contradiction wreaks a violent conflict between the two opposing parties. It also demonstrates the awareness of the blacks of political and social change in Francophone Africa. Through this conflict, Ousmane proves his commitment to emancipating those blacks disenfranchised and marginalized in their own father-land. These disenfranchised Africans who yearn for better living conditions, equal rights and political emancipation have to contend with different forms of suppression. Sacrifices must be made in any conflict. In some cases supreme sacrifices are made as typified in *God's Bits of Wood*. Many of the leading figures give up their lives in the struggle for a just and egalitarian society. For



instance, Doudou, the secretary of the workers' Union and Penda, the warrior, die in the conflict. Many blacks are thrown into dungeons where they are physically dehumanized. The arrest of Fa Kieta and his subsequent incarceration with many blacks are also quite significant in the conflict. The loss of lives recorded in the text is the inevitable price to be paid for the dignity of labour.

Again, despite all the attempts by the forces of oppression to suppress the will of the less privileged, the striking workers remain steadfast, determined and resolute. The Union leaders urge them to stand firm and go on with the struggle until a new life is born out of their present misery. An important milestone in the conflict is reached when the Governor-general addresses the black workers on their rights. Therefore, *God's Bits of Wood* is an example of socialist form of literature, which is on the side of the people. It is a people's literature that:

Creates positive heroes from among the working people, positive heroes who would embody the spirit of struggle and resistance against exploitation and naked robbery (N'gugi Wa Thiongo:24).

Furthermore, a deep understanding of the class struggle in Africa has always inspired Ousmane. His post independence novel, *Xala* is aimed at ending the existing class disparities. The class conflict is between the bourgeois class and the destitute. The text is designed to ensure the submission of the comprador bourgeoisie to the poor. The power conflict is between those in power, the vestiges of colonial regime, and the destitute. Ousmane turns his attention to the corruption, exploitation and decadence threatening the African society after the departure of the imperialists. *Xala* (1973) is a satire of the new and 'impotent' Senegalese bourgeoisie who appropriate virtually everything that belongs to the proletariat.

The post-independence era in Africa is an era of conflict between the neo-imperialists and the masses. There exists a very deep division between this class of indigenous African rulers, who are just agents of multinational companies, and the dispossessed. This group of Africans who are the intermediaries have collaborated with European powers to ensure the continued economic exploitation and suppression of the weaker folks. The native rulers make concerted efforts to take control of power from the colonial administration. Ousmane's *Xala* opens with the power conflict between the Senegalese and colonial administration. The aftermath of the ten years combat and conflict is noted thus:

The businessmen had met to mark the day with a celebration worth of the event. Never before in the history of Senegal has the chamber of commerce and industry been headed by an African. For the first time a Senegalese occupied the president's seat. It was their victory (*Xala*:1)

The enterprising men struggle to capture the bastion of the colonial power from their adversaries. The effort of this group of Africans is quite commendable as they are able to obtain a foothold in the wholesale trade and a stake in the administration of the banks. 'The new black bourgeoisie were engaged in a gruelling and sustained patriotic warfare which they have won at last' (Lar:8).

This economic and political freedom is however abused by the African comprador bourgeois. The focus on Elhaji, a representative of the African bourgeoisie, is worthy of note. The native rulers have betrayed their subjects as they are unable to minister to the needs of their fellow blacks. Elhaji's flamboyant and expensive lifestyle, maintained at the expense of the producers of the wealth, is the cause of the conflict between African bourgeoisie and the destitute. The first

challenge the bourgeois faces is the nagging presence of the beggar and his piercing voice. The all-pervasive presence of the beggar is one of the weapons used by Ousmane in the power conflict between the two contending groups.

Ousmane advocates divine intervention and natural justice, which are far more effective in bridging the gap between the two than physical combat. The psychological trauma to which the bourgeois is subjected marks a major landmark in this regard. Elhaji goes through the agonizing experience of choosing between his manhood, power or riches acquired at the expense of the downtrodden. Since Elhaji cherishes his manhood, he has to succumb to the most frustrating and dehumanising experience that would restore it. The scum of Dakar, the people he suppresses and dispossesses the ordinary beings must spit on him. Elhaji will strip himself naked while lepers fill their mouth with saliva and shoot adroitly at their victim. Only then can the conflict be resolved.

Therefore, Ousmane depicts power conflict between those in position of authority (privileged) and the less privileged that are being empowered. He reflects the activities of the African comprador bourgeoisies in post independence Africa. These bourgeoisies would go to very absurd and sometimes extraordinary lengths to perpetuate themselves in power. To retain his position (power) El Hadji, in Sembene Ousmane's *Xala*, dispossesses the poor. In his quest for power, he oppresses his driver and the beggars who represent the less privileged class.

*The Money Order and White Genesis* are two novellas first published in French in 1966 with an English translation in 1987. Ousmane outlines the conflicts in the post-independence Senegalese society in *The Money-Order* which portrays the emergence of a Western-style social class. He portrays a growing concern for the

marginalized blacks in the emerging capitalist state system. The author deliberately gives an account of life in the poverty-stricken area of Dakar. The issues of quest for power; control of power and desire by rulers to preserve their grip on power are portrayed in this work. Power conflict in *White Genesis* is between Guibril and Medoune. There is tussle for the position of village chief. In his bid for power, Medoune earnestly yearns for the execution of his brother so that he can claim that title (village chief). Another method employed by Medoune in his quest for power is by cloaking himself in his noble birth.

Moreover, Medoune is over ambitious; He is power drunk and so desperate that he plans the murder of his brother, Guibril. However, Medoune loses out in his fight for authority at the village square. Sembene Ousmane recommends truth and justice as prerequisite for the appointment of a ruler, and not social class. What takes place at the village square is power struggle; struggle to decide who controls Santhiu-Niaye. The quest for power is revealed through Medoune's moves to silence dissenting voices. Control of language during the discussions at the village square is crucial in the control of power. Any contender aspiring to control or hold power must prove himself to be the representative of the African tradition. The power seekers who contest for the authority of the village do this during their debates.

Similarly, Ousmane's collection of short stories, *Tribal scars* (1962) is an exposition of the power conflict between the colonialists and Africans, and another conflict between the African bourgeoisie and the deprived masses of the African continent. Ousmane portrays the process of colonial domination and recreates the struggle for independence by Africans. Some of the stories also evoke the post independence social and political climate. *Tribal Scars* is a disillusioned work.

Instead of enfranchising the dispossessed, independence led to the repressive hegemony of the bourgeoisie and the social domination of a stifling, patriarchal Islamic society. The struggle against colonialism was just the first step taken to restructure African society. The less privileged were disillusioned when the African bourgeoisie appropriated political power. In *Tribal Scars*, Ousmane depicts how the marginalised Africans express their disappointment with this political development. The theme of political betrayal is obvious in this regard.

The short story 'A Matter of Conscience' is a reflection of the great hope that the working class had in the nationalists during the struggle for self-rule. The tussle for power at the polls by Ibra shows the determination of the Africans to govern their nations. Ibra 'stormed the colonial fortress to obtain for the blacks equal wages with the whites' (*Tribal Scars*: 29). Here, Ousmane portrays the power conflict between the white overlords and the blacks. Ibra's success at the polls and the membership ticket that he obtains to the National Assembly both represent an important landmark in the lives of the black people. In the course of time, independence is declared.

However, the hopes that the Africans had were dashed because things changed completely. The colonialists who initially slammed the door in Ibra's face 'now welcomed him and the big bosses were delighted to see him at everyday reception' (*Tribal Scars*: 29). Ousmane explores how the African leaders take a position against their fellow blacks; he draws attention to the high hopes aroused by independence and the disillusioning experience of the less privileged blacks who are marginalised and oppressed. This situation culminates in tension and conflict between blacks and blacks. Conflict is now between black overlords and the downtrodden. The power conflict and tension heighten as Ibra acquires a villa and a car without paying a penny.

He now spends his holiday in France and leads a flamboyant life all at the expense of the workers. This is also a reflection of the lip service paid by African leaders to independence. The workers are left with no option but to demand for their political rights. Ousmane's 'A Matter of Conscience' reveals how workers are laid off and made to do overtime without an increase in rates even after independence. Since the workers, led by Malic, are aware of these rights, and they demand for them, class conflict between the African bourgeoisie and the masses is inevitable.

In the short story, there is political conflict between the progressives and reactionaries; the haves and the have nots'. The whites with African collaborators like Ibra are the reactionaries, while Malic and his black workers stand for the progressives. These separate compartments are in conflict as each group strives to safeguard its interests. The reactionaries try to play off the leader of the progressives against other progressives in order to get an unfair advantage. Ibra plays off Malic, the hero, against other workers. All the struggling workers in 'A Matter of Conscience' are fully aware that the petit bourgeois are only black outside- but inside they are just like the colonialists. They are therefore able to stand together like a union. There is a strong union of workers which is a device used by Ousmane to empower the masses. It is an effective means of mobilizing the workers into political action.

'The Promised Land' also reflects a similar conflict. However, it is a classic example of racial conflict; conflict between employer and employee; conflict between master and servant and protest against the discrimination and dehumanization of the blacks. Ousmane shows the extent to which the black servant is reduced. The image created is that of a suffering, molested and dehumanized African woman. Diouana,

the black servant is a victim of colonialism who suffers degradation in her fatherland and also experiences a bitter and agonizing moment in Paris. The themes of racial discrimination and class conflict are explored as Diouana is reminded of the colour of her skin and her race. The white children sing thus:

There's the Negress

There's the negress

Black as the darkest night (*Tribal Scars*: 95).

This persecution preys upon Diouana's mind in Paris. The white children's baiting causes a lot of psychological trauma, makes her realize that she is alone, and has nothing in common with the whites. At the centre of the deadlock between the master and servant is the fact that the black woman is reduced to a beast of burden made to do all sorts of menial tasks. Diouana ruminates over her situation and concludes that 'she was nothing but a useful object' (*Tribal Scar*: 97). She is a cook, chambermaid, nursemaid, cleaner and washerwoman among other things. Here, the theme of oppression is reflected. Diouana realizes that she has been chained like a slave. In protest, she gives her master a fiery look.

In addition, 'Love in Sandy Lane' is an allegorical tale dealing with power shift from the colonialists to the African bourgeoisie. The narrator makes the underlying conflict and tension between the community and an ex-colonial employee obvious. Elhadj Mar, the bourgeois is poles apart from the community. Elhadj has taken a position against the dispossessed by occupying the same seat vacated by the imperialists. Ousmane however provides a possible way to resolve the power conflict when a young man from the street and Kline, Elhaji's daughter, fall in love with each other. Nevertheless, the forces of repression and domination frustrate this relationship,

thereby making the union between the two parties complex. What is suggested here is that the hope the people had in independence is dashed. The Africans expect a renewed and a more united society but there is a turn towards neo-colonialism. Ousmane does not support the unexpressed love between the two people. He feels that:

It is the very inability of the people to articulate, to express their wishes and desires, to protest that cause them to allow themselves to be dispossessed and disenfranchised (Murphy: 49).

Ousmane is in support of confrontation and resistance as a way out of the subjugation of the dispossessed. It is a means of questioning the authority of the dominant class.

In *The Last of the Empire*, Ousmane is deeply concerned with the nature of the power in a one-party state. He condemns the personal nature and autocratic approach of Senghor's government. Ousmane focuses on the personalized rule and monarchical attitude towards power in the text. The venerable one, the head of state, uses his position and power to manipulate people around him in order to perpetuate his tenure. The novel depicts Ousmane's frustration with Senghor's regime. Ousmane frowns at the autocratic nature of Senghor and on his policy of continued dependence on the imperialists. Besides, all power within the state revolves round the Head of state. Mignane, like Senghor, rules the country on behalf of the former colonial powers. *The Last of the Empire* is a satire that is concerned with how the former colonial powers maintain their dominant position within their erstwhile colonies. Independence is a complete sham that merely camouflages the white man's perpetuating rape of Africa. Ousmane emphasizes the shady link between African bourgeoisie and former colonial powers. The ascension to independence by Senegal



has not ended France's domination of the country. The real government is not in Senegal (Africa) but Europe. The adviser to the Head of state is a European (Adolphe) who ensures that Europe maintains its hold politically and economically on Senegal. Ousmane is concerned with ridding Senegal of Senghor. It is only then that Senegal can claim true control of power over her nation.

In *The Last of the Empire*, Ousmane presents the Head of state as a political manipulator who assumes power and frustrates anybody that attempts to follow him up the ladder. Ousmane decries this overbearing attitude of African leaders after the departure of the imperialists. The

leadership predicament in the continent of Africa in post-colonial times is a problem of the post colonial African leaders and therefore should not be blamed on colonialism of the west. If an African leader is a free moral being that has a right to act rightly to bring peace and prosperity to his subjects, the point becomes clear that poor leadership tradition in Africa is a secretion of the African ruler or leader and therefore an African problem (Binebai: 113)

Mignane, in *The Last of the Empire*, is the archetype of an African leader drunk with power. Considering the nature of Mignane's government, one can classify him as a princely ruler. In this regard, the author explores the theme of lust for power or power control in post-colonial politics. Ousmane frowns at Senghor's thirst for power and reveals his desire to perpetuate his rule in Senegal. Mignane exerts so much power that the Prime Minister initially feels intimidated at the prospect of taking power and perceives Mignane's power in supernatural terms. However, Mignane's grip is not so strong as to forestall the power conflict that ensues in his absence. In addition, the

prime minister soon overcomes his fears to struggle for power. Ousmane reveals an African country governed by an oligarchy. He equally demonstrates attempts by pressure groups to halt this monopoly of power by a small group.

Ousmane's quest for a more patriotic and less autocratic ruler splits the cabinet into two political groups. There is conflict over who succeeds the missing Head of State. The power conflict is between the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance. Each of the rulers has his followers. The battle to succeed Mignane starts before the cabinet meeting and 'the prospect of a struggle between the two contenders hung like a storm on the horizon' (*The Last of the Empire*: 3). The sectarian spirit of the ministers is reflected in the text. The Minister of Finance challenges the constitution, which stipulates that the Prime Minister succeed the president. He claims that the country is not a piece of private property to be willed as the owner wishes. He feels that it is an abuse of power and despotism; Senegal is not an empire. Behind the minister's submissive adherence to monarchical rule, there is a deep-rooted resentment towards the president's despotic power. However, there is the other faction that considers the finance minister's moves as treachery. They think he is setting himself up against the government of Mignane, the despot.

Furthermore, the issue of power control is explored as an autocratic ruler (Mignane) creates a power vacuum when he suddenly goes missing. While some unelected technocrats (loyalists) struggle for his succession, others (Mamlat and Daouda) who are eager to take over power make frantic efforts to assume Mignane's position. The struggle between Daouda and Mamlat revolves around the question of caste and personality, which is often the case in a power conflict. The issue of the contender's lineage comes into play.

Ousmane as it is observed seeks to challenge the dominant discourses of the society. His writings are a vitriolic attack on the legitimising power of such discourses. He condemns the authority of certain oligarchy and equally shows his faith in the workers movement and the destitute where the people collectively struggle for an egalitarian society.

### **3.4 EMPOWERMENT IN OUSMANE'S PROSE**

The 1947 workers' strike in Dakar is largely the scenario in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*. Ousmane reminds us of the 1947 strike, and equally uses this strike to mobilize and empower the dispossessed black people into political consciousness. The strike is symbolic of the struggle of a people for equality; the ultimate goal is to bridge the gap between the employers and the employees.

Just like Ousmane, Bakayoko is a staunch member of the worker's union. He is able to mobilize the workers. Bakayoko therefore empowers the marginalised blacks by marshalling them into political awareness of their rights. The striking workers become so assertive in their decision that they do not return to work until the white overlords grant their requests. Bakayoko's speech at the Union office increases the political strength of the people who subsequently develop confidence in their capacities to end colonial rule. The urgency of his voice provokes the anger of the blacks and galvanizes them into action. The protest is to demonstrate the black man's strong disagreement with the forces of colonialism.

The ability to bring about a positive change demonstrated by the striking workers in *God's Bits of Wood* reveals that the blacks are sufficiently empowered to improve the lot of the less privileged. In addition, the marginalised blacks also demonstrate the ability to exercise control when they halt every machine until their

demands are met. The black workers are able to bring about change as the colonialists grant the dispossessed workers their freedom. Sembene Ousmane leaves no stone unturned in his empowerment of a whole people for political action. It is imperative that the young, the middle aged and the ageing including the womenfolk are fully mobilized to participate in the conflict that ushers in a new era of hope for the black workers. The exit of Dejean and Isnard, the directors of administration, is equally revealing since the blacks now decide what they want.

