

**RE-IMAGINING OGUN IN SELECTED NIGERIAN PLAYS: A  
DECOLONIAL READING**

By

**OLUWASUJI OLUTOBA GBOYEGA**

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**SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR JESSICA MURRAY  
CO-SUPERVISOR: DR NAOMI NKEALAH**

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# DECLARATION

**Student Number: 48394564**

I, Oluwasuji Olutoba Gboyega, declare that RE-IMAGINING OGUN IN SELECTED NIGERIAN PLAYS: A DECOLONIAL READING is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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SIGNATURE

09-04-2019

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## ABSTRACT

Through an in-depth analysis of selected texts, this study engages with the ways in which Ogun is reimagined by recent selected Nigerian playwrights. Early writers from this country, influenced by their modernist education, misrepresented Ogun by presenting only his so-called negative attributes. Contemporary writers are reconceptualising him; it is the task of this thesis to demonstrate how they are doing so from a decolonial perspective. These alleged attributes represent Ogun as a wicked, bloodthirsty, arrogant and hot tempered god who only kills and makes no positive contribution to the Yoruba community. The thesis argues that the notion of an African god should be viewed from an Afrocentric perspective, not a Eurocentric one, which might lead to violence or misrepresentation of him. The dialogue in the plays conveys how the playwrights have constructed their main characters as Ogun representatives in their society. For example, *Mojagbe* and *Morontonu* present Balogun, the chief warlord of their different community; both characters exhibit Ogun features of defending their community.

The chosen plays for this study are selected based on different notions of Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron and war, presented by the playwrights. A closer look at the primary materials this thesis explores suggests Ogun's strong connection with rituals and cultural festivals. These plays exemplify African ritual theatre. Being a member of the Yoruba ethnic group, I have considerable knowledge of how festivals are performed. The Ogun festival is an annual celebration among the Yoruba, where African idioms of puppetry, masquerading, music, dance, mime, invocation, evocation and several elements of drama are incorporated into the performances. The selected plays critiqued in this thesis are *Mojagbe* (Ahmed Yerima, 2008), *Battles of Pleasure* (Peter Omoko, 2009), *Hard Choice* (Sunnie Ododo, 2011), and *Morontonu* (Alex Roy-Omoni, 2012). No in-depth exploration has previously been undertaken into the kinds of textual and ideological identities that Ogun adopts, especially in the selected plays. Therefore, using a decolonial epistemic perspective, this study offers a critical examination of how the selected Nigerian playwrights between the years 2008 and 2012 have constructed Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron. Such a perspective assists in delinking interpretations from the modernised notions mentioned above, in which Ogun is sometimes a paradoxical god. Coloniality is responsible for such misinterpretation; the employed theoretical framework is used to interrogate these notions.

The research project begins with a general introduction locating Ogun in Yoruba mythology, which forms the background to how the god is being constructed in Yorubaland. Also included

in this first chapter is a discussion on a decolonial perspective, the principles of coloniality, the aims and objective of the study, and the relevant literature review. Thereafter, chapter two focuses on *Battles of Pleasure* and argues that the play re-imagines Ogun as a god of peace and harvest as opposed to a god of war and destruction. Chapter three discusses how Ododo's *Hard Choice* reconceptualises Ogun as a god of justice, in contrast to him being interpreted as a god who engages in reckless devastation of life. Chapter four explores Ogun's representation in Yerima's *Mojagbe* as a reformer who gives human beings ample time to change from their wayward course to a course that he approves. In chapter five, Ogun's reconception as a remover of obstacles in Roy-Omoni's *Morontonu* is examined. The study concludes with a discussion on how Africans should delink themselves from a modernist Eurocentric perspective and think from an Afrocentric locus of enunciation.

### **Keywords**

*Battles of Pleasure*; coloniality; coloniality of being; coloniality of knowledge; coloniality of power; decolonial epistemic perspective; decoloniality; *Hard Choice*; *Mojagbe*; *Morontonu*; Ogun; reconceptualisation; reconstruction; reimagination; South-West Nigeria; Yoruba

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Ayodeji and Tiwaladeoluwa, my lovely son. Thanks for your love, time, support and understanding. Thanks for always encouraging me not to give up.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Locating Ogun in Yoruba mythology<sup>1</sup>

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of Ogun as a god possessing positive characteristics, as opposed to the interpretation of him as being a cruel god<sup>2</sup>. Some examples of scholars whom this thesis interrogates are Rotimi (1971), Soyinka (1976; 1990), Barnes (1997), Poynor (2012) and Afolayan (2013), who represent Ogun as a god known for his fierce nature and blood-associated sacrifices. The reason for comparing the likes of Soyinka and Ola Rotimi with selected Nigerian contemporary playwrights is explained later in the study. Thus, a narrative will be created to grasp who Ogun is, as explored in the chosen plays. The primary texts for this thesis, namely, *Mojagbe* (Ahmed Yerima, 2008), *Battles of Pleasure* (Peter Omoko, 2009), *Hard Choice* (Sunnie Ododo, 2011) and *Morontonu* (Alex Roy-Omoni, 2012), were published between 2008 and 2012. The texts re-imagine Ogun as a god who encourages peaceful co-existence, fertility, justice and equality, as against allocated definitions that suit not only certain African scholars' definitions but also Euro-North American perspectives of him being a wicked deity, which are a result of modernity<sup>3</sup>. Ogun's contribution to his society as explored in the primary texts will form the basis of discussion in this thesis.

Being a religious figure in Yorubaland, Ogun inspires the people to deify him annually in several festivals across the geographical area<sup>4</sup>. This is the case in the Olojo festival in Ile-Ife, Ekimogun in Ondo town, the Oitado festival in Ado-Ekiti, the Ogunoye festival in Ikere Ekiti, and the Ogun Onire festival in Ire-Ekiti. These festivals in Yoruba communities are

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<sup>1</sup> The word 'Yoruba' serves in this thesis to embrace a range of similar or analogous cultural practices among people who claim South-Western Nigeria as their ancestral home (Adeuyan, 2011:72). Although the ethnic group regarded as Yoruba is also found in the diaspora, for example in Ghana, Togo, Benin, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone (Leroy, 2002:132), for the purposes of this study, the Yoruba people are those who migrated within the South-Western part of Nigeria. Adopting the word 'Yoruba' in this thesis does not suggest that the Yoruba people, both in South-Western Nigeria and in the diaspora, all share the same experiences merely by virtue of the fact that they are from the same roots.

<sup>2</sup> In agreement with Olajubu's classification of deities according to their gender in Yorubaland with Ogun being classified as a male deity, the pronouns 'him', 'his', 'he', will be used to refer to Ogun in this thesis (Olajubu, 2003:70).

<sup>3</sup> Modernity as a concept is explained in this thesis under the subheading 'application and significance of the three pillars of coloniality', to mean the opposite of underdevelopment and barbarism (Mignolo, 2009:132).

<sup>4</sup> The cultural and geographical region of the Yoruba people in South-Western Nigeria is referred to as Yorubaland. The researcher acknowledges the fact that the selected playwrights are non-Yoruba. The playwrights borrow from their cultural repertoire to explore the influence of African gods in their writings. Although Ogun is not mentioned in the plays, the god is implied in the way the gods that are mentioned in the plays are worshipped and referenced.

celebrations of Ogun's exploits, in contrast to the negative attributes of being an evil deity who should not be celebrated among his adherents. As a result of this, the chosen plays explore ritual, with Ogun being the central figure and constructed in a way that is different from the views of those who associate fierceness and cruelty with the god.

The celebration of Ogun's exploits in Yorubaland and its importance to the community's self-construction and well-being influenced this research. The structure and form of culture influence socialisation by shaping the social and cultural framework of an individual childhood. Patricia Adler posits that 'no individual is born into a society devoid of occupants and their subcultures; these primary groups socialize and shape young people as they grow' (1998:206). Thus, being a part of the Yoruba community had a massive influence on my knowledge of Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron and war. Choudry suggests that in order to understand ideas, we have to take history seriously (Choudry, 2010:7). In line with Choudry's opinion, the Ogun myth is a well-researched field in books, novels, and poems (Barnes, 1997). Choudry also argues that 'direct access to resources and intellectual involvement' (Choudry, 2010:9) with research materials helps in gaining knowledge about a particular field. Participation in the Ikere Ekiti Ogun festival from childhood assisted me in gaining more knowledge about the god of iron<sup>5</sup>.