As we can see, Ousmane has succeeded in empowering the black folk by re-organizing and restructuring the African mind and psyche. He mobilizes the rail workers through his protagonists to demand for their rights. This enlightenment, in the end, brings the desired positive change in *God's Bits of Wood*. The class conflict between the employers and employees also suggests that the working class which is now empowered is the only hope for the continent. The success of any struggle depends on the leaders and workers who should be strong and fearless. Ousmane builds a myth around Bakayoko the courageous leader. He challenges the whites and lays down conditions for his people's return to work at the risk of his life. But the whole group must mass together and fight for their collective and individual human dignity. Ousmane emphasizes that these workers owe their victory to good leadership, solidarity, long-suffering and doggedness.

The message in *Xala* is obvious. The real power for liberation and power to forestall suppression rests in the hands of the oppressed persons. Ousmane's *Xala* is an example of natural justice or nemesis as demonstrated in the case of El Hadji. The solution to the injustice by oppressors like El Hadji is natural justice as portrayed in the text. As a result of his crime, he goes through an agonizing experience of

impotence (*Xala*). Isaac B. Lar writes that: “*Xala* is a symbolism for natural justice and social equity. ... The masses are the ultimate repository of real power” (24).

The empowerment of the masses is evident in this regard. The potential strength of the marginalised beggars is emphasised. These disadvantaged folks are mobilised into political awareness to participate in the conflict that brings hope to them. The poor had suffered the most alienation and they possess the means of bringing about a genuine and authentic liberation. Sembene Ousmane denounces the perpetration of injustice and the exploitative tendencies of the privileged class. Therefore:

The nexus of Sembene’s literary and filmic work is generally a critique of the conflictual relationships between ... the state and the people, men and women, the rich and the poor, and the elders and the youths ... his concerns are directed to universal involving tensions that are created by power relations (Gadjigo :4).

Just like the empowered workers in Ousmane’s *God’s Bits of Wood* the beggars in *Xala* are also determined to demand for their rights. In *God’s Bits of Wood*, it is workers’ strike, and in *Xala* we have beggars’ strike. And in both cases, the deprived people demonstrate assertiveness in their decision to get their freedom. The beggars are also mobilized into political awareness to bring about a positive change, to reverse the status quo. Elhaj, who represents the comprador bourgeoisie, must come down from the exalted position of power. Furthermore, Ousmane uses *Xala* (impotence) as a powerful tool of social resistance. The *Xala* causes so much Psychological depression and degradation to the rich (Elhaj); the author uses it to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. The beggars are conscious of Elhaj’s short comings, and this

awareness empowers them to take their rightful position. Hence, they authoritatively take over Elhaj's house and humiliate him right before his family. The bourgeois have built on the misfortunes of the ordinary people by robbing them of their property. However, with this conflict, the oppressed masses have proved that the capitalist class only occupy a temporary position of power. *Xala* is ...' a story of independence, of uprising and revolution by those who are oppressed against their oppressors.' (Josef:1)

In *The White Genesis*, Ousmane empowers the griot (Dethye Law) whom he sees as the chief dynamic element in the traditional African community of Santhiuj-Niaye. Even though the griot is of a lower status, he is the upholder of truth and justice in the face of moral and political corruption. Dethye Law speaks the truth by condemning Medoune's surreptitious moves 'and evil machinations to usurp power from his incestuous brother. It is Dethye's profession (though socially stigmatized) that accords him the important and influential position which invariably gives him the opportunity to have a say within the political and social circles of power. His profession grants him the access to and influence over those in power. As an orator and vehicle for the people's history and tradition, he is indispensable and his services remain priceless. Hence, people pay attention when he talks and they always respect his opinion. Armed with the aforementioned tools, Dethye, a commoner and a man of a low caste makes the people see why Medoune cannot occupy the position of the village chief. Dethye has the power, as a manipulator of language to strengthen the position of the regime in power and to resist any attempt by discreditable power seekers to wrongfully seize power. Thus, Dethye Law plays a significant role in resisting the hegemonic discourses of Santhiu-Niaye. Throughout the story, he

provides the main voice of resistance. He strongly criticizes the lack of true nobility in men who proclaim themselves as noblemen in the modern times. His role in the ensuing power tussles after the demise of Guibril is noteworthy. He bandies words with the power drunk Medoune, the murderer of Guibril.

It is also interesting that Ousmane uses a commoner; a man of low birth to displace a man of noble descent. Dethye Law reminds Medoune that he is not a chief but a murderer. Ousmane, therefore attempts to purge the community of rulers who are undignified; men who think that noble birth is the yardstick for the appointment of a leader. Rather, the blood of truth is noble whatever its origin. The fact that Medoune's ancestors (of the royal descent) have always ruled Santhiu –Niaye does not and should not qualify an opportunist (Medoune) to ascend the throne. Ousmane maintains that:

Sometimes, into the most ordinary low caste family, a child is born who grows up and glorifies his name, the name of his father, of his mother, of his whole community, of his tribe; even more, by his work he ennobles MAN More often, in a so-called high caste family which glorifies in its past.. . (*White Genesis: .4*).

Ousmane preaches truth and justice as qualities or attributes that a true leader should possess. Medoune uses his noble birth to suppress Dethye who is of a lower caste. However, Medoune loses his social position which reveals the secondary consideration given to birth, wealth or social class in the selection of a leader. Ousmane advocates equality, honesty and truth and Dethye stands for these attributes. Ousmane's vision of equality and classless society triumphs over nobility when Medoune loses out in his quest for power. Those who think that they are born into the

highest social class usually suppress the commoners. Therefore, Ousmane's *White Genesis* attempts to bridge this gap. Medoune is thwarted in his plans to take control of power. He is an aristocrat who has the ambition of maintaining his grip on power, but Dethye, a commoner, wins. This victory reveals that Ousmane is a defender of those who are marginalized and oppressed in the society. Hence, he imbues the griot with the confidence to cause a positive change in the society. Dethye's ability to exercise assertiveness is demonstrated when he makes people see why Medoune cannot become the village chief. The marginalised griot- has that political strength to empower others. The griot is empowered to instigate political action against the ruling oligarchy which is reflective of the social context of his society. He occupies a near sacred position in his society regardless of his low social caste. He therefore galvanises the people to become aware that the position of the village chief does not belong to a particular lineage. Benhilda adds that

Dethye law uses the freedom of speech that his position as a lowly praise singer affords him to foster debate and speak his mind about how the truth is being subverted... When there is a suicide, and a premeditated murder, and the community looks set to shrug them off, Law takes drastic action to force the community to some kind of action (Benhilda: 1).

Ibra's zeal in 'A Matter of Conscience' is indicative of the empowerment of the marginalised. Diouna's refusal to accept the dehumanising condition in 'The Promise Land' shows that the oppressed blacks have been fully mobilised into political awareness and are therefore empowered to register their displeasure. Rather than continue to submit to the abuse and dehumanization, she finds a way out. She



commits suicide. The death of the black women in this story is however symbolic. It is more than a physical death. Nevertheless, it marks the end of enslavement and oppression of the Blackman. It is the end of slavery, end of racism and the birth of a new dawn. The bard at the end of the story, in honour of the messianic Diouana, confirms that the chains are broken. Diouana is a figure that all blacks should respect, Goddess of the night' and 'gleam of our coming dawn'. The poem encourages all Africans to struggle further to create a new dawn for Africa. What was initially a banal piece of trivia to the colonialists becomes a glowing symbol to the colonized.

Ousmane's message of empowerment in *The Last of the Empire* is evident. The constitution does not consider caste or personality as important. What is paramount is the ability of the ruler. Daouda is not of the aristocratic lineage but he is a technocrat who may make the system run more smoothly than Mamlat, who is merely an opportunist seeking to rise to power on the basis of his aristocratic ancestry. Ousmane attempts to break the old feudal network by allowing a man from a low caste to occupy the noble position of a prime minister. In this instance, Ousmane is empowering people from the low caste. Daouda, who is not of the aristocratic lineage, has the empowerment to be in the government; he has the knowledge, the skill and ability to run the affairs of government.

Furthermore, Ousmane believes that:

It would ...be erroneous to conclude that all male writers portray their heroines as totally limited characters locked into types and stereotypes. Sembene Ousmane, for example offers an exhilarating viewpoint. The women in Ousmane's fiction are politically active... (Adebayo:8).

Ousmane does not portray the womenfolk as totally limited characters. The female

characters, in his prose works, struggle against the continued restriction of the African woman to a woman space. The writer adopts certain processes to empower the women. For instance the female characters have the abilities to take decisions about collective circumstances; the women are courageous and they think positively about making a change. Soyinka and Ousmane demonstrate how the role and position of the African women are beginning to take a new dimension. The women are invested with powers and qualities hitherto recognised in men and they now have a more challenging and political role to play in the socio-political development of their countries. They are shown to transcend their traditionally limiting roles to become politically and economically relevant.

Again, Ousmane points to the growing awareness of the women when some of the female characters reject family-imposed marriages. In some cases, the woman repudiates the choice made by her parents. Most of the female characters are bold, confident and they represent the new breed of educated and emancipated African women. Moreover, the woman's exposure to urbanization implies that she has attained some form of social status. Palmer agrees that:

Far from being an object of pity, she is an object of admiration, a reservoir of quiet strength and dignity, a source of inspiration and a symbol of endurance and the will to survive. She becomes not only a source of strength but an agent of rescue and of healing. (189).

Ousmane adheres strongly to the notion that women play important roles in nation-building. He does not subscribe to the traditional belief that women are inconsequential in the political, social and economic development of their countries. Ousmane is one of the writers who empower women in a Muslim society – a society

that places women far below their male counterparts, a society that prohibits women from questioning the injustice meted out to them by men. He operates in a society where the purdah system limits the woman. He sees it as a retrogressive culture that does not promote the participation of women in activities other than domestic. His heroines participate actively in the fight for independence. This is portrayed in *God's Bits of Wood* where women are empowered to challenge the forces of law and the exploitative agencies of the French government. Ousmane demonstrates that women can function successfully outside their immediate families. They have a more challenging political role to play and are indeed important elements in shaping the environment. He uses his works to promote the image of women. Chukwukere asserts that:

Ousmane Sembene... demonstrated convincingly that if people are to change, grow and become socially and politically aware, everybody, men and women, must participate in bringing about the new consciousness.... The heroines possess great revolutionary potentials and constitute essential forces through which society aspires to a new order of awareness. They are shown to transcend their traditionally limiting roles to become politically and economically significant. If it is a war or revolution, they operate beside and not behind their male counterparts (80).

Ousmane's traditional Moslem women recognise and question the injustice of their situation and together with their male counterparts, they fight the imperialists. In *God's Bits of Wood*, the revolutionary conscious women play active roles in the demonstration of the rail workers. Ousmane gives his female characters a privileged

and dynamic role. The women of Dakar dare the police by marching to the police station to support the heroic Ramatoulaye. Ousmane mirrors the revolutionary conscious Senegalese women in characters like Maimouna, the blind mother of the twins, and Ramatoulaye.

Furthermore, Ousmane advocates a society where the woman will not be subservient or play trivial roles. He portrays the image of the zealous and empowered African woman who has an unbending determination to change that traditional belief that the female gender should be restricted to the home front. Ousmane, therefore, redefines the role of the African woman in the political and historical development of Africa. In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe portrays a woman who is not assertive, but very submissive and subservient to the heroes. Okonkwo's wives are very submissive to Okonkwo. However, Ousmane sings a different song as we can see his heroines take up arms to challenge the oppressive system of administration in Dakar. Ousmane, Soyinka, Ngugi and lately Achebe amongst other male writers challenge this norm that relegates the womenfolk to the background. They redefine women with much more complexity.

In the traditional African society, the role or responsibility of the woman has been that of a mother, a cook, home administrator and child bearer. The worth of a female is only conceived in terms of her rate of fertility. Ousmane demonstrates a startling departure from this order. He is an advocate of a new moral order that heightens the image of women. He challenges the practices that keep women trapped within certain roles. The women of Senegal now rise above the ancient standards of Africa where the woman is expected to be docile, submissive, silent, not interfering in their husbands' activities and married out without their knowledge. Assistan who has

these qualities is described as a perfect wife, a woman turned over to a man she does not know. Even when her husband dies, the old custom takes control of her life, as she had been married to her younger brother's husband, Ibrahim. She is as submissive to Ibrahim as she was to his brother. She considers her husband the master and her own lot as a woman is to accept things as they are-to remain silent. However, Ousmane describes the uncritical acceptance of this situation as 'ancient standards of Africa, and old customs' hence he empowers the female gender to be more relevant politically and economically in the modern times. He gives them the confidence to take up arms and overcome the policemen who beat a hasty retreat. They had the courage to withstand and defeat the spahis (veteran).

Furthermore, Ousmane does not support the patriarchal system where the men solely control the society. He projects both heroic male and female protagonists. He broadens the women's scope or potentials, to make them relevant in the society. His female characters possess great revolutionary potentials and constitute important forces in the struggle for political hegemony in Senegal. This is reflected in *God's Bits of Wood* where women fight alongside their male counterparts to end colonial hegemonic power control. The positive transformation of the women of Dakar and Thies is noteworthy. Unlike some of the men (Sounkare, Beaugosse and others) who betray their fellow workers, the women remain committed in the process of redefining their social situation. Most of the female characters have the courage, strength of character and they are therefore empowered to be politically relevant in a society where the black majority are marginalized. Young and courageous Adjibiji boldly makes her way to the union office despite the heavy presence of armed men while Maimuna, the blind woman often holds her head high like a goddess. Worthy of note

is Dieynaba who rallies other women like a band of Amazons to rescue their fellow men from the whites. We admire the efforts, zeal and determination of the Senegalese women in struggling for political emancipation. The support they give to their male counterpart is great; even when the men attempt to flee, Dieyaba turns them back. Ousmane notes that if the times were bringing forth a new breed of men, they were also bringing forth a new breed of women. Again, N'Deye Touti's education has to a large extent given her the empowerment to reject a life of drudgery. She dreams of love and a man that will enhance her status. She knows the difference between an independent woman and women who submit unquestionably to the traditional tenets of mother hood and wifehood. She also joins in the women's struggle for a better society and becomes emancipated having acquired a high degree of personal dignity.

Moreover, the women's march to Dakar and subsequent attack of the police is a device to depict female empowerment. The author, in this regard deliberately gives the women more control over their own lives and situations. Besides, the women now have more responsibilities added as most of them are breadwinners. Rametoulaye and other women fend for their families. It is their duty to feed the family when the men embark on the strike. As the women decide to go for the historic march that ushers in a new era of hope, the men cannot stop them, but follow them behind. Bakayoko, leader of the men says no one has the right to stop the women but urges the men to give them the necessary support. We are therefore interested in Ousmane's new women.

Ousmane's female characters question the values to which they had adhered for ages. The dynamic role with which Ousmane imbues these women, against the inability of the men folk to meet up the challenges of decolonisation is quite

revealing. This issue has exercised his mind as he questions the most limiting factor (polygamy) to women emancipation in his work. *God's Bits of Wood* is therefore a startling example of the process of bringing the women to the fore for them to be noticed by the men folk. Ramatoulaye reflects upon a situation where men are no longer able to play their traditional role of breadwinners. An exhilarating source of empowerment is the communal ties that really bring the women together to participate in the political struggle for independence. The women's courage and strength contrast sharply with the timidity displayed by Bachirou (a man). We have brave and courageous women like the indomitable Maimouna and Penda, an amazon, who asserts her individuality and freedom. We admire her unflinching courage and tremendous resourcefulness at ensuring that the women are well fed during the strike. Penda is a leader, a member of a strike committee and spokesman. Indeed, she is in-charge as she wears a cartridge belt and leads a march that is historic. The collective struggle of the women challenges the passivity of wifehood. The women, significantly march to Dakar as 'heroes' and bring the colonialists down on their knees. Therefore, Ousmane shows that women have a sense of direction and initiative. We see them assume aggressive and assertive social roles because of the exigencies of the strike. The female solidarity, which culminates in the women's political awareness, reveals Ousmane's vision of a society that will be less patriarchal. Thus

...the women of Thies have formed into a powerful

Force... they assert the right to initiate change within their total society.