Social location and the reader's response also influenced my knowledge about Ogun. Doucet opines that the researcher places him/herself, his/her background, history and experiences in relation to the subject matter (Doucet, 2003:419)<sup>6</sup>. Growing up in Ikere Ekiti, Southwest Nigeria and annually witnessing the performance of the Ogun festival encouraged my desire to conduct research into how the god is represented in academic discourse. Lastly, institutional context plays a vital part in how the researcher gains knowledge on theory and Ogun as a subject (see Doucet, 2003:421). Constant contact with my research mentor and colleagues in the field of performance and literature assisted in building knowledge of Ogun's identity, knowledge that had previously been overlooked or minimally explored by other researchers.

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<sup>5</sup> As noted in the main text, Ikere Ekiti is the community in Southwest Nigeria from where the writer of this thesis hails. Being part of the Yoruba community causes him to realise that there are more attributes of Ogun than merely being the god of iron and war.

<sup>6</sup> According to Doucet, 'social location allows the researcher to examine how and where some of his/her assumptions and views might affect her/his interpretation of the respondent's words, or how s/he later writes about the person' (Doucet, 2003:419).

The culturally rich history of the South-Western part of Nigeria has been explored in plays, novels, poems, books and articles (Eades, 1980; Leroy, 2002; Adeuyan, 2011; Adesina, 2009; Waite, 2016). Despite drawing extensively on the Yoruba language and philosophies in this thesis, the chosen primary texts are English originals, and not translations. Therefore, it will not be necessary to verify the authenticity of the translations. These plays significantly placed their emphasis on ‘Ogun’, who is represented in diverse forms. As indicated, Ogun is the Yoruba god of war, while iron (metal) is symbolic of his worship. Sandra Barnes comments that in the ‘minds of followers, Ogun conventionally presents two images. The one is a terrifying spectre: a violent warrior, fully armed and laden with frightening charms and medicine to kill his foes. The other is society’s leader known for his sexual prowess, who nurtures, protects, and relentlessly pursues truth, equity, and justice’ (Barnes, 1997:2). Those who do not revere Ogun are referred to as enemies by his adherents. The primary texts examine the reason behind Ogun’s association with the modernised notion of his fierceness and wicked nature. For instance, the Yoruba believe that accidents occur when Ogun is not offered libations. Hunters also believe that there will not be a successful hunt unless they revere Ogun in the proper way.

Rituals performed during the Ogun festivals are also examples of Yoruba communities’ knowledge about the gods. Most of these rites are still performed in some parts of Yorubaland as a reference to Ogun, although some believe that the rites are barbaric, outmoded, primitive, outdated and not meant for modern and civilised people<sup>7</sup>. This approach no doubt has affected the value system of the Yoruba people. It has also caused a major setback in the celebrations in honour of the god of iron. For instance, the relevance of Ogun to technology and security is being overlooked by modernity. During an Ogun festival for instance, Ogun is offered Aja (a dog) as a sacrifice because a dog symbolises security, and to the Yoruba people Ogun is a god of security. This is also because all iron implements used for security and transportation represent Ogun in Yorubaland. For instance, Yoruba people relate the metal chain used during Oduduwa’s descending from the sky, to found Yorubaland, to Ogun’s presence in Oduduwa’s

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<sup>7</sup> This is not limited to the colonisers alone: some people who were born and raised in Yorubaland, for example, find it difficult to participate or contribute towards the existence of indigenous worship. Ogunleye (2015:65) describes Western education, civilisation, modernity, science and technology as factors that contribute to such people understanding indigenous worship as barbaric, uncivilised, and outdated. Speaking on the influence of modernity and the emergence of Western civilization and urbanisation, Ogunleye opines that, ‘the Yoruba people, for example, are dangling between the traditional and the so-called sophisticated western mores and value system and had not even got to the other end before the traditional one collapsed, so we are in a total vacuum’ (Ogunleye, 2015:65).

journey to planet earth (Blackmun, 2012:92)<sup>8</sup>. In commemoration of this, one of the praise names of Ogun is Osin Imole, or the first of the primordial Orisha (members of the pantheon) who came to Earth; he is celebrated in such places as the Ekiti, Oyo and Ondo States. All these attributes are present in the oriki<sup>9</sup> (panegyric) of Ogun<sup>10</sup>:

Ogun lakaiye, Ọsin imọlẹ	Ogun the owner of the earth, the first of the primordial gods
Ogun alada méjì, Ofi okan sanko, Ofi okan yena	Ogun owns two cutlasses, he uses one to till the ground, and the other to protect
Ojo Ogun nti ori oke bo	The day Ogun was coming down from the hilltop
Aso ina lo fi bora, ewu eje l’o wo	He was clothed in fire and bloodstained garment
Ogun onile owo olona ọla	Ogun, the owner of the house of money, the owner of the house of riches
Ogun onile Kongun kongun	The owner of the innumerable houses in heaven
Ogun pọn omi si ile, fi ejẹ wẹ	Ogun has water in the jar but chooses to bath in blood
Ogun laso sile fi imo bora	Ogun has clothes but chooses to dress in palm fronds
E ma b’ogun fi ija sere	Do not joke about war with Ogun
Ara Ogun kan go go go	Ogun is anxiously waiting to strike. (Direct translation by researcher).

<sup>8</sup> Although there are different myths regarding the creation of Yorubaland, the reason for agreeing with the version linking Oduduwa as the founding father of the community is discussed in this introduction.

<sup>9</sup> According to Adeeko, oriki is referred to as Yoruba praise poetry (Adeeko, 2001:182). Oriki is a cultural phenomenon among the Yoruba-speaking people of West Africa. Karin Barber defines it as a genre of Yoruba oral poetry that could be described as attributions or appellations: collections of epithets, pithy or elaborated, which are addressed to a subject (Barber, 1993:1). Okewande elaborates on oriki as a literary form by which one can identify an individual within the history of his [her] family, clan and tribe (Okewande, 2016:487). Oriki of Ogun assist in identifying the positive characteristics of Ogun. The relevance of oriki, as Okewande puts it, is that it ‘links an individual to the root and the society at large’ (Okewande, 2016:487). Thus, the contributions of Ogun to Yorubaland can be easily realised in his oriki.

<sup>10</sup> This is often recited at the sacred grove of Ogun during the Ogun festivals. It is important to note that Ogun’s oriki comprise more utterances than the ones reproduced here.

These lines help to explain who Ogun is, but not in totality. In order to understand the representation of Ogun among the Yoruba people, there is a need to explore his association with iron. According to Diana Adesola Mafe, ‘Ogun is conceptually the orisa (god) of iron, his role includes patronisation of war and warriors: the Yoruba term for war (ogun), is related to the deity term, Ogun, in spite of tone differences [. . .]. The root ogun is found in ounogun, weapons; ologun, brave warrior; ori ogun, army general; awon omogun, army; and opo gun, war staff. Oral traditions also stress Ogun’s military exploits’ (Mafe, 2004:57). He is universally acknowledged in Yoruba mythology as an indispensable divinity, in as much as all iron and steel belongs to him. Hence, exploring Ogun’s positive features as presented in the plays will help to determine the construction of the god in contemporary texts. Biodun Jeyifo opines, in agreement with Mafe, that ‘there can hardly be, in Africa itself and in the African diaspora in the Caribbean and South America, a pre-colonial deity or avatar with a more powerful institutional consolidation as a religious and expressive frame of reference than Ogun’ (Jeyifo, 2011:53). As mentioned earlier, Ogun as a religious figure inspires the people to worship him annually in several festivals across Yorubaland.

Rituals and festivals are also performances and are regarded as classical drama types (Enekwe, 2013:38). Ritual performances highlight human beings’ recommitment to their notions of god; for this reason, as mentioned earlier, the chosen plays explore ritual, with Ogun being the central figure and translated or performed in various ways. For example, Peter Omoko’s *Battles of Pleasure* highlights the significance of songs to the construction of Ogun in his community. Commenting on ritual drama, Oyin Ogunba, in Dele Layiwola’s *African Theatre in Performance*, defines it as the ‘drama which emerges from the traditional festival celebration of the Yoruba people’ (Ogunba, 2013:54). The Yoruba festival celebration is beautified by varying performances used to entertain the audience and also impact the community. This does not imply that only Yoruba people possess ritual drama, but is intended to point out that festivals in Yorubaland are also dramatic performances. Ogunba furthers the view that Yoruba ritual drama ‘is not Aristotelian and it is what some people have described as pre-drama or non-literate drama and others simply as ritual or festival’ (Ogunba, 2013:54). I choose to call it festival because it relies heavily on the human beings’ recommitment to their notions of god, where the performer is transfigured and is in perfect union with the god, goddess, spirit or ancestors being celebrated.