If approximately fifty percent of the population of any community should do this, we would witness a radical transformation of thought and of social processes (Case:291)

Again, the image of the female folk is also enhanced in Ousmane's other works like *Tribal Scars*, *The Money-order with white Genesis* and *The Last of the Empire*. 'The promised land' is an interesting example in Ousmane's collection of short stories *Tribal Scars* where the women take an enviable position in Africa's resistance against colonial oppression. Diouana, in 'The Promised Land' is a symbol of African resistance against oppression: she is a symbol of a liberated Africa. Ousmane does not produce a prescriptive vision of the role allotted to African women; he effectively transforms the suffering of an individual African woman into an incidence of political significance. In addition, the woman is securely placed within the political sphere. Ousmane's concern with challenging the negritude notion of the African woman is hereby emphasized; he decries the idealized form of African femininity symbolizing the values of Negritude. His wish to give another picture of the female folk is also echoed in *The Money-order* where the co-wives of Ibrahim are in solidarity against their husband. They laugh and joke about their husband's fruitless effort to cash his money order.

In addition, the conflict between husbands and wives is obvious in most of Ousmane's prose works. The theme of marital strife is crucial in his short story 'The Bilal's wife'. By recording tales of marital breakdown in this story and in *Xala*, Ousmane launches a vitriolic attack on polygamy. For instance, *Xala* presents women challenging the traditional roles of both mothers and daughters. Elhaji's daughter, a radical student makes bold to question her father over the marriage of a third wife. *Xala* seeks to improve women's lot by improving on their education and standard of living. In essence, women liberation should be political and socio-economic. Oumi N'Doye dismisses the notion of inherent inferior social status for the female folk.



Ousmane portrays a more complex woman who questions the traditional role of the female gender. Elhaj's daughter is educated hence empowered to challenge her father for taking a third wife to the detriment of her mother. Ousmane's reflection of an educated female character has given her the wherewithal and power to boldly and confidently confront a polygamous father. Obviously, she is a revolutionary and a Marxist, hence very alert and politically aware. Rama is therefore empowered and she is able to speak out and she vows never to share her husband with another woman. She declines to attend the wedding and educates her mother on why she should get a divorce.

Elhaj's second wife, Oumi N'Doye is another interesting character that is as courageous as Rama and often addresses Elhaj with an air of defiance. We can compare her level of awareness to that of Rama. Her awareness, education and experience in overseas women's fashion give her the self confidence to always have her way. She accompanies Elhaj to receptions and considers divorcing him when he plans to take a third wife. Through Oumi, Ousmane censures the traditional norm of restricting the women folk. Oumi is so confident and assertive that she orders her husband out of his third house. She authoritatively says: 'Go and fetch your father for me. He is at his third house... I must see him' (*Xala*:40 ). As a modern African woman who often relaxes with magazines, Oumi brings the female-gender to the fore and as Elhaj becomes insolvent 'she tried to show that she was a modern woman by going from office to office... in search of work' (*Xala*:103). Babacar's wife is an ideal female character that is also noted for being strong-willed, courageous and a distinguished character. She is invested with the power to become self-confident and Ousmane equally gives her pride of accomplishment. Her authority is so limitless that

Babacar's friends say that: 'it was Babacar's wife who wore the trousers in the home' (*Xala*: 6). Moreover, she so intimidates the man with her strength of character that he (Babacar) is unable to take a second wife. Thus 'strong female portrayal is a recurring theme for Sembene ... in *Xala* the women are the centre piece of his vision.' (Lennox:1)

Again, Ousmane reflects the growing awareness of the womenfolk when some of his female characters reject family-imposed marriages by divorcing the partners selected by their parents or guardians. This is epitomized in Ousmane's *Tribal Scars* when Yacine repudiates her husband. Thus, the traditional Senegalese marital structure is threatened by modernity. Ousmane is critical about the practice that promotes the subjugation of the women. Therefore, most of the polygamous marriages in his texts collapse. A case in point is the marriage between Elhaji and his third wife in *Xala*. Ousmane thinks that polygamy is a means by which men institutionalize their authority over the female folk. He condemns the hegemonic status of the men folk and situations where men take younger wives. A younger woman supersedes Noumbe in Ousmane's *Tribal Scars*. Through Noumbe's reaction against her husband's insensitivity, Ousmane decries the patriarchal social structure that encourages polygamy. In addition, Ousmane presents a complete breakdown of the traditional polygamous marriage in his collection of short stories - *Tribal Scars*.

Ousmane's reflection of individual acts of female rebellion against polygamy is another ploy that is adopted to empower the female gender. Yacine, in 'The Biblical's Fourth Wife' is not a passive girl but a tomboy and a hard worker. She has the will power, the courage and of course the empowerment to stand against a bilial (caretaker of a mosque), and she is able to challenge the discourse of male hegemony.

She boldly questions some regressive Islamic laws in the presence of a massed crowd and religious leaders and she equally demands the return of her virginity if the bialil wants a refund of the dowry, thereby throwing the jurists into confusion. Ousmane's sympathy for the women is obvious; he is against the domineering men folk. Yacine is not afraid to break with the traditional rule that says that women remain silent and submissive even when they are denied their rights. Ousmane decries the polygamous marriage which has been a social norm. The most important factor in the empowerment of these women is their growing self-awareness which is obvious from their actions. That is why Yacine questions the injustice of her situation. She is mature, independent and totally aware of the injustice meted out to the female gender: she is firmly in control of her destiny.

In 'The Face of History' Ousmane again brings the women to the limelight. The men watch, with dismay, as women join the same queue with them at the Mali cinema. The women are out to enjoy the same freedom as their male counterparts 'prostitutes were strolling up and down in the cool air' (*Tribal Scars*: 18). Abdoulaye does not leave his wife at home; Sakinetou, Abdoulaye's wife, armed with a Technical College certificate confidently goes out with her man. She is described as a woman with shoulders of distinction. She wore her hair in a bouffant style and rings dangle from ears and her bell-shaped skirt is knee-length. And as she walks pass the men, her delicate soothing fragrance lingered in the air. Sakinetou is a classic example of a female character whose education empowers her. She tells her husband: 'I am not an illiterate fatou, I can pay for myself' (*Tribal Scars*: 20) Ousmane, in this case, recommends a more egalitarian society in place of a male-dominated one. His works seek to give voice to the predicament of the women and he encourages a

male-female relationship. Therefore, for the woman to compete successfully in a Patriarchal society, she must be armed (empowered). As we can see, Sekinatou's education emboldens her and equally gives her the confidence to make requests. It is not what Abdoulaye, her husband, wants that is important. Her defiant tone and outright refusal to do her husband's bidding indicate that she has been so empowered that she won't receive instructions passively

'Her Three Days' is a short story that projects the female gender in a positive light. The woman has the empowerment to protest the oppression meted out to her by her male counterpart. Noumbe, Mustapha's wife harbours spiteful words that she throws at her husband's face. She refuses to cook for the polygamous man who thinks he can come in when he feels like .Noumbe humiliates her husband right before his friend. It is quite revealing that Noumbe, like Sekinetu, has the will power, the courage and determination to resist this oppression. The passage of a resolution condemning polygamy in Bamako is the result of the actions taken by women to ensure that they do not remain in a relegated position.

In a similar vein, Ousmane's *White-Genesis* is an exposition of gender empowerment. He attacks the hegemonic position of the men who use their status and advantage to suppress the women. Ngone War Thiandum is a wife, a mother in a polygamous home who never complains about the infidelities of her husband (her Lord). She remains submissive and never raises her voice in a society sustained by maxims and recommendations that women remain fully devoted and totally submissive to their master. It should be complete submission of body and soul to the master-husband. The woman is made to believe that the man intercedes in her favour for a place in paradise. Hence, she is a listener and one who carries out her domestic

tasks to the letter. She is never given the opportunity to express her opinion and must carry out instructions given by her husband. She believes that whatever the man says is right and more sensible. The woman orders her life and the lives of her children according to received moral principles which are retrogressive.

Nonetheless, spurred by the burning desire to be free and now aware of the changing role of the female gender, the woman begins to question the precepts which had been the basis of her life. Ngone now realizes that she had judged events from her own woman's point of view. Ngone War Thiandum's body is now on fire and desires to hurt her husband. She cries out. Her cry is a cathartic explosion; a cry for revenge. The woman, who used to be sober and without guile, is now overtaken by bitterness,.

As we can see, Soyinka and Ousmane are committed to emancipating the marginalised folk. This chapter demonstrates that Soyinka has been an outspoken critic of many Nigerian governments and political tyrannists. Similarly, Ousmane condemns oppression of the disadvantaged folks by the ruling class. Their writings depict lust for power exhibited by the privileged few and the conflict created amongst other interested parties. The two writers project the female gender positively but Ousmane remains more committed to the changing status of women. Ousmane portrays female characters who take the readers beyond the romantically idealised African woman imagined by negritude.

## CHAPTER FOUR THE CONFLICT BETWEEN WESTERN AND AFRICAN VALUES

### 4.1 FUSING CULTURAL INFLUENCES IN SOYINKA'S PROSE

Wole Soyinka spent his childhood in Ake in Ogun State. While Soyinka's father hails from Ijebu, (Isara) the mother belongs to the Egba family. Consequently, the customs and traditions of Soyinka's family and clan are instrumental in shaping his literary works.

In addition, Ake has strong connections with Europe through the presence of European missionaries and these links inform the presence of Christianity and Western culture in the area. However, Isara which is located in 'an extremely isolated region of Ijebuland held on to many traditional cultural beliefs of the Yoruba' (Abra Reid:1). Agemo is the major deity and in Agemo festivals, the participants traditionally wear masks and perform acrobatics, rituals and processions. Obviously, this background must have had a strong influence on Soyinka when he wrote *Ake* and *The Interpreters*. The egungun motif predominates in *Ake* and Yoruba gods are depicted on kola's pantheon in *The Interpreters*.

Moreover, Soyinka mingles modernization (Christianity) with Yoruba land rituals (tradition) in *Ake*. The people of Abeokuta join other areas of Yoruba land to celebrate Ogun. Ogun festivals include animal sacrifices which are referred to in *Season of Anomy* when the Aiyero people bury their dead king. Usually there is a procession marked by metal-tipped palm fronds to appease Ogun. Again, Soyinka's parents' adherence to the traditional naming process of giving a child three names suggests a commitment to Yoruba customs. Soyinka has three names – Akinwande, Oluwole, Soyinka. This further informs Soyinka's fascination with the customs and

myths of his land. Festival is an important aspect of Yoruba culture and this is observed three times in a year- July (ifa), September (orun), and January (bere-end of harvest time). For example, in the bere festival, ‘the fields are ritualistically set alight to celebrate and illuminate the fruits of the soil’. ( Reid:1)

The mingling of Yoruba and western influences is a carryover from his childhood experiences in Ake and the traditions he witnessed in Isara. These feature prominently and repeatedly in his writings.

#### **4.2 CONFLICT BETWEEN MODERN AND TRADITIONAL VALUES IN SOYINKA’S PROSE**

The separation between “ancient” and “modern” world has led to allegiances that force one to choose between two different ways of life deemed irreconcilable. In addition, the criticism of traditional and modern values as presented by Soyinka presupposes the inadequacy of both customs. He promotes certain aspects of traditional life like communal living and concern for others while denouncing individualism which is inimical to national development. Individualism is a recent and modern principle that considers the ‘self’ more important than the community. It is an act of thinking of one’s own welfare or interest. For Soyinka, communal living should survive. Therefore, he condemns the modern tenet that encourages the comfort of a few individuals. He favours traditional African doctrine of neighbourliness. The Aiyero community in Soyinka’s *Season of Anomy* is a society that believes in communal living and common ownership. This is the type of tradition that Soyinka advocates. Ilosa, the base of the unpatriotic party men is not ideal, according to Soyinka.

However, Soyinka frowns at traditional values that are retrogressive such as the belief in local values whose principles Baroka is determined to project in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. Traditionalist Baroka strongly believes that construction of a rail line through Ilujinle may prove harmful to ancient tradition of his people. Hence, he brings the Oro cult to stop the progress. Soyinka's attention in *The Interpreters* (1965) is on the degenerate state of certain traditional beliefs. He demonstrates the conflict between traditional and modern values as we can see children break the fetters of traditional values by disrespecting the elders. According to Martin Bestman :

This conflict ... symbolizes the radical discord between the present and the past, the collision of two hostile, incommunicable worlds. It is the expression of a profound social malaise. The revolt has both positive and negative significances: it is positive because it affords children the liberty and the opportunity to develop their capacities thus paving the way for social progress: it is negative when the family structure ... becomes dismembered (Bestman:18).

Therefore, confrontation between traditional and modern forces is evident when children who should obey and comply with parental instructions disagree with their parents. The family structure, being the soul of Africa and the foundation of social order must remain intact. This tradition (respect for elders) should be sustained. Oladele Taiwo thinks that, "tradition ... is a force strong enough to make people comply with social and cultural expectations of their society"(20). For instance, the Yoruba are bound by tradition to prostrate before the elders. It is therefore not desirable to do the contrary. For the modernist, disrespect towards adults is not



viewed as a serious offence. Dehinwa, in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is an example of the educated modern African woman caught between traditional and modern values. The 'Modern Dehinwa' thinks that she is free to marry whomsoever she wants to and so challenges her mother on that. This is an example of disrespect to one's parent which negates the traditional principle. Tradition demands that children submit to their parents. However, the strong force of tradition makes Dehinwa sober and she now addresses her mother politely. In this case, Soyinka allows the traditional force to gain the upper hand for the survival of the family. In addition Jean Marie agrees that:

Tradition occupies the present as a permanent feature, but the way it is read changes constantly according to people's volition, power, expectation and interpretation. Tradition and modernity are more than close neighbours...(189).

Soyinka's works reflect traditional and modern values but the author promotes the values that he considers progressive. It is difficult for Dehinwa in *The Interpreters* to escape from the complex web of tradition which demands that the youths respect their elders.

Moreover, the contradictions of Modern Africa which 'stem from the co-existence of widely differing values are still the inescapable reality which the writer has to deal with'. (Gakwandi:1)

Soyinka presents African and European customs and denounces the practices that are repressive in either of the two cultures. The writer exhibits his sense of disappointment with tradition and sometimes modernity; his concern is the inadequacy of the old and the new. In *Ake*, the colonizers attempt to replace the indigenous political and religious practices of Africa with Christianity. Soyinka

demonstrates how Christianity spreads throughout the colonies. Efforts to supplant the native religious orders and traditional African tenets culminate in culture conflict between the divergent beliefs. In some cases, the attendant Christian-indigenous hybrid is at variance with European Christianity. For instance, chapter two contains an exemplary illustration of the clash between the two main cultures represented in *Ake*, colonial Christianity and traditional beliefs of indigenous Yoruba. Soyinka recounts how he went to see the spirit of the dead incarnated as masquerades despite the warnings from his Christian mother not to do so. Young Soyinka believed that tradition permitted his father, (a man) to accompany him. However, the mother forbade him from watching the 'egungun' because of her desire to maintain a strict Christian household which would not accommodate indulgence in events like the festival of the 'egungun'. As we can see Wole and his strict Christian mother disagree over cultural and religious matters. When Wole reiterates that Osiki would take him to watch the procession, the mother disapproves of the plan. Soyinka demonstrates in *Ake* that traditional customs are gradually eroded with the advent of colonialism. The episode depicts the symbolic confrontation of these two cultures. The clash is obvious when Uncle Sanya confronts and successfully repels wood spirits (Iwin). Uncle Sanya holds out his Bible and orders the spirits to go back to the forest. Thus, Soyinka shows how wood spirits and ghoumids compete with books and Christianity. Rev. J.J, a missionary who spreads the new religion also meets with frequent opposition. He often clashes with the masquerades. Soyinka demonstrates 'the power of tradition when the 'egungun' brings down a whole building by using his wand to tap on the door' (Raymond 1997).

From another dimension, modern medicine has not fully replaced traditional medicine. In spite of Wild Christian's faith in the new religion in *Ake*, she strongly believes in the curative power of the local 'omikan' a sour fermented liquid. Barks and roots are stuffed into bottles and left to soak for days. This is what Soyinka calls 'agbo' used to cure fever. Soyinka juxtaposes the two curative measures. Miss Macutter runs a clinic and offers modern treatment by giving lozenges pills. Similarly, Soyinka demonstrates the potency of local medication. In *Isara*, Iyawo initially tries the modern pills to cure 'iba' (fever). 'There has been some improvement. She still has those bouts of pain...' (*Isara* :108). Finding a lasting solution to the persistent pain has agitated Mr and Mrs Soditan and this nagging health problem makes them shuttle between the white specialist and the herbalist (traditional medicine). Mr Soditan shakes his head in bafflement and says;

Not even that white specialist from Lagos. And the Massey street hospital with all its modern medicine....All these tests and drugs and injections. What exactly have they been treating? I think it is nothing but trial and error... (*Isara*: 113)

If European treatment will not relieve the pain, then Pa Soditan's traditional method, ritual offering (ebo) will commence. However, Iyawo sees it as pagan practice and unchristian. Soyinka, in this instance emphasises the validity of the traditional healing process – 'saara' (ritual feast). Furthermore, this traditional healing process is portrayed in a positive light. It is a kind of thanksgiving and not a secret ritual. Mr Soditan assures Morola, his wife that the traditional method will not contradict the Christian teaching. Mr Soditan believes that this healing process is less secret than a surgical operation, since 'doctors never allow people in the theatre when they start

cutting up people and sewing them up' (*Isara*:114) Soyinka ridicules the white officiating priests (surgeons) who cannot account for parts of human bodies. Unlike the surgical operation, the ram or goat slaughtered for traditional 'etutu' is shared accordingly. This is a deliberate artistic ploy to promote this aspect of African culture. Moreover, ritual sacrifice is not a culture that would easily be replaced by the modern practice. After the sacrifice, Pa Soditan finds out that Iyawo's illness was not in the normal course of nature. After twelve months, in and out of hospitals, there is no remedy.

Besides, Soyinka also projects the black man's medicine when Sipe campaigns for native medicine. Sipe has not seen anything wrong with native medicine and maintains that 'our fathers used the native traditional medicine to bring us up. Dare they come to Isara and tell me not to set up a herbalist shop' (*Isara*:148). He further argues that Isara medicine is stronger than the medicines from India and other European countries. The combative questions that Soditan throws at Osigbo are also interesting in this regard. He asks:

Before you began to stock your pharmacy with all those oyinbo stuff, didn't we have our own curatives?... Does our medicine come after the Germans? In front of the British or French? Or don't we rate at all? But why should any of our local herbalists not come to your shop with a bottle of his concoction...? What would be so unusual in two professional colleagues exchanging learned opinions on the art of the apothecary? (*Isara*:109)

While Mrs Soditan joyfully succumbs to traditional local healing, Osibo thinks that Soditan does not support progress. Osibo feels that the modern therapy is synonymous

with civilization and progress. In the long run, Soditan overwhelms and defeats Osibo with his questions and critical remarks. Soditan says that the potency of a drug should not be measured by outward appearance. He remarks sarcastically. ‘the label maketh the drug’ (*Isara*:110). Sipe’s proposal to start a patent medicine store dealing in local portion dealt a serious blow on the pharmacist who heaved a deep sigh.

Again, there is a remarkable contrast between Ake where modern tenets have almost gained ground and Isara where Yoruba traditions exist and are ‘all pervasive and continue to shape the lives of people like Akinyode Soditan and his more illustrious son, Wole’ (*Isara*:238). It is in *Ake* and *Isara* that Soyinka demonstrates his conventional modern Christian living and that of a traditional ethos. He is fully aware of the modern African society which has enriched his creative mind. Soyinka reflects the partly modern Christian environment in *Ake*, by portraying characters like Wild Christian, Uncle Sanya and Rev. J.J. who challenge aspects of tradition that are harmful. As earlier mentioned, Wild Christian is strongly against Child Wole watching the masquerade and Uncle Sanya repels the wood spirit that only comes out to scare the living. However, the episodes in *Isara*, is suggestive of an almost traditional environment.

In essence, the partly modern environment of Ake, where Soyinka grew up, conflicts with the predominantly traditional Isara which has all the trappings and flavour of Yoruba culture. The tranquillity of the traditional setting of Isara is emphasised. For this reason, festive periods are often marked in the traditional village set-up. People leave the modern urban setting for the village-Isara. The joy of the season is better and apparently expressed or spent in the village where friends from all walks of life meet .It is the moment for people to descend

on the small community retailing accounts of intervening months, swapping anecdotes, doctoring failure and decking out successes  
(*Isara:1*)

The attendant joy is usually overwhelming because the home coming means fulfilled hopes and prayers. The home coming ceremonies are marked with activities like ‘etutu’ and rituals performed by Jagun. This is so reflected that the richness and worth of the Yoruba culture are made obvious. In a similar vein, Olisa reminds Saaki that Isara is not Abeokuta nor Lagos or Ondo. Isara had always gone her way, protected her own ways, ‘what Isara needs is a king steeped in its oldest traditions, not one hobnobbed with city operators and alienated servants’ (*Isara:228*). Bodunde remarks that the problems encountered by the traditional community of Isara

require the combative force of the new order represented by Akinsanya and the new generation of Isara citizens who by virtue of their journey have become men of knowledge, vision and power. Isara’s tradition from its obscure status to an open and receptive community cannot be attained until it sheds the old tradition. The perfect symbol of the old world is Agunrin... who does not even accept that the railway or motor lorry exists... the journeys of the younger generation have endowed them with a new consciousness, a new tradition that is completely in advance of the world represented by Agunrin...(91)

Soyinka demonstrates the conflict between African tradition and European values through the Agunrin-Akinsanya symbolic contest. The interior monologue device in which Agunrin expresses opposition to change is quite interesting in this regard; the death of Agunrin shortly after his encounter with Opeilu on Isara politics is equally

significant. His death coincides with the arrival of the new generation that culminates in the birth of a new life through the symbolic death of the old.

Akinsanya's impressive homecoming and Agunrin's exit are epiphanies which indicate the changing phase of the social and political history of Isara. Thus, an important aspect of this transition is the return of the ex-Iles, the new force that for a long time have been cast away from Isara as ex-Iles (Bodunde: 91-92).

In addition, the traditional way of finding solutions to problems is reflected through the consultation of the oracle (ifa). Jagun, one of the king makers, consults 'ifa' over the health of the king. The clash between Akinyode (modernity) and Jagun (tradition) over consulting the oracle on chieftaincy matters is a conflict between modernity and tradition. While Jagun is of the view that 'ifa's' words are final, Akinyode sarcastically remarks 'suppose the same ifa has approved the successor you have in mind' (Isara:) 'Ifa' is also consulted to confirm whether Binutu (Node's wife) has committed adultery with Alarade and had a child that culminates in Node's misfortune.

Nonetheless, it is imperative to acknowledge few instances where tradition accommodates modern practices. Traditionalist Jagun appreciates 'that times are changing; the white man is here and he pokes his nose in everything'. (Isara: 28). Jagun thinks that gone are the days when children are not involved in chieftaincy matter. The children understand the ways of the white man and they can pass on to him matters which concern the community.

Therefore, traditional African practice of consulting the oracle is fully reflected in *Isara*. In fact, the natives believe that every successful or wealthy person

owes their success to this traditional process but Soyinka condemns the aspect of this tradition where able bodied men simply fold their arms waiting for 'ifa' to always make positive projections. A man must get up and work to earn a living and not rely on spirits. Moreover, there is the risk of losing entire capital or a higher proportion of the capital to the spirit. Sipe, in *Isara* insists that under no circumstances would any spirit extort a full year's commission from him. Thus, the people have come to the realization that such traditional practices are exploitative and retrogressive. Instead of enhancing business ventures, the process of invocation puts an unnecessary imposition on the capital. Soyinka equally exposes the insincerity of the parties involved in such invocations. The method contrived by Sipe and Onayemi ridicules the traditional practice. The men prepare a list of preliminary questions and answers which they take to the medium in Odogbolu. Transactions would not extend to the spirit world, but between Sipe and the medium who acts as the spirit. The questions and answers are prepared to favour the business. Sipe prepares favourable responses that will promote his business. Onayemi and Sipe agree

to engage a mystic agent to ensure that the business thrives. Sipe endorses this approach having been convinced that it does not endanger the life of the partner. The mystic service entails the employment of a medium to invoke the spirit of the dead and the sacrificial offerings are dead and living partridge, living lily and a white young pigeon. These items are to be turned into powder before the ritual and they must be wrapped in white cloth. This ritual also includes taking virgin earth from the graveyard (Bodunde:87)



Sipe's wife and Rev. Beeton (modernity) are strongly against the traditional process that is not progressive. They condemn the foolish syndicate and the consultation of astrologers.

Furthermore, Soyinka's western education and cultural heritage are evident in *The Interpreters*. His cultural heritage enriched the education he received and 'his allusion to the Yoruba gods has given his novels a profound mythological background' (Maduakor:82) Kola reflects the Yoruba myth of creation which conflicts with the biblical account of how the world came about. Kola's encounter with Lazarus makes him to add a biblical view to his canvas. Hence, we are presented with the Christian and Yoruba worldviews. The Yoruba believe that the dead are ever present among the living. They also believe that the world was created by their supreme deity-Olodumare. Nevertheless, death and life are interrelated in both belief systems. In each case death is a gateway to a higher form of life. The Yoruba myth of creation is more sufficiently well equipped than the Christian view. This is because much of chapter 16 is an inventory of the gods depicted on the pantheon as prefaced with allusion to the Yoruba creation myth. The primordial deities that are featured on the pantheon are gods and goddesses in Yoruba myth. It is only a dimension of the Christian view that is reflected.

Soyinka laughs at the religious practice where the church overseer is worse than his flocks. He portrays this in Lazarus' dubious tale of having once resurrected from the dead and also lied that he became an albino after his resurrection. His apostles are a medley of ex-convicts. Soyinka pokes fun at the gullible congregation. In *The Writings of Wole Soyinka* E. D. Jones says that:

The primary society with which the novel is concerned is contemporary Nigeria, in which, although the ancient traditional life still makes its appearance, the predominant impression is of a society in the grips of a turbulent modernity. Its institutions show an uneasy blend of influence (219)

The clash between Mr. and Mrs Faseyi is obviously a clash between these two values- a turbulent modernity and ancient African values. Dr. Faseyi's aping of English mannerisms such as wearing gloves and drinking champagne are ridiculous and ironically conflicts with Monica's romance with African customs. Monica would not wear gloves. She asks 'who do you see wearing gloves in Nigeria' (*The Interpreters*: 40). Soyinka demonstrates his preference for African wine and satirises Africans (professor Oguazor) who speak and behave like the whites. Soyinka prefers natural to artificial decorations, hence he allows professor Oguazor to degenerate into ridiculousness of speech when he attempts to imitate western lifestyle. In this instance, Soyinka is proud of natural or native artefacts, hence he laughs at Africans who stupidly deny their African-ness. The artificial decorations which the writer condemns, according Sagoe, are not as beautiful as natural African artefacts. Sagoe insists that the natural artefacts can adorn our homes better.

Furthermore, the rift between Dehinwa and her mother is a demonstration of the clash between traditional African tenet and modern values. Dehinwa's mother who is truly African thinks that she need not inform her daughter before paying her a visit. However, Dehinwa who is modern in her ways says it is imperative to inform the host before the visit. Soyinka is quick to remind modern Dehinwa that in traditional Africa, there is no room for privacy. Dehinwa's mother would not allow

Dehinwa freedom to be on her own until she is formally married. Her affair with Sagoe negates the traditional principles of a man and a woman living together when they are not married. Dehinwa tells her mother not to make midnight journeys and confidently adds; ‘suppose I had a man with me’. (*The Interpreters: 37*) In response the mother snaps:

Suppose you had a man with you? Is that the sort of life you want to cut out for yourself?... what sort of daughter have I born? If I found a man in your house at any awkward hour, I will let him know that my family bears the name of Komolola. A man in this house at night?...I will humiliate him in public (*The Interpreters: 37*).

In *Ake*, Soyinka demonstrates his own complicity (as a westernized African) in the erosion of Isara’s traditions most dramatically in ‘his youthful challenge to the custom of prostration. He responds to the practice as a European would, seeing only its potentials to soil one’s clothes...’ (Lindeborg: 67) Soyinka says that he avoids ‘prostrating on those streets whose dust stuck to one’s clothes, hair, skin... (*Ake:127*). This traditional method of greeting (prostration) is also a point of conflict between Egbo and his uncle in *The Interpreters*. Awosika notes that another point of conflict between Egbo and ‘his guardian was over the custom of prostrating while greeting elders’ (Awosika:86). Soyinka demonstrates the clash between the traditional way of prostration and modern style of standing while greeting the elders through the conflict between Egbo and his uncle.

On your belly, you son of the devil. And Egbo would correct him gently; my father was a reverend pastor and he never taught me how to prostrate (*The Interpreters: 17*)

Egbo never succumbs to this traditional practice. Each time Egbo returns from school, he braces himself and greets the old man standing. Therefore, Soyinka challenges this method of prostrating; he responds to it as a modernist. It is one of the traditional methods to accommodate the modern practice of greeting the elders while standing but bowing slightly. However, Soyinka denounces the 'been to's modern practice of the youth who raise their hands to their lips while shaking elders. Mr Akinyode prefers a brief shake and a bow. The Nigerian youth movement in *Isara* also condemns the modern system of the youth shaking hands with elders without taking a bow. The movement takes up the matter by demanding for the perpetrator's (Mr Bowen) repatriation.

Another traditional tenet that Soyinka projects positively is communal living. In *Ake* Wole and his siblings eat and sleep in their neighbour's house (the bookseller). Again, Soyinka is just like his father (Essay) who is fond of bringing his cronies home at meal times. According to Wild Christian, 'Wole is going to be like his father. He brings home friends at meal times without any notice'. (*Ake*: 25). Essay receives visitors at all times-during meals, before meals or after meals. Wole equally invites all his friends and classmates home to celebrate his birthday without notifying his mother. Soyinka writes that:

We often slept at the book seller's. Mrs B would send a Maid to inform our house that we would eat and sleep at their own house....When we got into trouble we ran behind her and she shielded us.(*Ake*:15)

With this kind of influence, it is therefore not surprising that Soyinka prefers the communal living of Aiyero in *Season of Anomy* The foregoing discussion manifests in

*Season of Anomy* where Soyinka portrays two different worlds that are polarized. The modern world of Ilosa with its crops of suppressors is at variance with the traditionally and communalistic world of Aiyero. Soyinka notes that the Aiyero community: ‘held all property in common literally to the last scrap of thread on the clothing of each citizen’ (Soyinka: *Season of Anomy*: 2). This is the sort of traditional society that Soyinka advocates. However, Ilosa, the base of the cartel considers this community as a prime example of unscientific communalism. To the cartel, it is ‘primitive and embarrassingly sentimental’ (Soyinka: *Season of Anomy*: 3). Soyinka establishes the strong conflict between these two communities from the outset. The mores and values, which the young men of Aiyero experience at Ilosa, are poles apart from the ones of their traditional home base. The young men contribute immensely to the communal fund and aid the self-sufficing community. On the other hand, they do not succumb to the styles and values of the neon cities. Rather, they are always attracted by the hospitality of Aiyero. It is therefore obvious that Soyinka prefers African communalism to the European individualistic culture of Ilosa. The conflict between Aiyero and Ilosa is a clash between two communities with differing values; conflict is between the world of Aiyero and the world of Ilosa. Ofeyi’s target is to ensure that an authentic culture is born from the communal rural utopia (Aiyero).

In addition, Soyinka’s formal education and working experience have brought him into contact with ideas of the modern world. He grew up in an atmosphere of religions syncretism, having contact with both Christian and Yoruba traditions. However, he has his roots in Yoruba culture. He started as a Yoruba person; he was born a Yoruba and naturally a part of the culture; he is interested in the Yoruba culture (microcosm of African culture). Hence, he reflects myths from Yoruba

tradition. His reference to Christianity is a pointer to his parental influence. Nevertheless, emphasis is on the traditional belief in Olodumare. The traditional influence on Soyinka is so strong that he is often fascinated by the gods/goddess, spirits and ancestor. This is epitomized in *The Interpreters* and *Isara*. His deep involvement in the culture of his people is evident in all his works.