In addition, during the Ogun festival, masquerades also form an integral part of celebrations in Yorubaland. This will be especially evident in Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe* (2008). *Mojagbe*, for example, makes it clear that masquerades are of different shapes and colours which bear different types of significance for the community. Ahmed Yerima makes use of Layewu in *Mojagbe*. Layewu is the masquerade that is associated with the Ogun festival in Yorubaland<sup>11</sup>. Yoruba people believe that masquerades represent the spirits of the departed ancestors and relatives, that the worshippers could pray through them and that their prayers would be answered. Masquerades are often clothed in the regalia that are primarily linked with Ogun, which are made from the *mariwo* (palm frond). This is also evident in some parts of Ogun's oriki, thus:

Ojo ti Ogun n ti Ori Oke bo	The day Ogun was descending from heaven
Ogun Lakaaiye ko laso	Ogun had no cloth
Mariwo l'aso Ogun	Palm frond is the cloth of Ogun
Ogun laso sile fi imo bora	Ogun has clothes but chooses to dress in palm fronds (direct translation).

According to Sandra Barnes, 'Ogun's clothing provides further insight into his character... the robes are blood-red or fire-red, signalling his fiery, belligerent comportment and furious temperament' (Barnes, 1997:165). Barnes focuses on the negative significance of Ogun's clothing rather than the reason for the association. For instance, palm fronds are sacred in the worship of Ogun; they are used to decorate shrines and attached to vehicles during the festivals. The relevance of this practice is to avert unfortunate circumstances on the roads and to appease Ogun, who might have been angry, with drivers or passengers who have broken the codes of conduct of the community. Olupona also comments on the relevance of the *mariwo* in revering Ogun (Olupona, 2011:118). Also, drivers in Yorubaland adorn motor vehicles with fresh palm fronds to signify either that a corpse is being conveyed in the vehicle or that the driver of the car is asserting his or her loyalty and homage to Ogun at the time of the annual Ogun festival. Significantly, palm fronds are used along footpaths as a signal that a shrine is nearby. They also serve as a special decoration on sacred trees during the Ogun festival as a sign of homage to the god of iron and fertility. Palm fronds are also symbols of fertility, which Ogun represents in Yorubaland; fertility is another positive feature of Ogun that will be discussed later in the thesis. Ogun's fertility attribute in terms of bountiful harvest and procreation is explored in

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<sup>11</sup> See Campbell (2015:47) and Aremu (1991:12).

Omoko's *Battles of Pleasure* (2009) and Roy-Omoni's *Morontonu* (2012). Some of these themes will be investigated in subsequent chapters instead of relying on the negative aspects of Ogun. This thesis will interrogate these themes, and the focus will be shifted to the benefit of Ogun's characteristics to the Yoruba people, as explored in the chosen plays.

As already mentioned, over the years, scholars such as Soyinka (1976; 1990), Barnes (1997), Poynor (2012) and Afolayan (2013) have focused mainly on what they see as Ogun's negative attributes. Barnes, for example, did not explore the association of palm fronds with the fertility prowess of Ogun<sup>12</sup>. Conceptually, Robin Poynor posits that, 'Ogun is a paradox. Although founder and champion of civilisation, he is the terrifying and violent god of war, the ferocious maker of weapons, charms and medicines that strike, wound and kill; yet, as he vanquishes and exterminates foes he expands frontiers and protects those who acknowledge his power' (Poynor, 2012:14). Poynor highlights Ogun's attributes adopted by scholars, either as religious or social elements. He describes Ogun as a person who easily becomes angry and causes turmoil in the community. He further mentions Ogun's weapons, which, according to the Yoruba people, Ogun utilised to fight for their liberation from colonial powers and intertribal wars. Ogun's representation in Omoko's *Battles of Pleasure* is that of a god who settles conflicts and proffers solutions to social disturbances. Poynor also represents Ogun as a selfish god who only fights to gain more kingdoms; this contrasts with the Yoruba people's belief that Ogun is the god of fertility who generously increases their population by protecting them from accidents and also removes any obstacle from their path as explored in Roy-Omoni's *Morontonu*<sup>13</sup>.

Ogun's generosity and contribution to society are considered, but not in detail, in Sandra Barnes' introductory note to *Africa's Ogun, Second, Expanded Edition: Old World and New*. She states that, '[c]ertainly Ogun remains... more than many other precolonial supernatural powers, he (Ogun) has adapted to contemporary life and became increasingly visible to the public<sup>14</sup>' (Barnes, 1997:xiv). Ogun's capability of adapting to present-day life could take on

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara Walker asserts that a 'palm tree is a principal asset, from which palm oil and palm kernels are harvested. Palm trees of one kind or another furnish the Yorubas with roofs, walls, mats, cooking oil, coconuts, and leaves for salads, in addition to the frosty pink palm wine which is Nigeria's national drink' (Walker, 1990:97).

<sup>13</sup> Babatunde Lawal argues that Ogun assists during surgical operations as the medical implements are made of iron and he is consequently the god of medicine (Lawal, 1996:xvi)

<sup>14</sup> According to Warner, 'the public is a kind of social totality. Its most common sense is that of the people in general. It might be the people organised as the nation, the commonwealth, the city, the state or some other community' (Warner, 2002:49). Some of the primary materials selected for this thesis present a scenario, whereby a central figure addresses the people and the people imitate the performer during ritual performances. The knowledge of the knower is acquired from his or her belonging to the public.



shapes that are not explored in Sandra Barnes' assertion. Ogun is the god of justice in *Morountonu* as well as the patron of wisdom in *Battles of Pleasure*. Ogun, being a giver of wisdom, is deified with songs and panegyrics by those who revere him. Sandra Barnes' definition, however, does not explore a number of Ogun's socially positive features. Although she cites a further example, that of a Nigerian governor who during his inauguration ceremony insisted on swearing by Ogun rather than by the Bible or Quran, she did not mention that Ogun is also the god of justice. Ogun is reconceptualised as a reformer in Yerima's *Mojagbe*; his relevance in Nigerian politics is also reinforced in the play where the plight of some Nigerian leaders before their ascent to power is investigated.

Furthermore, Gani Adams, the leader of a faction of the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), a nationalist organisation based in Nigeria, opines that, 'if Nigerian state swears in court to Ogun, the god of iron, nobody will lie again because of the instant consequences; Ogun don't waste time [sic]' (Duruji, 2010:289). This is also applicable to *Mojagbe* in Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe*, when he incurred the wrath of Ogun, refusing to attend the Ogun festival to avoid being struck dead by the god of justice. Nonetheless, Barnes' discussion is very useful as she answers the questions: What significance does the Ogun myth have in relation to crime and punishment? How has the Ogun myth been absorbed into modern Nigerian narratives, contrasting with the efforts of scholars who might have been influenced by modernity shortly after Nigerian independence?

In this regard, Wole Soyinka became prominent in the Nigerian literary scene after independence, when the military was ruling the affairs of the country. Soyinka foregrounds Ogun in relation to Western oppression. In his definition of Ogun, Soyinka sees Ogun as: 'the master craftsman and artist, farmer and warrior, essence of destruction and creativity, a recluse and a gregarious imbibor, a reluctant leader of men and deities... he harnessed the resources of science to hack a passage through primordial chaos for the gods' reunion with man' (Soyinka, 1990:26-27). Soyinka constructs Ogun in such a way as to combat colonial constructions but does not portray Ogun's contributions to prevailing conditions such as militancy and rebellion, as explored by Sunnie Ododo and Ahmed Yerima in *Hard Choice* and *Mojagbe* respectively. Soyinka illustrates Ogun as the essence of destruction, as opposed to Omoko's representation of Ogun in *Battles of Pleasure* as the god of peace and harvest, where the singing troupes in *Battles of Pleasure* revere him with their songs.

However, Soyinka's construction of Ogun to suit anti-colonial purposes which were useful at the time, rather than exploring fundamental issues such as the conflict, bad leadership and corruption that are undergirding the present conditions of the Nigerian people, does not totally erase his major contribution to the study of Ogun. Researchers such as Ebeogu (1980), Okpewho (1999), Dafe (2004), Jeyifo (2004; 2011), Gomba (2014), to mention but a few, highlight that foundational discourse on Ogun emanates from the scholarly contributions of Soyinka. Aiyejina asserts that 'Soyinka embraces Ogun as his major metaphor, mainly because Ogun's personality coincides with his as an unrepentant agent of revolutionary change' (Aiyejina, 2010:7). For instance, in *A Dance of the Forest* (1963), he represents Ogun as a figure that is capable of posing threat to the peace of the community; Soyinka's depiction might be due to the dominant circumstances after independence. After British rule, Nigeria was hit by a series of military interventions, where each leader posed as the right person to transform the country into the 'Promised Land'. For instance, Dr Bero, in Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists* (1971), is another very prominent Ogunnian<sup>15</sup> character and an unfortunate one because he abandons his humane, curative medical profession to adopt a brutal, militaristic one. He is indeed possessed by Ogun to the extent that he believes in the omnipotence of the gun (a symbol of Ogun). He thinks that with his gun he can even take control of the metaphysical and supernatural guardians of the earth. It is therefore evident that Soyinka's representation of Ogun is rooted in his quest to oppose Western domination, rather than the Nigerian political issues mentioned above. These are all societal features that the selected playwrights explored.