Furthermore, Soyinka sometimes satirizes both traditional and modern customs. This is often done when he wishes to express his disappointment with both. Where both tenets are criticized, no side can claim absolute victory over the other. This is the case in Egbo's refusal to accept either the traditional title or his appointment in a modern foreign office. On the one hand, he is an embodiment of the Yoruba customs because of his romance with the past. On the other hand, he is an active participant in the present. However, he is not attracted to the moral squalor of the modern times and not too attracted to the traditional past. Egbo doubts 'the dignity of his roots' (*The Interpreters*: 12). He says that Osa, the seat of the mystery is 'an outpost for smugglers and... 'his grandfather is a glorified bandit' (*The Interpreters*: 14). Thus Egbo struggles to reconcile the past with the present. Osa offers Egbo 'privilege that fascinates him and causes him agonized moments of struggle' (Okonkwo: 1). The problem of reconciling the old and new appears in *Season of Anomy* where Osa transformed into an idealized Aiyero. But Ofeyi easily reconciles the claim of two separate worlds. He turns down the offer of Custodianship of the Grain insisting that the waters of Aiyero must burst their banks while the grain finds new seminal grounds else it will atrophy and die. However, Ofeyi proceeds to extract the seeds that will help in revitalizing the rotten present. Ofeyi is caught between Aiyero's orthodox Christianity and a neo-paganism (the religion of the grain) worship

of nature (constant observance of the rituals of renewal). We see the link between the dead and the living through the ceremonies of dawn that attend the demise of the dead king to smooth his path to the ancestors. These ceremonies also ensure for the living the continuing operation of his divine essence. Soyinka's projection of the Religion of the Grain is interesting; The Aiyero image continues to lurk in the background as the story unfolds. It is from the traditional community of Aiyero that Ofeyi recruits men to confront Ilosa, the modern corrupt world of cartel. Culture conflict is obvious between this traditional community and the large world of Ilosa which is an inverted mirror image of Aiyero's social order. Awosika concludes that

‘this double nature becomes an aesthetic expression of the stalemate between the past and the present which forms the thematic background of *The Interpreters*’ (14).

Finally, Soyinka has demonstrated that in any clash between tradition and modernism, each of the two differing values must be sufficiently well represented to triumph.

#### **4.3 CONFLICT BETWEEN EUROPEAN AND AFRICAN TENETS IN OUSMANE'S NOVEL**

Ousmane is also interested in the search for an African identity as his protagonists fight not only for political and economic emancipation but also for cultural identity. They decry the uprooting of African values, a culmination of centuries of colonial domination.

Ousmane reminds his readers of the values of their ancestral past and equally decries aspects of tradition that are anachronistic in modern times. In *The Last of the Empire* he demonstrates that monarchy is an anachronism in the modern world. Ousmane does not support any tradition that promotes oppression of the less

privileged or the weak. His short story *Tribal Scar* and *The Last of the Empire* attack the old monarchical rule that enhances the comfort of a particular caste especially the ruling class. He decries the repressive practice in *God's Bits of Wood* by mobilizing the traditional authority to confront colonial authority. As a social activist who is against the oppression of the weak, Ousmane promotes the culture that guarantees the welfare of the down trodden. For instance, he does not support the repressive African culture that forbids the full participation of women in political activities. Ousmane draws attention to some African traditions that block social or political progress. In *God's Bits of Wood* and *Xala*, he denounces the traditional practice of relegating the womenfolk to the background and recommends the modern system that allows the female gender equal opportunity with her male counterpart.

Again, he believes that certain traditions have outlived their usefulness. A man should not marry many wives under the pretext of tradition or religion. Sembene Ousmane depicts the polygamous lifestyle of the Senegalese in *Gods Bits of Wood*. Most of the female characters are either second or third wives, but one of the protagonists, Bakayoko refuses to take a second wife. Ousmane stresses the need to break with African customs which retard progress. Ousmane condemns the polygamous system because it is oppressive. We can see this in *Xala* where Elhaj's enlightened daughter openly challenges her polygamous father who plans to take a third wife.

From another dimension, Ousmane promotes traditional values in his works. He has often been referred to as a griot who knows a lot about the history and culture of his people. He is a dynamic figure in his land and chief witness to every event. He is like a griot who recites events before the community. The transportation of folktales



into his art is a move to validate African culture. Most of Ousmane's tales contain examples of traditional wisdom that deals with the question of morality. Ousmane's tale also

worked as an expression of the African sense of community with the voice of the narrator...imitating that style of the griot talking directly to the reader, in an attempt to recreate the effect of the direct contact between story teller and listener in traditional African society (Murphy:43).

Thus, Ousmane combines traditional African technique of story-telling with focus on detail. Such dynamism enables Ousmane to blend the indigenous and the non-indigenous, the traditional and the contemporary. He often uses literary techniques that blend traditional and modern elements. On the one hand, we see him as a recorder, witness, narrator and master of epic tradition. On the other hand, he is a cinematographer, 'filming' his protagonists in motion. In *God's Bits of Wood*, he imbues Bakayoko with the griot's powerful gift of persuasive speech and also emphasizes 'the wisdom and deep religious conviction of the venerable sage, Fa keita' (Mildred:72) In this regard, Ousmane who is committed to social change shows his concern for traditional wisdom. He combines European literary approach with traditional model of oral narrative where the hero is deeply rooted in African legend and history. Udeh writes that

The epic is a genre of folklore and oral folk tradition that are recurrent motifs in many cultures of the world... It should be a heroic narrative with developed heroes...(31)

*God's Bits of Wood* is a heroic narrative. Just like all culture heroes who are rooted in African legend and history, Bakayoko can be seen as a historical or quasi-historical figure. The text is a reflection of a traditional community. We can also equate Bakayoko with the epic hero since he has the intuition of knowing the appropriate time to act. As the workers await this hero, the reader equally becomes curious. He comes 'at the crucial point in the history of his locality when his services were dearly needed and performs the magnificent feats of battling his...foes' (Udeh:78). Bakayoko is hot headed, bold, boastful and almost beating his chest when he confronts the representatives of the whites. Thus, Bakayoko is like epic heroes that are larger than life men: he is capable of great deeds of courage and strength. Ousmane must have transported this folk material from the oral tradition.

Ousmane has high regard for certain aspects of African culture and tradition. He appropriates materials – techniques, folklore and themes – from the oral tradition and also acknowledges oral antecedents by modelling upon these prototypes. For example, the African novel is an art form that is created out of the traditional African cultural context. The use of proverbs and songs is reminiscent of traditional African speech patterns. In *White Genesis* Ousmane emphasises the importance of oral traditions by investing Dethye Law (the griot) with the same powerful gift of persuasive speech. He knows a lot about the people's history and he is the custodian of the people's culture. If not for the griot, most of the traditions would have gone into extinction. Through his activities (story-telling and the use of proverbs) we know that the oral tradition is respected in Senegal. His proverbs and songs are of great importance in the lives of the people. The griot maintains the values and traditions of his society. The modern African writer is often compared to the traditional griot to

link him to a traditional form of story-telling. The modern African writer performs the same role as the traditional griot. Both of them tell the story of a people. In fact, modern African literature is a continuation of oral tradition; the oral tradition serves as antecedents to the modern African literature. The only difference is that while the former is spoken (oral), the latter is written. But they serve the same function (didactic art). The artists, in both instances have a moral lesson. In an interview with Bonnie Greer Ousmane bares his mind thus:

In the traditional society... we have the tradition of the story-teller called the griot ....Their role was to record memories of daily actions and events. At night, people would gather around them and they would tell stories that they had recorded. I think there are parallels between myself and these story-tellers because in that traditional society the story-teller was his writer, director, actor and musician. And his role was very important in cementing society. Now with new technologies and the tools that we have acquired... we can take inspiration from them... (Guardian Interview with Bonnie Greer:1)

Ousmane therefore plays the same role as the griot; he records the events that take place in his society (Senegal).From the foregoing, it is obvious that Ousmane is inspired by the griot. Hence, the importance of the griot in Ousmane's work cannot be overemphasized. It reminds the readers of the important role played by these traditional story tellers. The society needs its story tellers (griots) to remind it of its values. Dethye in *White Genesis* possesses a very fine voice and he uses it to speak and remind the people of their cultures. Lamar tells the griot that a discussion has

never been held without him. It is the griot (Dethye) that reminds the people of the rule of their grandfathers in the days when the essence of nobility depended on the way one lived and not on self-displays. The griot knows what punishment should be meted out to offences committed by any member of the community. He narrated how the ancestors used to deal with cases of incest. Dethye is deeply rooted in the history of his people as he reminds us how the ancestors handled disciplinary cases. Ousmane uses the traditional model of oral narrative in *White Genesis* as Dethye often narrates past events to the gathering. The bond between the story-teller and the audience is significant. The narrative style of *Money Order with White Genesis* is the same with the style in Ousmane's collection of short stories- *Tribal Scars*. The style is different from the grand narrative of *God's Bits of Wood*. 'There is a far more ironic and elusive narrative voice which hints at things rather than stating them straight out' (Murphy: 58). Ousmane in this case links the contemporary African writer to a traditional form of African story-telling. The *White Genesis* contains an example of traditional wisdom dealing with issues of morality. The moral of the story is 'Nobility is Not by Birth'. The first sentence in the *White Genesis* is 'The story I am going to tell you today is as old as the world' (*White Genesis*: 5). Ousmane... is ' a modern griot story-teller best known for his historical-political works with strong social comment.' ( Grunes:1)

Similarly, most of the stories in *Tribal Scars* have a moral lesson to teach. For instance, in the 'Bilial's Fourth Wife', we learn that there can always be doubt as to who is the father of a child, but never as to who is the mother. 'Tribal Scars' explains how our ancestors came to have tribal marks- They refused to become slaves. The question posed is about the source of the tradition of scarification. This tale reminds

us of the popular story of how tortoise came about its shell. The moral in *The Money Order* is ‘Honesty is a crime nowadays’. Ibrahim Dieng, the honest one goes through a shocking and frustrating moment. This style is similar to the device in oral tradition. The narrative voice imitating the voice of the griot in his direct address to the reader recreates a strong bond between the teller and his audience. It is interesting that, in this case, Ousmane promotes both the European literary tradition (written literature) and the African oral tradition. Sembene Ousmane himself is like a griot who knows a lot about the history of his people, and we can compare his commitment to art, his sense of justice and integrity with that of the griot (Dethye) in *White Genesis*. Dethye will stop at nothing to reveal or say the truth. Thus, Ousmane defines himself as a griot in contemporary Africa.

In *God's Bits of Wood*, Fa Keita, the old one reminds us of traditional tales where wisdom (age) is paramount in managing conflict. He says ‘I have seen more suns rise than any of you’ (94). He also reminds us of the times when the young listen as the old ones speak (what it used to be in the olden days). The conflict between modern and traditional practice is seen in the disagreement between the old man (tradition) and the young men (modern). While the young men advocate physical blow to punish Diara, Fa Keita thinks that shame, public disgrace or ridicule is more painful. The reasoning of the old man overshadows eight members of the jury when he says

‘You have shamed him before his friend and before the world and in doing that you have hurt him far more than you could by any bodily punishment’ (Ousmane: *God's Bits of Wood*: 95).

When the sage speaks, everyone listens, ‘all the earlier heat of argument varnished’ (96). It is worthy of note that Fa Keita uses wise sayings to settle the conflict between the jury and Diara. Thus, Ousmane does not recommend a trial at the law court (modern) but public disgrace or ridicule. Another instance of public disgrace is obvious in *Xala* where Elhaj is subjected to public ridicule. He is not tried in any court of law but he is publicly disgraced. The harrowing and shameful experience is more painful than the physical blow. The trial of the strike breaker in *God’s Bits of Wood* is a moral non violent rebuke that is more effective. The trial has ‘far more reaching consequences than the violent one of physical flagellation hitherto adopted’ (Aire: Modern Language Studies:77)

In *Tribal Scars*, Ousmane reflects how traditional tribal marks have outlived their usefulness in this modern time. Ousmane reveals that in the era of the slave trade, the marks were traditional security devices to save potential slaves from being captured by procurers. This is the case with Iowe who had all her body marked with cuts by her father, Amoo. The only device used to discourage the slave traders from capturing the blacks is these marks which were only relevant in the era of slave trade. However, educated and civilised people now look down on this tribal tradition. Ousmane recommends the modern practice of living without tribal marks as wives of gentlemen travel to Europe to consult beauticians who remove the marks. The new rule for African beauty which is a modern practice disdains this old tradition. African women are becoming americanised (modernised) and tribal marks have lost meaning and importance.

In *The Money-order with White Genesis*, Ousmane presents a traditional village-based society. This society is in the process of being transformed into a modern cosmopolitan urban society. The communal bond hitherto noticeable in traditional Africa is broken because of the emphasis on material possession. Moreover, urbanisation, modernity and bureaucracy which are the characteristics of civilisation now distance people from one another. In *The Money-order* Ousmane reflects a new modern society against the traditional community pictured in *White Genesis* thus juxtaposing a traditional community with a modern one. The Juxtaposition of these two differing communities is a device to ridicule any aspect of the culture that is not beneficial. For instance, Ousmane promotes the traditional African concepts of neighbourliness, communalism and mutual responsibility that help to sustain a member of the same community in times of need. It is quite interesting that, even in his moment of distress, Ibrahim Dieng gives 25franc to a helpless woman who in turn offers a helping hand to her neighbour. On the one hand, there is the moral obligation to help one's neighbour like in the olden days. On the other hand, Ousmane portrays the dark side of this society by creating a scenario where people are always so desperate to demand their share to the detriment of a fortunate person. Dieng is completely at the mercy of social expectations and constantly manipulates his neighbours. In this instance, tradition encounters change. Ousmane condemns the modern bureaucratic process as he laughs at Ibrahim Dieng who goes through a harrowing experience of cashing a money-order. The money-order that should bring joy, ironically, causes untold hardship and frustration. This is because of the bottleneck experienced as Dieng attempts to cash it. His inability to

cash the bank cheque reveals how the modern bureaucratic system slows down progress.

Moreover, as Ousmane condemns aspects of the tradition that hinder development, he attempts to rehabilitate the cultural patrimony in order to preserve the positive traditional beliefs that are fast eroding. In *White-Genesis*, Ousmane also takes as his theme the decline of village life and traditional morality. He uses a tale of incest which is an abomination in traditional Africa to demonstrate the breakdown of the African way of life. The incestuous relationship between father and daughter (Guibril and Khar) is a grave crime. The culprits are either expelled from the village or killed. The argument between the Imam and Massar as to whether Guibril be put to death is the main conflict in the story. Traditionalist Massar, supported by Baye Yamar, feels that the penalties should be carried out as stipulated in the *adda* (the tradition, or customary law). The *adda* is the first rule in the lives of the people. If this tradition is broken, the violator deserves either death or expulsion from the community. It is the only way to preserve the honour of the community, since the infamous behaviour brings shame on the whole of Santhiu-Niaye (the entire community). Ousmane condemns this incestuous act in all its ramifications, but he thinks the law should be modified in the modern times. He advocates a secular African tradition that will be more liberal when the Imam speaks in its favour. Thus, there is disagreement over the execution of Guibril, but he is ostracized. In his bid to strongly condemn the morally abnormal behaviour, Ousmane uses this crime to look at the breakdown of traditional African way of life. The Incestuous relationship between Guibril and his daughter, Khar reveals that people no longer conduct themselves in the way of the olden days. According to Dethye 'it was the rule of our



fathers and of our grandfathers in the days when the essence of mobility depended on the way one lived, not on self-display' (*White-Genesis*: 43).

To this end, the conflict between Medeoune (who insists on the application of traditional penalty) and Masser who feels the old law should be moderated in the modern time is a clash between tradition and modernity. Though both cultures do not condone incest, they are however in conflict over the punishment that should be meted out. Through Medeoune, Ousmane seems to suggest that tradition views incestuous relationship as a condemnable and abominable crime that should be visited with instant death or banishing of the parties involved. On the other hand, Masser and Imam (custodians of the tradition law) upholds that the penalty should not be applied as it is laid down, though he respects the law. What Ousmane recommends in this modern time is obvious from the way everybody tacitly avoids Guibril. During prayers, no one agrees to sit next to him. Sometimes they walk out of the mosque leaving him alone. The community so humiliates him that he remains indoor. In essence the short story points to the isolation of whosoever is guilty of this crime (incest). Ousmane's *White-Genesis* is a classic example of a writer's attempts to eliminate traditions that inhibit progress (murder of the offender).

Again, Ousmane is critical about the traditional practice that allows a man to marry more than one wife. 'The Bilial's Wife' in Ousmane's collection of short stories condemns the polygamous system. The man, Suliman is a martyr to polygamy as he crowns his later years with a fourth wife, a young one about the age of his eldest daughter. Just like Elhaj in *Xala* goes through a very shocking experience after taking his third wife, Suliman, in 'The Bilial's Wife' equally suffers the consequence of taking a fourth wife. The culture conflict in this case is evident when the men who

think polygamy is a way of life disagree with the young brides who are made to marry old men. Yaccine, in 'The Bilial's Wife' and Ngone in *Xala* are given out without their consent. Yaccine eventually runs away to a man of her age. Ousmane challenges this culture of giving out young girls without their consent and also condemns the practice of giving them out to old men. The conflict between traditional and modern values is inevitable when men refuse to abandon this African custom of polygamy. As the President of chamber and commerce puts it 'Although we are anxious to belong to the modern world, we haven't abandoned our African customs.(*Xala*:2) The modern practice is that people prefer to marry their contemporaries with whom they are compatible; this is a healthier custom than the old tradition of having girls betrothed to their family friends. In some cases girls have suitors chosen for them even shortly after their birth. This custom seals relationship between families. However, Ousmane's writings strongly frown at this repressive culture because the perpetrators often regret their polygamous lifestyle.

The locale in *The Money- Order* contrasts sharply with the setting in the *White Genesis*. There is a shift from the desolate rural community reflected in the latter to the urban setting of Dakar. Ousmane's concern in *The Money-Order* is the devastating effects that modernization (in form of money-order) could have on innocent people. The external agent (money order) from the Paris world forces Ibrahim out of his traditional but familiar and pleasant world to an unfamiliar world of the Dakar bureaucracy. Leaving his own familiar world culminates in pain, sorrow and frustration in the end. Ousmane criticises the modern but slow bureaucratic process of getting things done. At every point, the bureaucratic functionaries (in the Banks or post office) want a piece of paper as a form of identity. This bureaucratic process is in

conflict with the traditional African ethos of communalism. Ibrahim's frustration at cashing the money is designed to ridicule this modern practice which Ousmane thinks is inimical to progress. Why have Africans embraced foreign practices to the detriment of their own people? Why is there so much mutual distrust in a society where we are supposed to be our brother's keepers? Nowadays (modern times) people no longer think of others. According to Ibrahim, in *The Money-Order*, the present times no longer conform to the old tradition. Hence Ibrahim who is steeped in African tradition of neighbourliness often comes into conflict with other Africans who have been overwhelmed by the wind of modern change. Thus, Ibrahim is sceptical about seeking for assistance when his sister urges him to do so. He insists that nowadays everyone looks after himself. It is a time when the youth (as demonstrated by the apprentice) are expected to respect the elders, but the apprentice throws rapid blows at Ibrahim; a time when adolescents blow cigarette smoke to their elders. Money, these days, has taken the place of morality. If Mbaye, Dieng's relation could dupe Ibrahim of his 25,000 franc then honesty is not the best policy in the modern times. For one to survive the present one should not be too trusting; there are no longer true neighbours. Ousmane is bitter about the craze for material things which has made people throw morality to the wind. The sarcastic note on which he ends *The Money-Order* is revealing. This is because the society at large is inundated by the influence of modern values. Ibrahim Dieng is our model. Even in the face of adversity, Dieng remains unshaken in his commitment to upholding those traditional values that unite Africans.

Therefore, as Ousmane mirrors a traditional village-based society in the process of being transformed into a modern urban society in *The Money-Order*,

conflict between the African tradition and the imported value system of the west is imminent. The notion of mutual responsibility that helps to sustain the members of the same community in times of need is being replaced with the western capitalist system that emphasizes individual comfort. It is now every man for himself.. Ibrahima, who used to adhere strongly to the African notion of neighbourliness by sharing whatever belongs to him, decides to 'wear the skin of a hyena'. He realizes that in the modern times, it does not pay to be honest. He declares thus: 'it is over now, I am now going to put on the skin of a hyena' (*White-Genesis*. p. 136). It is only cheating and lies that are rewarding nowadays.

## **CHAPTER FIVE SOYINKA AND OUSMANE COMPARED AND CONTRASTED**

### **5.1 METHODS USED BY THE COMPARATIVIST**

Chapter five compares the selected prose of Soyinka and Ousmane in terms of conflict and empowerment; it deals with the relationship between these two African writers of different nationalities. The chapter is concerned with the similarities and differences between the works of these artists. Comparative literature is an academic field dealing with the literatures of two or more different linguistic, cultural or national groups. Comparative study can be performed on works of same language if such works originate from different nations or cultures. It is an Interdisciplinary field where the comparativists study literature across genres, across national borders, across time periods and across languages.

Other areas of interest in comparative literature include the link of literature to folklore and mythology and the study of colonial and post colonial writings in different parts of the world. Beginning from the twentieth century, a popular empiricist and positivist approach termed the French school has characterised comparative literature. The Scholars examine works forensically searching for evidence of origin and influences between works and from different countries. They also trace how a particular literary motif or idea travelled between nations over time. In the French school, the study of influences and origins dominates. This researcher has embarked on a study that is similar to the French School.

The intention in this chapter is to establish defining characteristics such as sources, influence, thematic parallels and disparity. The study compares the selected works of the chosen artists in terms of themes and approach. The research draws attention to the fact that the two authors present similar ideas and equally discusses

how they differ from each other. Comparison is our instrument and this is across national frontiers. The researcher extracts point of similarities in dissimilar texts-Francophone and Anglophone literatures. The chapter looks at the exchange of themes and ideas between the two writers. Henry Remak writes that ‘comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country (Remak: 1). Comparative literature deals with the relationship between two countries or two writers of different origins. In this instance, through a study of Soyinka and Ousmane the research looks at the relationship between Senegalese literature and Nigerian literature.

## **5.2 SIMILARITIES**

### **5.2.1 Writers’ Approach to Conflict**

The two writers share similar influence and background. As earlier discussed in chapter 3, Soyinka was an eye witness to the conflict between the Egba women and the colonial government and he received political education from Ransom Kuti who urges him to be conscious of world affairs. This beginning or influence armed him with the materials needed for his works. In a similar vein, Ousmane is greatly influenced by his earlier experience as a docker. He was actively involved in the 1947 workers’ strike in Dakar which can be equated to the Egba women’s strike that equally motivated Soyinka. The events mentioned manifest in the works of these first generation writers.

Moreover, characters in the works of the two authors fall into two different compartments of progressives and reactionaries. Bakayoko with his union of workers are the progressives in *God’s Bits of Wood*; the whites with their agents who struggle to perpetuate the white man’s tenure are the reactionaries. Similarly, Ofeyi and his

cohort are the progressives in *Season of Anomy*; the cartel made up of people like Zakari, Amuri, Chief Biga and Chief Batoki constitutes the reactionary elements. In Soyinka's *The interpreters*, the interpreters who desire a change are the progressives while the political elite made up of people like chief Winsala and the chairman constitute the reactionaries. In Ousmane's *Tribal Marks* Malic and other workers are the progressives; the whites with African collaborators like Ibra represent the reactionaries.

There is a division between the bourgeois class and the proletariat in Ousmane's *Xala* and a similar separation between the intellectuals and the politicians in Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. Ousmane ridicules Elhaj, the Comprador bourgeois in *Xala*: Soyinka laughs at Chief Winsala, the politician in the *The Interpreters*. The two authors do not support the indigenous African rulers who have taken so much from the less privileged. They write to expose these middlemen who maintain a flamboyant and expensive lifestyle at the expense of the less privileged class.

Soyinka and Ousmane demonstrate the zeal with which Africans search for another ruler each time a throne is vacant. This is presented in Soyinka's *Isara*, Ousmane's *The Last of the Empire* and *White Genesis*. In *Isara*, the zeal with which the people search for another ruler reveals man's instinct for power. Similarly, there is serious power conflict in Ousmane's *The Last of the Empire* when the Head of state goes missing. Medoune, in Ousmane's *White Genesis* has the excessive ambition to take his brother's position.

Moreover, the authors present the marginalised as the heroes in the political conflict between the political elite and the marginalised. Selection of characters is premised on the deplorable condition of the marginalised. Bakayoko, the leader of the

workers in *God's Bits of Wood* is marginalised and also one of the heroes in the text. Other marginalised protagonists include Penda, Ramatoulaye, Maimouna and Adjibidji among others. Ousmane does not say much about the whites who oppress the blacks. In a similar vein, the interpreters (the disillusioned graduates) in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* are given more attention than the political class. Reference to politicians like Chief Winsala is not frequent. In essence, the two novelists focus more on the less privileged than the privileged class. It is only in Ousmane's *Xala* that the writer tries to maintain a balance; Elhaj the comprador bourgeoisie receives about the same attention as the womenfolk and the destitute (the oppressed). In *The Money-Order with White Genesis* Dethye Law and Ibrahim are given adequate attention.

Moreover, it is obvious that the conflict in the works of our chosen authors is between the progressives and the reactionaries; it is between the forces of change and forces of reaction that are often bent on maintaining the statusquo. While the conflicts in Ousmane's works are between the haves and have nots, Soyinka portrays conflict between the intellectuals and the Politicians, and between the privileged and the less-privileged. The intellectuals-Egbo, Sagoe, Sekoni, Ofeyi, the Dentist and Iriyise are in conflict with the political class in *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy*.

In addition, Soyinka and Ousmane mirror the evils of political domination, conflict and suppression of the weak. The writers also believe that it is the duty of the marginalised to rise up to liberate themselves. Soyinka is a victim of an unjust system in *The Man Died* while Sekoni and Sagoe are victims of the oppressive system in *The Interpreters*. Similarly, Bakayoko and the other rail workers in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* are victims of the unfair colonial powers. Moreover, Elhaj's driver and the destitute in Ousmane's *Xala* are the oppressed ones.



Therefore, the two authors who are committed to the cause of the proletariat explore the themes of power and class conflicts. The conflicts between the strong and the weak, the privileged and the less- privileged, the ruling party and the masses are also depicted in the works of Soyinka and Ousmane. There is power conflict between Ofeyi and the Cartel in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*. Similarly, Ousmane's *The Last of the Empire* is an exposition of the power conflict between Daouda and Mamlat. Ousmane's *Xala* is a reflection of the class conflict between the neo-colonialists and the masses; Soyinka's *The Interpreters* portrays a similar conflict between the interpreters and the politicians. While the masses (beggars) in *Xala* disagree with the class of businessmen, Sagoe, one of the interpreters is in constant opposition with Chief Winsala. Moreover, the power conflict in Soyinka's *Isara* is akin to the conflict in Ousmane's *The Last of the Empire*. Just like *Isara* seeks for another Odemo, Senegal, as reflected in *The Last of the Empire* searches for a new Head of State. There is a vacuum in each of the communities, and this culminates in power conflict. ,

Antagonistic contradictions are basically contradictions between classes whose interests are irreconcilably hostile. The major feature of these contradictions is that they cannot be resolved within the framework of social system of which they are representative. As these contradictions grow deeper and more acute, they lead to bitter clashes, to conflicts...(Nwankwo and Mbajorgu: 146).

For instance, the antagonism between Ofeyi and the cartel in *Season of Anomy* is irreconcilable because they represent different classes. And so is the antagonism between the workers and their employees in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*. The same contradiction is portrayed between the bourgeoisie and the destitute in

Ousmane's *Xala* and between the intellectuals and the politicians in Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. This bitter class struggle (Conflict) has become endemic in the fight against injustice.

Ousmane advocates social revolution in resolving the class conflicts. In *God's Bits of Wood* and *Xala* the workers and beggars revolt against the privileged class to press for their rights. Ousmane demonstrates that it takes a revolution to end an unjust system. One can say that Soyinka prefers the 'non-violent strategy as a legitimate process of exposing the social injustice' (Nwankwo and Mbajiorgu: 154) in *The Interpreters* and *Isara* where the conflict is resolved through an open and democratic election.

### **5.2.2 The Writers' Approach to Empowerment**

Comparative literature establishes a relationship between different writers or literatures and promotes 'our understanding of literary works as a human activity with similar aesthetic and social functions' (Izevbye:11). A close examination of Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* and Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* reveals the interconnectedness of literatures in terms of themes and characterization. Just like Bakayoko in *God's Bits of Wood* mobilizes the workers to fight for their political rights, Ofeyi does the same in *Season of Anomy* by requesting the presence of the marginalized Aiyero community to undermine the Cartel. The two protagonists marshal the less privileged class into political awareness and conscientization which spurs them to action.

Soyinka and Ousmane are African writers who started their creative activities before their countries gained Independence. They are among the first generation of African writers who demonstrate their concern for the less privileged with the same

passion. They are human rights activists and visionary writers who seek to better the lot of the proletariat. Both of them are therefore committed to empowering ordinary people who do not have the same privileges as the bourgeoisie. Soyinka and Ousmane believe in the potential strength of the oppressed class and they employ the same method of empowering them. The oppressed class is mobilised into political awareness of their rights through the protagonists. The disadvantaged as seen in their works are always in solidarity thereby drawing strength from each other. The common bitter experience often binds them together and gives them the confidence and empowerment to fight the injustice meted out to them. For instance, the progressives in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* who do not belong to the ruling class are so united that they remain committed to displacing the cartel (the ruling class). Similarly, the beggars in Ousmane's *Xala* speak with one voice and the strong union of deprived workers in *God's Bits of Wood* remains committed to the same cause- the overthrow of the colonial masters. The workers' Union in Ousmane's prose are as united as the progressives in Soyinka's works.

In essence, the two authors increase the political, social and economic strength of the marginalised that are often excluded from decision making and denied other privileges. The less privileged ones who were earlier ostracised gradually become relevant and bring about positive changes. The marginalised people of Aiyero in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* were initially unaware of the cartel's moves to cling on to power. However, as Ofeyi and the Dentist embark on a mission of empowering the citizens, the people become conscious of the events around them. In a similar vein, the naive workers and beggars in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* and *Xala* are equally mobilised into political consciousness.

Furthermore, just as the workers in Ousmane's *Tribal Scars* are aware of their political rights and strongly demand for justice, Jagun faction in Soyinka's *Isara* fights to break the old feudal network that perpetuates a particular caste in power. Soyinka and Ousmane are averse to systems whereby few people continue to keep power; they do not believe that leadership should be retained by the privileged class. This conviction informs their resolve to empower the weak. Soyinka and Ousmane do not support monopoly of power by the ruling caste (royal family). Therefore, the two authors allow those who do not belong to the ruling class to have the upper hand in *Isara*, *White Genesis*, *The Last of the Empire*, *Season of Anomy* and *God's Bits of Wood*. Soyinka empowers the Jagun faction and the progressives in *Isara* and *Season of Anomy* respectively. For instance, members of the Jagun faction are so assertive in their decision to dethrone Olisa (the ruling class). Similarly, Medeoune, the aristocrat in Ousmane's *White Genesis* loses out and Daouda, who is not an aristocrat in *The Last of the Empire*, has the empowerment to run the affairs of government.

Soyinka and Ousmane suggest that rulers should be selected based on the credentials of any contender and not on family background or blood ties. Soyinka frowns at selecting leaders solely from the royal family in *Isara*; Ousmane condemns it in *The White-Genesis* and *The Last of The Empire*. In *Season of Anomy* and *Isara*, Soyinka equally suggests that power should not be monopolised by a particular group or lineage. He wonders why people want to hang on to power forever. For instance, attempts to cling to power by the power-besotted cartel and Olisa in *Season of Anomy* and *Isara* respectively are resisted by the progressives. Similarly, Ousmane advocates skill, knowledge, integrity, honesty and ability as yardsticks for anyone who wants to run the affairs of government. He denounces the practice of denying those who are

not of the aristocratic lineage access to power. Hence, he breaks the old feudal networks by allowing a man from a low caste assume the noble position of a prime minister. Ousmane equally frustrates the efforts of ambitious rulers in *The White-Genesis*. It is worthy of note that a man from a low caste (Dethye) thwarts the attempts made by ambitious and discreditable contender (Medeone) to usurp power. In essence, the two authors are committed to empowering people from the low caste; the ordinary man; the disadvantaged folk and the marginalised. The two writers give the dispossessed people hope.