Ola Rotimi<sup>16</sup> is another influential Nigerian playwright who provides foundational understanding on the construction of Ogun after Nigeria's independence. He wrote plays that gained international recognition, such as *To Stir the God of Iron* (1963), *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1971), *Kurunmi* (1971), *The Gods are not to Blame* (1971) and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1977). In relation to Soyinka's representations, Ola Rotimi depicts Aare Kurunmi in *Kurunmi* (1971) as stubborn, arrogant and abrasive, one who delights in war<sup>17</sup>. Aare Kurunmi represents Ogun in the play. Both scholars in the highlighted texts present Ogun as a stubborn and impatient god. This is antithetical to how Sunnie Ododo portrays Bashorun, a character

<sup>15</sup> This adjective refers to Soyinka's representation of Ogun in his characters.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Banham describes Ola Rotimi as a: 'complete man of the theatre - an actor, director, choreographer and designer - who created performance spaces, influenced by traditional architectural forms' (Banham 2000). Banham, M., 2000. Ola Rotimi: Playwright who put Nigeria's dramas on the stage. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/oct/17/guardianobituaries1>. [Accessed 22 June 2016].

<sup>17</sup> Aare Ona Kankafo is the army generalissimo of Yorubaland (Folorunso, 2001:215).

who is always ready to fight for the liberation of his kingdom from external threats. He was the one who consulted the Ogun priest in reference to the stolen crown in *Hard Choice*, in order to determine possible solutions to the imminent danger. Ola Rotimi and Soyinka did not suggest solutions to any problems or challenges embodied in their characters of Ogun. Both scholars depict their characters as arrogant and selfish people who are capable of rejecting colonial rule without considering the consequences for future encounters. It seems that Soyinka and Ola Rotimi's characters are selfish and over ambitious, which contrasts with the presentations of Alex Roy-Omoni, Ahmed Yerima, Sunnie Ododo and Peter Omoko's Ogunnian characters as selfless, altruistic and willing to attend to societal needs. However, the researcher's use of Soyinka and Ola Rotimi to compare contemporary writers such as Ahmed Yerima, Sunnie Ododo, and Peter Omoko is not intended totally to write off these earlier scholars' contributions to the scholarship of Ogun; rather, it is a way of enriching the scholarship on Ogun as a mythical figure<sup>18</sup>.

The significance of attaching aspects of Ogun to the Yorubaland people's names is worth mentioning as it is also evident in *Mojagbe*. Ogun's selfless nature has led the Yoruba people to immortalise him by naming their children after the societal and personal contributions of Ogun. Ogundele, 'ogun has come to my house', Ogunsakin, 'Ogun is strong and reliable', Ogunmodede, 'Ogun guides the hunter successfully', are examples of names mentioned in *Mojagbe*. In Yorubaland, names that have ogun as prefix afford an indication that the bearer has been born into a family who believes in the god of iron. In discussing the importance of this, Adesokan narrates one of his encounters in the diaspora with a Yoruba, a Nigerian refugee named Tommy, at an American conference<sup>19</sup>. Tommy renders his lineage oriki as 'Thomas Otolorin Oguntomilowo (god of iron, is enough for me), son of Sunday Adigun Oguntomilowo, grandson of Ajibola Ogunrinu (god of iron, sees what is hidden) Oguntomilowo, great-grandson of Odewale Akanbi Oguntomilowo, husband of seventy, father of four hundred, a famous warrior from the tribal wars of the pre-colonial era, who, according to legend, turned

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<sup>18</sup> The reason for mentioning Ola Rotimi and Soyinka is to acknowledge that early Nigerian playwrights have done a lot on Ogun and 'some' of their works were not favourable to the representation of Ogun's identity. The researcher acknowledges that Ogun is Soyinka's patron god. Succinctly, both Soyinka's *Ogun Abimbima* (1976) and Ola Rotimi *The Gods are not to Blame* (1971) portray Ogun in positive manner. Odewale's character in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame* emphasises how Ogun implement, if used wrongly, can cause damage and the repercussion will be greater than imagined.

<sup>19</sup> 'Tommy fled Nigeria several months ago to escape religious persecution. He was being cared for by a branch of the Society of Friends in Dearborn, where he lived, while his request for asylum in the U.S. was pending' (Adesokan, 2010). Adesokan, A., 2010. [Online] Available at: <http://www.bu.edu/agni/fiction/africa/adesokan.html>. [Accessed 22 June 2016].

into a fly and ascended to the sun above the flame and smoke of a thousand gunshots... eating his favourite, “the dog” (Adesokan, 2010). According to tradition, these panegyrics also signify Ogun’s exploits during the migration of the people to different Yoruba towns. Logically, though, one should first introduce the ethnic group called the Yoruba.

Geographically, the territory now inhabited by this group is bounded on the west by the Republic of Benin, on the south by the Atlantic Ocean, on the east by Benin (Edo State) and on the north by the Hausa and Fulani tribes living in the Kwara and Kogi States of Nigeria. Due to many inter-tribal wars during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Yoruba people in the South-Western part of Nigeria were scattered. Hence Yoruba tribes are found in the Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti States of Nigeria. Owing to periodical inter-tribal wars, the Yoruba people also settled in the Kwara State as well. The cause of this displacement is attributed to the Afonja<sup>20</sup> and Jihad<sup>21</sup> wars of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Yoruba people are also found in the Edo and Kogi states of Nigeria.

Alfred B. Ellis states that, ‘at the beginning of the eighteenth century, all the different tribes were united, and were ruled by a king who resided at Old Oyo’ (Ellis, 1999:7)<sup>22</sup>. Up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the government system in the old Oyo kingdom was monarchical. The leader of the kingdom was the Alaafin of Oyo, who, like some other Yoruba Obas (crowned kings), ruled from the centre. The centre and capital of the old Oyo kingdom was Oyo Ile. Adebowale Atanda declares, ‘at the time, there were many kingdoms in Yoruba land, among them were the Egba, Ekiti, Ijesa, Oyo and Ijebu kingdoms’ (Atanda, 1980:19). Oyo was the largest and most powerful of these<sup>23</sup>. Each had a capital town as the centre of its administration. Many subordinate towns, serving as local government units, surrounded the capital. Some of these towns were large, while others were small. In the larger subordinate towns, the head of government was the Oba (crowned king) while the Bale (uncrowned king) ruled in the smaller

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Alaafin Awole ordered Afonja, Aare Ona kankafo (the chief warlord), to attack Iwere town, located on top of a steep inselberg, presumably on the assumption that Afonja would fail and be forced to commit suicide. Afonja instead staged a rebellion; with the support of the Oyo Mesi and the Onikoyi he marched on the capital and forced Awole to commit suicide himself, in about 1796’ (Eades, 1980:24).

<sup>21</sup> ‘To strengthen Ilorin’s position, Afonja called on the support of Muslim elements in the kingdom. He was not a Muslim himself, and it appears to have been political opportunism to harness forces that proved to be invincible in the states to the north. He enlisted the help of an itinerant Fulani scholar, Alim al-Salih, better known as Mallam Alimi, who declared a jihad at Ilorin’ (Eades, 1980:24).

<sup>22</sup> This can also be accessed on <http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/yor/yor02.htm> and [http://www.obafemio.com/uploads/5/1/4/2/5142021/yoruba\\_speaking\\_peoples\\_of\\_west\\_africa.pdf](http://www.obafemio.com/uploads/5/1/4/2/5142021/yoruba_speaking_peoples_of_west_africa.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> The Yoruba communities were characterised by several inter-tribal wars during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which caused the Yoruba people to switch between Ile-Ife and Oyo as their regions of residence. For example, the Ikere Ekiti people left Ile-Ife to settle down in the northern parts of Yorubaland.

subordinate towns. Karin Barber describes the Yoruba Oba as “‘second to the gods (Olodumare<sup>24</sup>)”, a being of a different order, a mystically endowed spiritual being... the Oba inherits his power through his position, he maintains it through recreation and he expands it through friendship with his subjects’ (Barber, 1993:193). Since the Yoruba Obas are below the Olodumare in authority, one should enquire: who is Olodumare then? This question will assist in knowing the significance of Ogun in Yoruba mythology.

In this mythology, Olodumare (the Yoruba version of Supreme God) is the ‘Almighty’ with sixteen ministers serving as intermediaries between him and mortals as he is too great and remote to access. The ministers include Orunmila, the god of wisdom; Obatala, the god of creativity; Ogun, the god of iron; Osun, the river goddess and Sango, the god of lightning (Jegede, 2006:256; Ribeiro, 1997:243). Obatala’s responsibility is to create human forms, while Orunmila endows the forms with senses. Obatala was revered as a great artist, although deformities continued to smear his record when ‘creating’ human images<sup>25</sup>. Lawal suggests that Obatala rushed back to Olodumare and requested the power to mould only perfect human forms (Lawal, 2011:163, see also Waite, 2016:12). Ajalorun, the gatekeeper to heaven, laughed and put Obatala through a learning process to demonstrate that humans choose what they want to look like or become like before birth, and that not even Obatala could change this. In other words, the Yoruba people will say that, failure or success in life depends on one’s chosen destiny. The chosen destiny is guided by Olodumare who owns the power to kill and to destroy.

Although there are many controversies surrounding Yorubaland’s origin, noted by Waite (2016:12), as intimated the writer of this thesis agrees with the story linking the people’s origin to Oduduwa Atewonro (Oduduwa who came with a chain to earth), who descended to the planet earth with a chain and founded a community named Ile-Ife<sup>26</sup>. The word ‘Ile’ in Yoruba means land, while ‘Ife’ is ‘expansion’; with reference to the Yoruba myth of origin ‘Ile-Ife’ is accorded the term ‘the Land of Expansion’, from where all Yoruba communities trace their origin. Note at this stage that the chain represents the presence of Ogun<sup>27</sup>. In Yorubaland, the association of Ogun as the Yoruba god of metallurgy originates from this account of creation

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<sup>24</sup> Olodumare is the Yoruba term for the Supreme Being (Ekeke, 2010:214, Igboin, 2014:189, Arinola, 2013:148).

<sup>25</sup> While creating humanity, Obatala grew thirsty and had a drink of palm wine. He continued to create, in his intoxicated state, humans with crippled legs, albinos, hunch-backed humans and people with malfunctioning organs (Dixon 2017:120).

<sup>26</sup> There are different mythical accounts of the Yoruba people’s origin. This symbolic account of Yoruba origin can be found in Idowu (1962:22).

<sup>27</sup> Although Ogun migrated to other parts of the world from Yorubaland, he has also migrated from Ile-Ife to other parts of Yorubaland.

(Salami, 2006:111). The reason for the writer's concurring with this creation account is that the Ikere Ekiti from whom he originates, reference their origin to Ile-Ife (Oloidi, 2014:57). Ile-Ife captured scholars' imagination as the origin of the Yoruba people (Salami, 1991:220; Lloyd, 1955:239; Adedoyin, 2008:684; Fadahunsi, 2011:276; Fadamiro, 2016:19). In terms of this narrative, Olodumare summoned Obatala into his presence and charged him with the duty of creating earth. Olodumare gave Obatala a leaf packet of loose sand, a tool in the form of a five-toed hen (*adiye elese marun*) and a pigeon.

However, as stated earlier, many arguments exist about this account. A further question arising is, 'who is Oduduwa?' The Yoruba's mythology has it that Oduduwa was a powerful leader under whom the Yoruba people migrated into their various homelands. This Yoruba origin myth situates Oduduwa as a controversial earth creator alongside Orisa-nla (Sultan, 2015:16; Kanu 2013:542). Babatunde records that Oduduwa accomplished what Obatala failed to execute; in so doing, Oduduwa usurped his right as earth's creator (Babatunde, 1990:49). As compensation, Olodumare commissioned Obatala to perform the special duty of moulding the human structure and confirmed Oduduwa as the creator of the sacred city, Ile-Ife.

Regardless of this controversy, the Ikere Ekiti people migrated from Ile-Ife as one of Oranmiyan's descendants; he is Oduduwa's grandson<sup>28</sup>. 'The first Olukere came from Ile-Ife and founded Ikere, much later. The first Ogoga, a hunter, left his base in Benin and came to Ikere on a hunting spree<sup>29</sup>. Reaching Ikere, he went and stayed with the Olukere at his palace (Babatola, 2015:15; Akintoye, 1969:540). The account of the first Ogoga in Ikere Ekiti is elaborated by Akintoye. He comments as follows, '[T]he first Ogoga of Ikere was a Benin prince and famous hunter who first lived at Akure, then at Agamo in the forests between Ikere and Igbara, and finally at Ikere. Because of his great wisdom, the Olukere, the then ruler of Ikere, whose time was taken up with the town rituals, gradually assigned Ogoga all judicial and political duties' (Akintoye, 1969:540). Other accounts also say that the Ogoga might have, through political wisdom, outwitted the Olukere (Babatola, 2015:15; see also Afolabi, 2008:11). Ogoga's intervention is attributed to the strength of Ogun and is performed as a rite during local festivals.

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<sup>28</sup> Ikere Ekiti is a Yoruba community used to illustrate the migration of Ogun across Yorubaland.

<sup>29</sup> Ogoga is the monarchical head (Oba) of Ikere Ekiti. He might have overthrown the Olukere (the town chief) through political sagacity and become the king. However, according to the tradition of the Ikere people, the Olukere was the first to migrate from Ile-Ife, before the coming of Ogoga (Babatola, 2015:15).

Ogoga's intervention is evident in the depiction of Ogun in the Ogun festival in Ikere Ekiti. The chief in charge of the said festival in the community will lead a procession from his palace to 'a small shrine outside the Olukere's palace, which is regarded as Ogoga's residence before he became ruler' (Akintoye, 1969:540). The given festival in Ikere Ekiti is celebrated in honour of the king who is the representative of Ogun in the community. Consequently, the name of the festival is referred to as Ogunoye<sup>30</sup>, freely translated as 'Ogun of the king'. This celebration is witnessed *en masse* by the people of Ikere Ekiti in the town's market square. The community's royal market (Oja Oba, king's market) is located strategically in front of the Ogoga's palace. Oyin Ogunba comments on the celebration of Ogun festivals all over Yorubaland, arguing that, 'the market place is central to the worship of Ogun' (Ogunba, 2013:56). Sandra Barnes also elaborates on how the public performs a mock battle in reference to Ogun's conquest in the Yoruba inter-tribal wars during the celebration of the Ogun festivals in the market square (Barnes, 1997:59).

The way in which Ogun is being celebrated in different Yoruba communities depends on their understanding of who the god of iron is. In Ile-Ife, for example, the king actively participates in the Ogun festival as a means of celebrating the deity's leadership quality during the migration of the Yoruba people. As part of this migration, the Yoruba people took with them different 'gods' that they worshipped either yearly or monthly<sup>31</sup>. For instance, the Ogun festival is performed yearly to mark the Ikere Ekiti people's migration from Ile-Ife, referring to Ogun, the god of war, and his significance as a god responsible for fertility, harvest, peace and victory during war(s). The Ikere people's migration from Ile-Ife was characterised by several wars and inter-tribal commotions, leading Ogun to come to the people's rescue. One such event was when the Ibadan warriors decided to raid the town; Orole rock opened as a cave and housed the people until the war was over<sup>32</sup>. According to legend, the Ikere people are the only tribe that did not experience defeat during the inter-tribal wars, presumably because Ogun protected

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<sup>30</sup> Ogunoye is the name of the Ogun festival performed in Ikere Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. As noted, Ikere Ekiti is an example of a Yoruba community used to trace the migration of Ogun from Ile-Ife in this thesis. The significance of choosing Ile-Ife as the source of Yoruba people is discussed in the introductory section of the study.

<sup>31</sup> For instance, in *Mojagbe*, Ahmed Yerima explores how Mojagbe, the main character, often links his ancestral home to Ile-Ife and being the descendant of Oduduwa and frequently associates himself with Ogun (Yerima, 2008:58). Although Mojagbe adopts Ogun's destructive features, the play highlights the consequence of such and disapproves the misinterpretation of Ogun's strength. Yerima's *Mojagbe* is intended to explore the reason why most Yoruba kings associate themselves with the strength of Ogun.