### 5.2.3 Writers' Approach to Culture Conflicts

Ousmane and Soyinka promote traditional African culture. The writers are interested in those cultures that enhance the welfare of an individual. They attack those traditional tenets that prevent the female characters from attaining self-fulfilment. Women are therefore given roles that ensure this fulfilment. Ramatoulaye and Penda in *God's Bits of Wood*, Mrs. Faseyi in *The Interpreters* are not stereotypical of the restricted African women. Both authors present the female gender in a positive light. They do this by putting the female characters on par with their male counterparts. The Egba women's riot in Soyinka's *Ake* brings to mind women's heroic march in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*. In both instances, the women challenge the authority of the whites.

Similarly, the two African writers are interested in those cultures that unite the Africans. They demonstrate their passionate concern for the survival of the extended family system as a unit. Dehinwa's mother in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* need not inform her daughter before visiting her and Ibrahim in Ousmane's *Money Order* remembers the members of his community in spite of his ordeal. In essence, the two

artists strongly believe in the African sense of communalism; they remind us of the old times when people live together sharing possessions and responsibilities. There is that strong sense of belonging and oneness. The writers make efforts to protect the healthy African culture from the harmful modern system that only guarantees the welfare of selected privileged ones. Moreover, communalism is one of the themes in *Season of Anomy* where the people of Aiyero share everything in common. In *God's Bits of Wood*, Ousmane also advocates this communal living by bringing all the rail workers together to agitate for their rights. It is this communal living that ensures the welfare of all the blacks, since they are able to come together to press for better living conditions.

Soyinka equally supports communalism in *Isara* where people leave the modern urban settings for their native and traditional community. Friends from far and near come back home (their community) to share their joy. What Soyinka suggests in *Isara*, as people travel home is that as members of the same community they are brothers. In *Isara, Essay*, Soyinka's father often takes his son home to visit his extended family. The image of homecoming is central in the text. People go to the city but often return to their village which is regarded as 'home'. In this instance, Soyinka is saying that 'home' is the place where all members of the extended family converge and unite as one big family. He decries the modern nuclear family system where the father and mother with their siblings mind their business. Hence, Pa Soditan is more disturbed about Iyawo's ailment than Essay (Iyawo's husband). Soditan also cares for his grandmother when he considers building a comfortable house for her. Ousmane's *Xala* equally condemns the capitalist system, where few business men control and run the affairs of government for personal gains.

The business men like Elhaj and his cohorts run the country's business for profit. They so mismanaged the nation's resources that the peasants wallow in penury. Ousmane frowns at this western capitalist system and reminds us of that same communal living. We see the beggars as a community when they unite together as one family to demand for their rights. The Egba women's union in Soyinka's *Ake* and the Women's Union in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* are also classic examples of situations where Africans come out as a community for community service. Thus, the community spirit in Soyinka and Ousmane's works is evident in this respect.

In addition, as the two authors celebrate certain elements of African culture, they reject the negritude notion of blind celebration of everything African. They do not support the romanticised concept of pure African tradition. Their vision of the African society is one that will accommodate changes that are progressive. Like Soyinka, 'Sembene's image of Africa has been more self-critical, less romanticised than Leopold Sedar Senghor who more or less glorified the past' (Grunes:1). On the one hand, Ousmane's Ibrahima, in *God's Bits of Wood*, who represents African tradition, accepts to marry his late brother's wife seeing it as a traditional role. On the other hand, he is averse to the polygamous African tradition. Similarly, Dehinwa's Mother (respector of African tradition) in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is aware of the importance and relevance of western education, hence she invested so much that she sends her daughter abroad to acquire this knowledge. However, she is incensed at the western practice that permits a spinster live with a man. Thus, the two artists promote the relevant tenets in their selective approach to African and western values. Ibrahim and Dehinwa's mother, as demonstrated, take on board what they consider appropriate to the need of their times.

Again, the two novelists are critical about some ridiculous and retrogressive religious practices. While Ousmane disapproves of the Islamic tradition that suppresses the weak, Soyinka laughs at the hypocrites in the church. For instance, Ousmane satirises the retrogressive Islamic injunction that allows a man to marry up to four wives. He frowns at the polygamous lifestyle in *Xala*, *God's Bits of Wood* and *Tribal Scars* and also condemns the strict koranic law (the adda) which states that anyone who commits incest be executed. He advocates a liberal option of banishment considered to be a secular African tradition. In a similar vein, Soyinka is averse to some religious procedures in the church. In *The Interpreters*, he ridicules Lazarus (the overseer of a church) who is worse than his flocks. Soyinka rejects religious quackery through his cynical attitude towards the hypocritical practice in the church. Like Brother Jero in *The Trials of Brother Jero*, Lazarus recommends himself when he says that, like Christ, he once resurrected from death.

Thus, the study of these texts in a comparative manner demonstrates how people of different cultural and social backgrounds respond in the same way when they are faced with a similar experience. The similarities that are drawn between Soyinka and Ousmane's texts are quite revealing.

### **5.3 DIFFERENCES**

Having looked at the similarities between these two authors, we now focus our attention on the differences. It is imperative to explore the dissimilarities to discover what is peculiar to each of the writers. As we have seen from our previous discussion, both of them show strong similarities. Nevertheless, each of them is biased towards some of these issues. The writers demonstrate tendencies to favour certain beliefs by



projecting them positively. While Soyinka is a culture activist dwelling more on the Yoruba culture, Ousmane is more particular about the plight of traditional African women. However, both of them maintain almost a similar stance on the sad situation of the less privileged folks.

Soyinka is more fascinated with the culture of his people than Ousmane. Soyinka grew up in the midst of his people before travelling abroad. Reference to his customs is frequent in his works. His constant allusion to Yoruba creation myth is most revealing. The belief in a supreme deity, Olodumare, is the content of Kola's pantheon in Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. Soyinka always reflects spirits of ancestors guiding and guarding the living. The living should be careful not to say anything to offend the spirits else sacrifices must be made to appease them. The children, in Soyinka's *Ake*, are warned not to play around the forest where the spirits reside. Soyinka's ethnic heritage and regular visits to his father's ancestral home in Isara, a Yoruba community, secure in its customs, are evident in this regard. The belief in 'Abiku', the spirit that keeps coming back to torment the living and the fusion of Yoruba festival traditions like the appearance of masquerade are given considerable attention in Soyinka's prose.

Moreover, Soyinka's cultural background as a Yoruba man manifests greatly in his works. There are certain vernacular expressions and rhythm of Yoruba speech patterns that are retained. He often uses the resources of the first language (culture) and successfully demonstrates the relevance of the past to the present. For instance, he prefers to use the local word 'egungun' for masquerade in *Ake*, *Isara* and *The Interpreters*. Also, Soyinka retains vernacular meals such as 'iyan', 'amala' and 'ewedu' among others. He prefers to express Yoruba attire, music, arts and gods in

the vernacular. Thus, in *The Interpreters* ‘agbada’ is used in place of a voluminous Yoruba garment, ‘adire’ for dyed cloth; ‘dansiki’, orisanla; the principal deity, sango; god of lightening, apala; a kind of Yoruba music, iyawo; a new bride just to mention a few. The use of these vernacular expressions is significant because at the time Soyinka wrote these texts, this was not the practice. Writers put in glossaries to explain unfamiliar words and expressions. Soyinka prefers to use vernacular terms for these items; it is preferable to retain the local expression in order to showcase this rich and interesting culture. These vernacular expressions are recurrent in *Isara*, *The Interpreters*, *Ake* and *Season of Anomy*. Language is an integral part of culture; hence Soyinka demonstrates the relevance by interpolating vernacular expressions into his literary works. The following examples (from *Ake* ) have been given to further illustrate our point.

B o o lo Oya mi\_ If you aren’t moving, get out of my way

Igbagbo \_Faith

Sa a ra\_ An offering

Abiku\_ A child is born, dies, is born again and dies in a repetitive circle.

Egba mi , ara e ma ntutu \_ Help me, she is getting cold all over.

Akara, moinmoin \_Delicacies made from beans

Omi kan \_ Sour fermented liquid believed to have curative powers.

Emo \_ A wild rodent

Aso oke \_ a hand woven cloth

Iyan \_ pounded yam

Ara oko \_ someone from the hinterland considered 'bush'

Moreover, Yoruba songs are often used; Soyinka artistically blends English language with Yoruba language by interspersing the songs in his works. In *Ake* the school children sing thus:

B'ina njo ma jeko	If the house is on fire, I must eat
B'olen nja ma jeko	If the house is being robbed, I must eat
Eni ebi npa omo witi re	The child who is hungry let him speak

The child (Wole) also sings in this way:

Ogbon 'jo ni September	Thirty days has September
April, June, ati November	April, June and November
February meji din l'ogbon	All the rest has thirty-one days except
Awon Iyoku le okan l'ogbon	February which has twenty-eight days

Igba o lowo	The gourd has arms
Tere gungun maja gungun	Tere gungun...
Tere	The gourd has no legs
Igba o lese	Tere...

Tere gungun maja gungun

Tere

Nijo itoro- Gbim!	One day of three pence
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Nijo i sisi- Gbim!	One day of six pence
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O o ni lo l'oni- Gbim	You are tightly held
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O o ni se b'emo- Gbim	You won't repeat it
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Won gba e leti- Gbim      You are soundly slapped

Ewon re do'ola- Gbim      Your sentence begins tomorrow

The strong regular repeated pattern of sound (rhythm) is quite interesting as the author seems to remind the reader of African beats. In addition, Soyinka uses these vernacular expressions in his works to bring dignity to bear on native African language. In addition, the use of these expressions in works that are read worldwide is a literary device employed to give visibility to a culture and language worthy of recognition internationally. Yoruba proverbs are used and they are rendered in vernacular (Yoruba). Hence, in *Isara*- A je ke l'a na, omo ku l'oni; tani ko samo pea je lo p'omo (*Isara:93* ) meaning the witch cried last night and the child died at dawn; who dare claim it was not the witch that murdered the child. The implication of this proverb is that there are always clear indications of every incident. In addition, Soyinka sometimes blends Yoruba proverbs with English language as in 'This is not oju lasan'(*Isara:73*) which implies this is not in normal course of nature. The word 'oju'(eye) is the metaphor suggesting that there is more to whatever one sees

However, we see less of these in Ousmane's works; he does not give importance to the Senegalese culture as Soyinka does. Virtually all of Soyinka's works demonstrate the writer's passion for African traditional religion. The Religion of the Grain is the belief of the people of Aiyero in *Season of Anomy*. In *Isara*, emphasis is on the traditional belief of consulting the oracle before one embarks on any project. Ousmane does not portray such African religious practices and vernacular expressions as Soyinka. Ousmane is more concerned with the oral tradition-the use of the story telling technique, wise sayings/ traditional wisdom and stressing the crucial role of the griot. For instance, his collection of short stories, *Tribal Scars* contains

stories that teach one moral lesson or the other. The griot is reflected in almost all his novels. He portrays the griot in *Xala*, *Tribal Scars*, *Money-Order with White Genesis* and *God's Bits of Wood*. This is a feature (griot) that is lacking in Soyinka's prose works. The Moslem society of Senegal is also obvious in Ousmane's prose. Virtually, all the protagonists in the selected works are polygamists. However, he condemns those Moslem practices that oppress the weak. As earlier stated, even though a Moslem he does not support the tenet that allows a man to marry more than one wife.

The different emphasis pointed out in this research may be due to the fact that both authors truly reflect their societies. The griot is central to the social organisation in Ousmane's community and absent in Soyinka's, while the masquerade tradition which feature prominently in Soyinka's prose is absent in Ousmane's Islamic society.

Wole Soyinka devotes more time to the modern world's interruptions of ancient ritual practices. He looks back with nostalgia, he envisions a "New Africa"

.....that would escape its colonial past by grafting the technical advances of the present onto the stock of its own ancient traditions. Native myth, reformulated to accommodate contemporary reality was to be the foundation of the future, opening the way to self retrieval, cultural recollection and cultural security ([http; prelectur Stranford.edu/lectures/Soyinka;2](http://prelectur.Stranford.edu/lectures/Soyinka;2))

On the other hand, problems of family relations and marital discord are more prominently featured in Ousmane's writings. The exposition of gender related- issues in Ousmane's prose are such that one could tag him a feminist writer. His concern for the female gender puts him almost on the same plane with gender activists like Zainab Alkali, Mariama Ba and Buchi Emecheta among others. The female characters, in his

works, are more positively portrayed than in Soyinka's prose. In fact, they are militants willing to use force or strong pressure to attain a better situation. In essence, the female characters in Ousmane's novel are stronger and more assertive than the women in Soyinka's works. It is only in Soyinka's *Ake* that the Egba women measure up to Ousmane's ideal females. Most of the women in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*, *Xala* and *Tribal scars* among others are more liberated, more outspoken and committed to the cause of women than the women in Soyinka's prose.

In addition, the number of assertive and courageous women in Ousmane's works is more than the one in Soyinka's works. We have strong female characters like Ramatoulaye, Penda, Maimouna, Adjibidji, N'deye Touti, Niakoro, Assitan just to mention a few in *God's Bits of Wood*. In *Xala* we admire the courage of Rama, Oumi'Ndoye and Babacar. His collection of short stories, *Tribal Scars* also features more female characters than the male characters. For instance, Vaccine, Sakinetou, Noumbe and Diouona are few examples of the female characters that Ousmane projects positively. The bold women in Soyinka's works are relatively few compared to the number of female characters in Ousmane's novels. We have only three outstanding women in *The Interpreters*, three in *Season of Anomy* and the women's union in *Ake*. Though Soyinka portrays a liberated African woman, the women in Ousmane's works are more politically forceful in demanding for independence.

In addition, Ousmane focuses more on the effects of colonialism and the rise of the African middle class. Much of his prose is centred on the struggle for independence, and how the African bourgeois ape the former colonial masters. Maryse Conde contends that

...Ousmane is an exception in French-speaking West Africa. He is almost the only writer who started publishing novels during the colonial period and still does, denouncing the evils of the post-Independence era as he did for pre-Independence.( Conde:97)

In its early stage, the bulk of Ousmane's works was concerned with colonial abuse of power and the concomitant 'effects of the colonial experiences on the cultural values on his referent society (Amuta:180). However, his later critical observations condemn the perpetration of oppression and injustice in post-colonial Africa. Colonialism is one of Soyinka's themes, but he gives attention to this in some of his plays. For example, *A Dance of the Forest* reminds us of the chronic dishonesty and abuse of power which colonialism has bred in African rulers. The theme of colonialism is recurrent in Ousmane's novels. He strongly believes in the radical nature of the independence movement, hence he presents the workers' Union as an agent for independence in *God's Bits of Wood* and *Tribal Scars*. The conflict in Ousmane's works is first, between the whites and the blacks and then between blacks and blacks. *Xala* is also an exposition of the conflict between the white man and the black man as we witness the union of native rulers makes conscious efforts to seize power from the imperialists. *Tribal Scars* also explores power conflict between the colonialists and the blacks and another conflict between African bourgeoisie and the deprived masses.

On the other hand, Soyinka dwells more on post-independence politics (Neo-colonialism) than on colonialism. He is often bitter about African leaders' overriding interest in power. The conflict in his prose works is mostly between the black rulers and the less privileged. For instance, Soyinka condemns the injustice meted out by African leaders to the less privileged in *The Man Died*. The conflict in *Season of*

*Anomy* and *The Interpreters* is also between African bourgeoisie and Nigerian intellectuals. In *The Man Died*, the conflict is between the privileged black leaders represented by people like Mallam D and the less privileged blacks represented by Soyinka and the Igbo prisoners. Again, the power conflict in *Season of Anomy* is between the progressive blacks and the reactionary black leaders. Ofeyi, the Dentist, Zacheus and Iriyise are the progressives; Chief Biga, Zaki Amuri and Chief Batoki represent the reactionary group. In *The Interpreters* where Soyinka explores post-colonial politics, he suggests that we should not be unduly preoccupied with the atrocities of the colonialists. If we continue to dwell so much on the evils of colonialism, African writers may neglect the chaotic state of the continent in contemporary times and ignore the responsibilities of Africans themselves for its present state.

Therefore, Soyinka's prose is more committed to exposing the decadence of modern African society than the evils of colonialism. His prose works are concerned with snobbery, hypocrisy, materialism, social inequality, injustice, incompetence and the prevalence of corruption. All these are attributes of African leaders that are seen in *The Interpreters*, *Season of Anomy* and *The Man Died*. For instance, Soyinka rejects the injustice meted out to the prisoners in *The Man Died*; he deplores the corrupt practices of politicians like Chief Winsala in *The Interpreters* and condemns social inequality and materialism in *Season of Anomy* where Chief Batoki lives a flamboyant lifestyle.

The study of selected texts by Ousmane and Soyinka demonstrates how people of different cultural and social backgrounds respond in the same way when they are confronted with similar situations. The similarities drawn between Soyinka and



Ousmane's texts are quite revealing. The researcher has established parallels between Soyinka's themes of conflict and empowerment and that of Ousmane. The importance of this comparative study with regards to the selected texts is that the full understanding of the works is shaped by the projection of similar ideas and vision by the writers. Comparative literature is therefore a method of literary analysis that enhances our appreciation of literature and its value to society.

## CHAPTER SIX SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### 6.1 SUMMARY

The study gives a background and general influences on Soyinka and Ousmane. These influences or environmental factors, to a large extent determine the nature of the writers' works. The two novelists grew up in an environment where conflict resulted in the oppression of the less privileged by the privileged ones. The two writers are therefore committed to empowering the marginalised. The authors are fully aware of how modern cultures are gradually replacing traditional African tenets. They respond to enculturation by promoting rich and progressive cultural values. They are also conscious of the plight of the women in a patriarchal society and are passionate in their bid to empower them.

Wole Soyinka and Sembene Ousmane are also leading protagonists in empowering the marginalised. Various instances of conflict in the works of our chosen artists and the process or method of empowerment are discussed in this work. The authors have portrayed power conflict between the progressives and the reactionaries. As the former strives to bring about political changes, the latter is determined to keep power. It is this inordinate political ambition of the reactionaries that culminates in power conflict between the two groups. Soyinka also reflects power conflict between the Igbos and the Federal might in *The Man Died* and in *Season of Anomy* there is power conflict between the power besotted cartel and the progressives. Another instance of power conflict is in *Isara*, between two factions- Jagun and Olisa. Power conflict in Ousmane's *Xala* is between the pseudo-bourgeoisie and the imperialists. There is a similar conflict in *God's Bits of Wood*

between the black workers and the colonial overlords and another conflict between these workers and their fellow blacks (agents of imperialists). Ousmane portrays power conflict between Medeoune and Gubril in *White-Genesis* and between Daouda and Mamlat in *The Last of the Empire*.

The two authors examine class conflict between people who are not of the same socio-economic background; it is a conflict between two different classes (between the privileged and less-privileged class). The study has shown the class conflict between the class of intellectuals and the ruling class as portrayed by Soyinka in *The Interpreters*. There exists class conflict between Elhaji (the privileged one) and the beggars (the less privileged class) in Ousmane's *Xala*. The conflict in *God's Bits of Wood* and *Season of Anomy* is equally between people who are not of the same socio-economic level. The disparity in socio-economic status culminates in class conflict. The class conflict in *God's Bits of Wood* is between the less-privileged black workers who agitate for better living conditions and the privileged whites. The study shows how the authors empower this less-privileged class. The research also demonstrates how Soyinka and Ousmane create awareness in the disadvantaged folk of the need to bring about socio-political changes. Soyinka uses songs (arts) in *Season of Anomy*. These songs are powerful political tools employed in empowering the rural community; the songs are used in educating the people on the need to undermine the cartel. This research has equally shown another source of empowerment which is the unity of the less privileged class. In *The Interpreters* the interpreters are university graduates, hence they are enlightened and they are fully conscious of the social inequality perpetrated by the political class. Moreover, their education has given them the empowerment to exercise assertiveness in their resolve to expose corrupt

politicians. Bakayoko in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* is a strong agent of empowerment. Ousmane uses him to mobilise the deprived workers into political consciousness of their rights. The strong union and unity of the workers and destitute in *God's Bits Wood* and *Xala* give the marginalised the boldness (empowerment) to demand for their rights. The study shows the role played by the griot in empowering the weak. Dethye, a griot has all it takes to bring about social and political changes. He is an orator who knows a lot about his people. As a manipulator of language, he is in the position to empower the people and to instigate political action against any discredited power.

The researcher further examines culture conflict in the case of the two writers. The western and African values that are in conflict include:

1. Modern medicine versus traditional medicine;
2. Christian religion versus traditional religion;
3. Communal living versus individualism;
4. Traditional ways of behaviour and modified social behaviour
5. Modern urban setting versus traditional village setting;
6. Monogamy versus polygamy;
7. Extended family system versus nuclear family system;
8. English mannerisms versus romance with African customs;
8. European literary approach versus oral narrative;
9. Trial in a law court versus traditional wisdom and
10. Modern bureaucratic process versus communal neighbourliness.

The study has also shown the tenets that are incongruous in the modern age and the healthy and progressive values. Some of the progressive and positive African tenets

are communal living, extended family system, respect for the elders, traditional therapy, natural artefacts, and tranquillity of the traditional African setting and the use of certain vernacular expressions. Notable among the cultures that are inimical to progress are polygamy, consultation of the oracle, execution of people who commit incest, monarchy and tribal marks among others. Soyinka suggests that the custom of prostration should be moderated; instead of lying down completely and soiling one's clothes, the youth can bow slightly and have a brief handshake with the elders. In addition, the youth should have a say in chieftaincy matters. Some of the modern values that the writers condemn are Individualism, Nuclear family system, trial in a law court and Modern bureaucratic procedures. They recommend monogamy, equal opportunities for men and women and the right or freedom to choose a spouse.

The researcher looks at how Soyinka and Ousmane imbue the women with qualities hitherto recognised in men. It is a deliberate device to empower the female folk who were formerly relegated to the background. The writers bring the women to the fore by reflecting female characters that have courage and perseverance. Soyinka and Ousmane allocate to the womenfolk strong, vital and challenging roles, not a secondary status. The woman is well represented in their texts. Many of their works are populated by women who play very active roles in crisis situations. Women have the right to be heard. Bakayoko, one of the male characters in Ousmane's *Gods Bits of Wood* raises his arm for the women calling for silence. "Our gallant women have something to say to us .... They have the right to be heard." (Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*: 185). Indeed, a woman speaks strongly and very confidently, on behalf of the women. She reiterates the women's resolve to raise their heads and not give in, and the proposed plan to march to Dakar to press for their demand.

The woman appears in another light as a person capable of taking decisions in difficult situations in order to bring about positive changes. The writers have depicted bold, revolutionary and assertive heroines who are determined to change the traditional belief that women are subservient. The authors also increase the political, social and economic strength of their female characters. As earlier discussed, women were instrumental in the fight for political emancipation: they provide for the home and they are no longer trapped within the traditional roles of mother and cook. They have emerged from their cocoon basking free to mixed reception of surprise and wonder. Ousmane fully portrays the theme of female assertiveness. His female characters adopt a positivistic view in crisis situations. They have the ability to plan and concretise their plans thus making the female individualism evident in his works. Soyinka also advocates a new moral order that heightens the image of the women. He broadens their scope and potentials thus making them relevant politically and socially. They are therefore empowered and instrumental in the fight for political emancipation.

The study concludes appropriately with a comparative analysis of the selected prose of Soyinka and Ousmane. The researcher notes the following areas of similarities:

1. The two writers demonstrate concern for the less privileged;
2. Both of them are human rights activists who empower the marginalised;
3. They portray political conflicts in the selected prose;
4. The authors draw attention to the class conflicts between the privileged and the less privileged ones;
5. Soyinka and Ousmane decry monopoly of power by the privileged class

6. They promote traditional African cultures that are progressive;
7. They denounce African cultures that are inimical to progress;
8. They promote Western cultures that are progressive and denounce the ones that are oppressive;
9. They advocate an improved image for women
10. The two authors are critical about religious practices that are ridiculous or oppressive.

However, there are areas where the writers differ which have also been noted by the researcher. The disparity between Soyinka and Ousmane is basically in their approach to the issues espoused in the selected prose.

1. Soyinka dwells more on Yoruba culture, and African religion while Ousmane is more particular about the plight of the female gender.
2. Ousmane is more concerned with colonialism (in the prose works) than Soyinka.
3. Soyinka is more particular about post independence politics (in his prose works) than Ousmane.
4. Ousmane combines colonialism with post independence politics.
5. Soyinka artistically blends English language with the native language. (The use of vernacular is not as predominant in Ousmane's works as it is in Soyinka's prose).

## **6.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

While Soyinka relies on the radical intellectuals to bring about positive changes, Ousmane believes in the potential strength of the proletariat and masses.

This is obvious in Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and *Season of Anomy*. The interpreters in *The Interpreters* and the progressives in *Season of Anomy* are the educated elite. It is also evident that the workers in Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* and the destitute in *Xala* have the power to liberate themselves. However, the intellectuals in Soyinka's prose who are enlightened are not able to make obvious political changes like the workers in Ousmane's works. Soyinka is concerned with

‘how the intellectual can function as an effective watchdog or creative artist in his society...and what his role must be in the crusade against corruption’ (Anyadike: 37).

The researcher has also discovered that Soyinka is an advocate of peaceful resolution to conflict. He advocates for a democratic option for social change in *Isara* and condemns the killings in *The Man Died* and *Season of Anomy*. He does not support war. On the other hand, Ousmane believes in a dialectical materialistic option (a more radical approach) to resolving conflicts. He advocates the use of strike by workers as the fastest means of liberating the down trodden. The workers strike in *God's Bits of Wood* and beggar's strike in *Xala* are deliberate artistic efforts. Furthermore, while Soyinka is a spokesman for Yoruba culture, Ousmane is more concerned with gender roles and the empowerment of the female gender. The theme of colonialism is more recurrent in Ousmane's prose than that of Soyinka; Soyinka dwells more on post colonial issues than colonialism in his prose works. Soyinka is very passionate about African traditional religion. For instance, the religion of the grain is the belief of Aiyero in *Season of Anomy*. This study finally corrects the negritude notion of praising anything that is associated with the black man and his culture. The concept of Negritude espoused by Senghor was the beauty, dignity and excellence of African



culture. Francophone authors so glorified African life that they over idealised its values. They praised the excellence of Negro womanhood and extolled the beauty of the Negro physique. However, this research reveals that Soyinka and Ousmane do not conform to this romantic idea. The authors censure African values when they are inimical to progress and recommend any culture that is healthy (African or European). They celebrate certain elements of African tradition as a symbol of African resistance to domination and refuse to fall into trap of Negritude with its blind celebration of anything black. This is akin to what Gary Warner suggests when he quotes Albeit Gerald thus:

African literature... must get rid of its obsession with the past-its outdated exaltation of a mythical negritude, its obsolete attacks against a colonialism which has been abolished- and dwell instead on the expression, analysis and criticism of the existential situations which prevail in reality in contemporary Africa (Warner:341)

Moreover, the novelists are more concerned with current socio-political issues than praising the dignity of African humanity. In conclusion, Soyinka and Ousmane do not support the monopoly of power by a few individuals especially the discreditable ones.

### **6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study hereby recommends that research can be extended to a comparison of Soyinka's plays and Ousmane's films. Researchers can also look at the close interplay between the novels and films of Ousmane on the one hand and Soyinka's prose and plays on the other. By doing this, the researcher will discover how the different aspects of the stories are conceived of in their respective literary and

dramatic or cinematic forms. The researcher could go further to compare the scenes (in plays and films) with the dialogues in the prose works. This exercise is worthwhile to discover the responses from the readers and the viewers. In this case, the researcher should endeavour to bring selected plays and films to public view. This is to further discover the affinities between these artists. The study recommends that researchers compare other Francophone and Anglophone writers. For instance, it is possible to compare Ferdinand Oyono (Francophone) with Chinua Achebe (Anglophone). The research also suggests the inclusion of the works of some male writers in courses that basically treat female writers. In this regard, scholars can embark on the comparison of Male-African Writers with Female-African Writers. Furthermore, it may not be necessary to separate male African writers from female African writers. This is because some male writers, like the ones chosen in this study, appreciate the worth of the women folk. First and second generation female writers had presented an articulate strong and positive female character an

‘approach that is sometimes contrary to demands that literariness should reflect reality and experience (anthropological). Culture as an integral part of society cannot be excised from literary texts ( Molemodile:148)

A lot has changed for women writers and women in society since Soyinka and Ousmane with other feminist writers began to write to empower the female gender and

today... women have achieved much through their feministic quest for socio-economic equality with the man. They are also learning to express themselves without fear or restriction (Azuike: 160).

It is high time the female writers became more committed to fighting corruption and other social malaise. Women are now free to contest elections; they can vote and be voted for. Many of them now occupy enviable and exalted positions. We have women as Senators, Governors and Ministers among others. Now that the female and some male writers have contributed to the elevation of the women, attention should be given to the important landmarks that are mostly explored by male writers. Female writers should compete with their male counterparts by projecting these landmarks—corruption, injustice, poverty, neo-colonial disillusionment just to mention a few.

They should project these issues with the same vigour as the male artists.

#### **6.4 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

One of the benefits of comparative study is that it allows the comparativist to study literature across linguistic and cultural background. It also enables us to see beyond our own historical horizons, bridge the distance between different societies and era and expose the researcher to a range of literary works and traditions. For instance, an important aspect of Senegalese history and culture that this study has revealed to us is the crucial role played by the griot in Senegal. The study also reveals a lot about the history and people of Senegal. From the study, we know that women did not occupy enviable positions in the 1960's and that has informed Ousmane's passionate concern for them.

The areas in which the writers agree are more than the ones they differ. Francophone writers have devoted so much time demonstrating the beauty of traditional African life while Anglophone writers focus on the evils of colonialism and post-independence politics. This discourse has shown the similarities between the

two literatures by juxtaposing and analysing the prose works of a writer, each from the two different locations. The two authors experienced similar historical and political realities, hence they handle the issues (conflict and empowerment) based on their similar experience.

By comparing an Anglophone writer with a francophone writer, the study has served as an additional source of material in the field of comparative literature. Other scholars working in the area of comparative literature may find this study relevant or useful in the light of Nnolim's submission that comparative literature is

a truly fertile area for criticism ... in its infancy in our literary scene and there is yet no respectable body of criticism on this expanding genre.(158)

The study is therefore an important contribution to comparative literature. It compares the experience of colonialism and its impact on Anglophone and Francophone societies. The thesis also draws attention to the historical position of Soyinka and Ousmane as male feminists at a time when feminism in Africa was in its infancy. In the 1960's and 70's when writers like Achebe and Amadi project women as subservient, Ousmane and Soyinka imbue them with enviable and admirable qualities.

Furthermore, the work reveals the various means of resolving conflicts. First, the oppressed should be empowered; they should be enlightened or given the awareness of their rights. Once they are aware, they will persevere. The ways in which the authors handle political and socio-economic problems that is under scrutiny in their works reveal that awareness of social injustice is possible through reading their works or research works like the one we have embarked upon. To this end, Soyinka and Ousmane would have contributed to consciousness raising

(empowerment) in their readers. It is a consciousness that strives for the establishment of equity and justice. Hence, in any conflict situation, the marginalised should remain steadfast. Soyinka does not support war but peaceful resolution as demonstrated in *Isara* where he recommends open election. The two authors believe in the potential strength of the masses in any conflict; the potential strength of the marginalised remains the only hope in liberating them in any conflict situation.

The research has also shown the African cultures that are progressive and the ones that are inimical to progress. It also reveals those traditional beliefs and practices that need to be modified to accommodate contemporary realities. The study finally shows the healthy modern tenets advocated by Soyinka and Ousmane.

We draw the conclusion that since the dawn of the Nigerian Republic, the human rights and political activist Wole Soyinka has remained steadfast in opposing discreditable regimes. Even more revealing are some of his latest works one of which is *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*. He has continued to demonstrate his political courage and dedication as an artist. The text reveals the central place occupied by Soyinka in Nigerian history. He has had relationships with almost all the heads of the Nigerian government which puts him in the position to cast Nigerian history. He meditates on justice and tyranny and has not relented in his fight against this abuse of power. Just like Soyinka, Ousmane remained committed to his ideals until his death in 2008. Ousmane demonstrated that he was an artist concerned with taking his message to the less privileged. He was a revolutionary writer who believed strongly in the combined efforts of the proletariat and in a bid to make his art accessible to the people who constitute the subject of his artistic endeavours, Ousmane adopted most of his novels

for the screen. His movies include *Black Girl*, *Xala*, *Moolaade*, *Ceddo*, *Mandabi* and *The Money-order*. To this end, Ousmane's life was that of a revolutionary artist.

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