<sup>32</sup> Orole is the female version of Olosunta rock. Both rocks are associated with the strength of Ogun during intertribal wars in Yorubaland. See Ngumoha (2011:128).

them. Because of this feat, the Ogun festival is performed yearly as a commemoration of Ogun's benevolence. Below is an example of a song sung at the festival:

Ha eh Ogun gba aye lo Ogberi o mo

Ha eh Ogun is taking over the world, the uninitiated is not aware  
(Direct translation).

Thus, Ogun was present during the creation of Yorubaland according to the myth of Oduduwa and the chain which, as indicated, represents the presence of Ogun and how the god helped during creation. This is knowledge that is being passed from generation to generation in Yorubaland. As stated above, the manner in which the researcher gained knowledge of Ogun has exerted a major influence on this research. Among the Yoruba people, the knowledge about Ogun is being distorted and almost forgotten because of the influence of Western education and colonialism. Colonialism is used in this thesis to refer to the dispensation of the ex-colonial masters, while colonality is the effect of colonialism that still exists in every sphere of the society. This thesis will therefore adopt a decolonial epistemic standpoint to understand how the god is being reconceptualised based on the primary texts. This perspective is discussed next.

## **1.2 Decolonial epistemic perspective: a theoretical intervention**

This study is written from a decolonial epistemic perspective (Mignolo, 2007:130; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b:10), which is a critical theoretical approach that initiates an epistemic break from Eurocentric knowledge, one which was introduced to the ex-colonies as a package of colonialism<sup>33</sup>. Such a perspective refers to the intervention that seeks to challenge modernity brought by colonality, thereby placing African subjects at the centre, to understand their subjectivity as ways to counter modernity and its tenets (Sithole, 2014:vi). Ogun, the Yoruba god of war and iron, serves in this thesis as an African subject who is being misinterpreted by scholars, most likely due to the influence of modernity. Examples of such scholars are referred to as modernist in this thesis. Their views are influenced by colonality. Ogun is a subject of global attention and has been widely researched by scholars who might have been influenced by modernity to interpret him as a stubborn, wicked, unfriendly and sometimes paradoxical deity; however, to reiterate, this thesis centres on a decolonial interpretation of the god.

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<sup>33</sup> This will be based on the themes explored in the play to acknowledge what the Yoruba people believe about Ogun.



A decolonial epistemic perspective also gives freedom to knowledge that has been distorted, bastardised, ignored, and rendered irrelevant by the Euro-North American kind of knowledge. In Sithole's words, a decolonial epistemic perspective 'privileges the subjectivity of the subject from its own existential locale and it is foregrounded outside modernity emphasising the fact that there is no monolithic knowledge, but what is referred to as ecologies of knowledges' (Sithole, 2014:vi)<sup>34</sup>. The theoretical approach helps to understand certain key factors that decoloniality intends to address, such as locus of enunciation, colonality of time (colonialism, postcolonialism, precolonialism), subjects, and subjectivity, as discussed in this section.

Locus of enunciation refers to the point of view of the writer, researcher or basically the subject. It denotes that where an individual stands, ideologically speaking, is the location he/she thinks from. Mignolo posits that knowledge should not be determined by those who are not positioned where the subjects are (Mignolo, 2007:460)<sup>35</sup>. The argument in this thesis is that the knowledge about Ogun has been mainly dictated by what scholars are meant to believe about the god. As such, Mignolo suggests an 'epistemic shift from the loci of enunciations that had been negated by the dominance and hegemony of both the theo-logical and ego-logical politics of knowledge and understanding' (Mignolo, 2007:460). In this thesis, a decolonial epistemic perspective is deployed to expose three kinds of colonality; colonality of being, knowledge and power, in the chosen primary texts. The three pillars of colonality will be discussed later in this chapter; consequently, the next step is to understand the principles of colonality.

### **1.3 Principles of colonality**

The politics of knowledge has its roots in what Sousa Santos refers to as 'modern western thinking' and what he later calls 'abyssal thinking' (Santos, 2007:45). He further argues that abyssal thinking is concerned with making distinctions between peoples. Santos sees an imaginary abyssal line that distinguishes the oppressed darker races from the privileged whites. Santos visualises those who live above the abyssal line as people who belong to the zone of being, while those who live below the line belong to the zone of non-being. On the privileged side of the line he confirms that one finds attributes such as superiority, development, Christianity, knowledge, humanity, peace and democracy, while on the oppressed side there

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<sup>34</sup> The notion that beliefs are an integral part of African identity while knowledge and ideas are exterior to Africans or ex-colonised is regarded as biased. As such, Boaventura de Sousa Santos posits that 'we (ex-colonised world) are what we believe, and we also have ideas' (Santos, 2007:68).

<sup>35</sup> Defined as the geopolitics of language; place from which knowledge is created and articulated (Mignolo, 2002:61). The ways in which knowledge is being colonised will also be looked at from the angle of Yoruba oriki.

are underdevelopment, violence, invisibility, darkness, heathens, inhuman practices, savages, dictatorship, homosexuals, inferiority and a host of other negations and deficiencies. In simpler terms, the ex-colonies are regarded as zones of non-being and the ex-colonisers as zones of being. This categorises the part of the world where Ogun is worshipped, Southwestern Nigeria, as a zone of non-being.

As a result of these imagined fundamental modifications, the privileged colonisers of Western European descent assumed a higher social status while the darker races of the south were placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This racial classification at the social level reinforces coloniality. It results in creating a modern global social structure that links the privileged white race with superiority as mentioned earlier, while further truncating the status of the underprivileged subjects on the darker side of the so called abyssal line (Santos, 2007:46). The ex-colonised darker races are treated as lesser beings and little is done to support their culture and practices. Ogun has also been on the receiving end of this classification as his followers are meant to believe that their god is powerless or not going to exercise any positive contribution to their community.

To Quijano, the idea of race became the most efficient instrument of social domination (Quijano, 2000:534). If Ogun had been a god of European origin like Dionysus, he might have enjoyed a universal recognition. Quijano states that European peoples were privileged over non-European people, culminating in the white race assuming dominance over the darker races of the world (Quijano, 2000:535), while Mignolo avers that the dominance of the white or Euro-North American gradually came to be seen in the light of a logic referred to as global coloniality (Mignolo, 2009:138). He notes the discovery of new lands, new people and new culture as what breeds coloniality.

As a result of the acquired dominance over the alleged darker side of the world and the elevated position whites occupied on the social ladder, some elements that were colonised include: authority, gender and sexuality, subjectivity and knowledge. This dominance was not only restricted to race, as coloniality or control overflowed to cover ethnicity and gender, resulting in what Subhendu Mund refers to as multiple colonialities (2016:409). The logic of identifying the world in terms of a racially based division was perpetuated and rooted in many parts of the colonised world. Despite the end of formal colonial rule in most parts of the world, colonial forms of domination that characterised colonial rule have persisted. Salvatore refers to coloniality 'as an historical process - colonialism, its form of governance, its representations,

and the persistence of the colonial in the present' (Salvatore, 2010:339). This is evident in current oppressive structures in the form of imposed knowledges, power and its forms, both within independent states and between ex-colonisers and ex-colonised, that bear similarities with the colonial past. The current oppressive structure results in religious wars between adherents of different religions. For instance, a Christian might say to an Ogun worshipper that his or her god is dead, thereby leading to religious violence.

Consequent to the above, this study is cognisant of the arguments surrounding the usage of the term 'postcolonial' and chooses to use the term practically, to denote the period that followed the termination of colonial administrations in most parts of the world. Postcolonial studies, to the researcher, have a definite relationship to discussing issues that relate to modernity rather than accepting that the subject still exists in every sphere of the society. The reason for adopting decoloniality rather than embracing postcolonial theory is explained in the section below. Decoloniality as opposed to postcoloniality does not in any way patronise modernity. Its modes of criticism are not within modernity as in the case of postcoloniality, but outside modernity. This is in line with Maldonado-Torres' conceptualisation of coloniality as patterns of power that survived the end of colonialism (2007:243). Accordingly, decoloniality identifies that domination is not just economic. Coloniality operates at all levels of interrelation between the different domains of coloniality: power, being and knowledge (Mignolo, 2011:13). Coloniality endeavours to concern itself with knowledge production, identity, sense of being, race, and differential power hierarchies in the global system.

#### **1.4 Why decoloniality to study Ogun?**

The discussion in this thesis will be guided by the three pillars of epistemic perspectives: coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of power and coloniality of being, in order to comprehend the representation of Ogun, god of iron and war, in the chosen texts. In line with the discussion above, Maldonado-Torres further states that 'in a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:243). This suggests that there is a force or power that determines what is correct or not correct. Such power survives colonialism and still dictates how issues are being interpreted in the society.

The adoption of the proposed perspective will also pave the way to interrogate how Ogun has been represented by the scholars already mentioned, namely Soyinka (1976; 1990), Barnes (1997), Poynor (2012) and Afolayan (2013), who researched the negative features of Ogun rather than the positive characteristics that are explored in the themes relating to Ogun in the

plays chosen for this study. A decolonial epistemic perspective in this thesis is deployed to expose the three kinds of coloniality in the way which scholars have viewed Ogun. Ogun, in this thesis, will serve as an African subject, who is subjected to different kinds of personality labels. Ndlovu-Gatsheni opines that ‘the African subject constitutes a second category of being, which emerged as the ‘Other’ within Western thought and colonial encounters’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a:18). This is in relation to coloniality of power where the Euro-North Americans determine who and what is god.

Through the said epistemic foundation, the playwright’s thinking and ideas are closely examined as they have a bearing on understanding who Ogun is; his identity subjection, and subjectivity in the pre/postcolony<sup>36</sup>. Subjectivity denotes the way in which knowledge practices are informed by conditioned ways of knowing and understanding the lived experience of an individual or group of individuals (Sithole, 2014:vi). In this thesis, Yorubaland is the postcolony, where Ogun is subjected to a series of definitions and interpretations that are guided by principles of modernity. It is pertinent to note that the Yoruba people moved to their present abode before the advent of the colonial masters, and the present researcher learned about the Yoruba god from participating in Ogun festivals and listening to myths about Ogun from elders<sup>37</sup>.

Mignolo suggests that the subject position is important in terms of understanding subjection (2009:162). The subject position is therefore used in this thesis to refer to Ogun as a text that migrated with Yoruba people to their present locations. References will be made to characters that possess or embody the characteristics of Ogun in the chosen primary texts. Mignolo further suggests that the knower<sup>38</sup> should be questioned rather than the known, in order to grasp the very epistemic foundation of subjection. Ogun is known to the world as having different faces (Barnes, 1997), suggesting the numerous features attached to him, although attention is only given to his negative contribution to his community. Therefore, a decolonial critical analysis will be explored to identify this particular African subject’s representation in the chosen plays. As suggested by Ndlovu-Gatsheni, critical analysis of this type constitutes the application of decolonial options as a resistance tool against modernity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a:18).

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<sup>36</sup> The term ‘postcolony’ has been coined by Mbembe to refer to how ‘state power creates, through its administrative and bureaucratic practices, a world of meanings all its own, a master code which, in the process of becoming the society’s primary central code, ends by governing - perhaps paradoxically - the various logics that underlie all other meanings within that society’ (Mbembe, 1992:3).

<sup>37</sup> See footnote number 5 on knowledge production.

<sup>38</sup> The Yoruba people should be given the opportunity to determine what to associate with their gods. They should not be made to understand that their god is outside modernity.

Although this study does not weigh up Ogun in the face of colonialism, it answers some questions regarding his identity in his new community<sup>39</sup>. As intimated, the way in which he is being interpreted in different communities depends on their understanding of who Ogun is to them. In order to interrogate the existence of coloniality in the selected primary texts, the themes that relates to how Ogun is being represented will be discussed.

As mentioned, the core of this study is not colonialism or anticolonialism, but a delinking from the assertion of Soyinka et al that the god in question in this study, Ogun, possesses certain qualities that are aimed at destroying the nation state of Yorubaland rather than developing it. To delink means to change the terms and not just the content of the conversation, from Western categories of thought that have been globalised through the logic of coloniality and the rhetoric of modernity. Delinking is to de-naturalise concepts and conceptual fields that totalise a reality (Mignolo, 2007:459). An exploration of the positive features of Ogun as explored in the selected plays will assist in understanding how the god of iron has been misrepresented in studies that are influenced by modernity.

Consequently, the theoretical framework for this study will be decoloniality, as it aids in understanding the place of Ogun both in Yorubaland and the entire world scene<sup>40</sup>. Decoloniality, according to Mignolo, means ‘working toward a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ, which is what modernity/coloniality does and, hence, where decolonization of the mind should begin’ (Mignolo, 2007:459). There is a need to decolonise the mind from thinking that what we know about our tradition and culture are barbaric. This term assists in locating the place of Ogun in cultural history, as it has been influenced by coloniality.

The reason for not undertaking a postcolonial study is that the approach to Ogun in this thesis is not intended to trace its relevance to the usual themes that are explored in postcolonialism such as hybridity, class, order, the other, or colour domination. Understanding postcoloniality and decoloniality will enable an understanding of why decoloniality is appropriate for the discussion in this thesis. Maldonado-Torres posits that ‘postcoloniality has left one of the stronger expressions of modernity/coloniality untouched’ (2008:382); although postcoloniality

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<sup>39</sup> Check footnote number 1 on Ogun’s migration to different Yoruba communities and in the diaspora.

<sup>40</sup> Sandra Barnes suggests that worshippers of Ogun can also be found in Puerto Rico, Miami, Venezuela, and Los Angeles (Barnes, 1997:xvii), all in the Americas. Might the Yoruba have migrated with their own version of Ogun to the diaspora? Ogun is not a fixed image; as a result, people in Yorubaland and in the diaspora have reconceptualised their own version of Ogun that suits their purposes.

tends to oppose some tenets of colonialism, it still maintains the Eurocentric mentality. The theory does not perceive modernity as causing structural violence, whereas decoloniality condemns modernity, still understanding it as coloniality<sup>41</sup>. Decoloniality perceives modernity as the darker side of coloniality. Decoloniality's mode of criticism is therefore undertaken from outside modernity, in contrast to postcoloniality. Ashcroft expresses the view that postcoloniality constitutes 'different indigenous local and hybrid processes of self-determination to defy, erode and sometimes supplant the prodigious power of imperial cultural knowledge' (2006:1). To Ashcroft, colonialism is something that is outdone or transcended. However, following Mignolo, I argue that studying decoloniality exposes the tenets of colonialism as still informing the present and existing in the form of coloniality, a constitutive part of modernity.

Decoloniality questions the expression and effect of colonial structures and constantly combats every form of coloniality. According to Maldonado-Torres, 'decoloniality positions some of the imperial underpinnings of modernity' (2008:382). In simple terms, decoloniality is a constant critique of modernity/coloniality and it continues to be so, to the extent of being labelled as 'preoccupied' or 'obsessed' with coloniality (Martinez, 2013:38). Decoloniality reveals coloniality wherever it seeks to hide itself. The major aims of decoloniality are to render coloniality visible by exposing both its rhetoric and reality. Decoloniality as a standpoint 'does not hide its geography and biography from where the critique emerges' (Mignolo, 2011:84). Decoloniality is relevant today because it authorises the lived experience of those who are at the receiving end of subjection, Ogun and the writer of this thesis for example, and commands such subjects to declare their locus of enunciation.

According to Sithole, '[T]he contours that shape the landscape of decoloniality can be traced to Steve Biko, Bernard Magubane, WEB Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Ihechukwu Madubuike, V-Y Mudimbe, Paul Zeleza, Anibal Quijano, Linda Alcoff, Archie Mafeje, Walter Rodney, Kwame Nkrumah, Cheikh Anta Diop, Aimé Cesaire, Ramon Grosfoguel, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinweizu, Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Lewis R Gordon, *Chinua Achebe, Chinweizu Ibekwe, Chinua Achebe, Dani wa Dada Nabudere, Valentin Mudimbe*' (Sithole, 2014:35, *Emphasis added*). Sithole advances the view

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<sup>41</sup> According to Munemo, structural violence refers to violence that is embedded in social and political hierarchies that impose conditions which place people at high risk of negative repercussions, such as unemployment, landlessness, illiteracy, corruption, poverty, poor service delivery and marginalization (Munemo, 2016:11).

that these thinkers originate from different thought traditions and different geographies but share a common interest and intention in their work, which is decoloniality.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni states that ‘decoloniality is born out of a realisation that ours is an asymmetrical world order that is sustained not only by colonial matrices of power but also by pedagogies and epistemologies of equilibrium that continue to produce alienated Africans who are socialized into hating the Africa that produced them, and liking the Europe and America that rejects them’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b:11). Decoloniality will be a valuable resource to examine a subject that has been neglected, where such issues have, perhaps unconsciously, been explored in texts that portray indigenous gods as savage. The theoretical framework will be a useful means to visualise Ogun and festivals associated with him as producing societal harmony, rather than destruction. The notion that Ogun causes chaos or evil in the community also forms the basis for employing decoloniality as a framework for discourse in this thesis<sup>42</sup>.

According to Mignolo, ‘decolonial thinking is already about thinking otherwise and assuming from the start a de-modern thinking as well. To de-colonize means at the same time to de-modernize and demodernizing means de-linking from modern Western epistemology, from the perspective of which the questions of “representation” and “totality” are being constantly asked’ (Mignolo, 2009:143). Mignolo explains that to de-modernise does not mean going back in time; it conveys an understanding that coloniality still exists in scholarly discourse. Decoloniality asks one to forget the generally accepted juxtaposition of modernity and tradition as its ‘dark other’ and to accept that the confusion caused in the world today is as a result of ‘some people regarding others as inferior’ (Mignolo, 2009:143-144).

Modernity is also an issue that this thesis seeks to address. Defined by scholars (Mignolo, 2011; Grosfoguel, 2002; Lander, 2000; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Walsh, 2002, Schiwy & Ennis, 2002) as the darker side of colonialism, as already mentioned, modernity is also a veil that tends to keep the indigenous African people away from the beauty of their culture. Ndlovu-Gatsheni observes, “‘African subjects’ begin the painful path of learning to hate their progenitors as demons, they begin to be taught that all the knowledge they possessed before coming to school was nothing but folk knowledges, barbarism and superstitions that must be quickly be forgotten’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b:11). For instance, there is a dearth of material on most traditional festivals of the Yoruba people, except some popular ones such as the Osun

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<sup>42</sup> This notion is completely erroneous.

osogbo festival, egungun festival and Ifa festival. Likewise, there is no published material on the Ogunoye festival that the next chapter of this thesis will discuss in relation to Peter Omoko's *Battles of Pleasure* (2009). This is because the cultural practice of the people is viewed as uncivilised, if not perceived as downright barbaric or is simply ignored. Sithole also explains that, 'the world inhabited by the African subject is a place that is on the receiving end of the darker side of modernity' (Sithole, 2014:44). The implication is that modernity has produced much disturbance in African communities, for example, and caused their members to see themselves as inferior. Hence, the need to delink from the imperial/colonial organisation of society (Mignolo, 2009:132), which will arise in later discussions on the relevance of Ogun to the nation building of Nigeria.

## **1.5 Concepts of coloniality of knowledge, being and power**

As mentioned earlier, the contribution of this study at the theoretical level is to utilise the three conceptual pillars of a decolonial epistemic perspective, namely coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, and coloniality of being, to understand the subjection of Ogun to numerous representations. The three concepts contribute to the understanding of decoloniality as a theory (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b: 11).

### **1.5.1 Coloniality of power**

In Ndlovu-Gatsheni's words, 'the first concept, coloniality of power, helps to investigate how the current global politics was constructed and constituted into the asymmetrical and modern power structure' (2013b:11). Mentioned earlier, this portrays how the people of the world are being viewed as inhabiting a zone of being (superior) and a zone of non-being (inferior), with some commentators dispensing modernity while the supposedly inferior are on the receiving end.

According to Douglaus Munemo, 'coloniality of power is an expression taken from the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano to refer to the structures of power, control and hegemony whose source can be traced from the conquest of the Americas in the late 15th century to the current contemporary era' (2009, 142). He further states that coloniality of power serves to manage, and keep under control, local knowledges and histories through political frameworks. It clarifies the way the existing global political order was formed and fashioned into an irregular modern power structure. In reference to earlier discussion, Lucy Taylor also argues that 'the coloniality of power thus entails not only physical oppression, political authoritarianism and economic exploitation but most fundamentally epistemological domination' (Taylor 2013,



598). In other words, the alleged European ways of knowing the world in the areas of language, theories and practice in society, regarding time and humanity, are considered to be superior. This thesis contends that belief in Ogun and practices associated with his worship are not inferior to the coloniser's god.

Coloniality of power will be used in this study to explore how Ogun is being relegated by the hegemony of the West to being a powerless and untrue god who only exists in the mythology of the Yoruba people. In contrast, this thesis will make reference to how important it is to decolonise from the assumption that only the Euro-North assumptions about the god of iron are correct. Consequently, the thesis will delink itself from scholars who might have been influenced by modernity and who exercise authority in determining whether Ogun exists or not. The existence of Ogun will be explored in the areas of his strength, administration of justice, promoting peace and stability and exhibiting power in increasing the population of the people rather than decreasing it.

The coloniality of power helps to understand the asymmetrical global power structure that developed from the quest for modernity. Such a coloniality privileges the West and facilitates its dominance over the colonised world. Grosfoguel summarises that, power is located in the western hemisphere amongst the “fairer” races of the world, where everything is considered from the point of view of the politics of constitution of a racially hierarchized, Euro-American-centric, Christian-centric, patriarchal, capitalist, hetero-normative, hegemonic, asymmetrical, and modern global power structure (Grosfoguel, 2007:216-217). The control of the global political system by Britain and the United States over the economic, political and diplomatic aspects of dominated smaller and weaker nations, former colonies that are dependent on them for various forms of assistance, has resulted only in conflict in the colonised nations. For instance, the Nigerian Government must rely on the support of the United States to curb religious violence that may have occurred as a result of what should be termed ‘god’ in the country<sup>43</sup>. The dominance assumed by the Euro-North has been responsible for conflict and the absence of improvement in most parts of the Global South, while there has been stable peace and development in the Global North. Ogun worship should not be regarded as barbaric and could be visualised as an escape route to encourage political development owing to his instant

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<sup>43</sup> Eno Iwara (2015:10) extensively examines the part the United States was and is playing in offering Nigeria assistance to curb religious insurgency. Iwara also highlights that the promises are mere instance ‘lips service’ that had been issued since the regime of Goodluck Jonathan.

judgement of offenders. The chapter on Sunnie Ododo's *Hard Choice* explores Ogun as a god of justice, who also acts as a custodian of sacred oaths.

The colonality of power can be traced back to the post World War II era. Grosfoguel contends that the aftermath of the war was accompanied more by transition from global colonialism to global colonality rather than by decolonising the globe (Grosfoguel, 2003:7)<sup>44</sup>. I concur with Grosfoguel that what changed were the global forms of domination, but not the structure of core-periphery relationships on a world scale, in the areas of global world power. The significance is that most dominated states and oppressed peoples of the world are still colonised as a result of hegemonies exercised by Europe and America. Ndlovu-Gatsheni comments that 'the colonality of power articulates continuities not only of hard power between the Westerners and Africans that has its roots in centuries of European colonial but currently continuing through cultural, social and political power relations' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013c:8). Ndlovu-Gatsheni's view implies that the Euro-North dominance still exists in the areas of dictating what the colonised should believe or not. Colonality has ensured that most of the developing world has remained in colonial situations, even though these regions are no longer under any particular juridical-political administration.

*Mojagbe* also highlights the dependence of the people on things that are outside their community rather than focusing on the available resources in their homeland. Yerima in *Mojagbe* comments that some of his community people prefer to remain slaves in another man's land rather than enjoying what Ogun has provided for them. Although Kwame Nkrumah would perceive this reaction as neo-colonialism (Nkrumah, 1965:1), the last stage of imperialism, it is with assurance that this study will refer to it as colonality. This is in accord with Ndlovu-Gatsheni who argues that Africans still live under the colonality of power in which their leaders have no power and freedom to decide on the course of development in their countries without approval from Washington, London, Paris and other Western capitals (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013c:13). This is in contrast to the notion that political colonialism has been eliminated. This thesis argues that the relationship between the West and the developing world, Nigeria for instance, continues to be one of colonial domination in the aspects of knowledge, being and power.

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<sup>44</sup> According to Grosfoguel, 'the concept of "colonality of power" is useful here to transcend the assumption of both colonialist and nationalist discourses, which state that with the end of colonial administration and the formation of nation-states in the periphery we are living in a postcolonial, decolonised world' (Grosfoguel, 2003:7)

### **1.5.2 Coloniality of knowledge**

The second concept focuses on ‘teasing out epistemological issues, politics of knowledge generation as well as questions of who generates which knowledge, and for what purpose’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b:11). This notion refers to the manner in which knowledge systems were formulated and totalised by the Euro-North American Empire and how African subjects were silenced and excluded.

Coloniality of knowledge is closely linked to the coloniality of power and is useful in comprehending the modern/colonial world we live in. Maldonado-Torres posits that ‘while the coloniality of power referred to the interrelation among modern forms of exploitation and domination (power), and the coloniality of knowledge had to do with impact of colonization on the different areas of knowledge production’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:242). Coloniality of knowledge is a power structure that involves the control and monopolisation of epistemology by the Euro-North American Empire. It privileges knowledge that emanates from Europe and regards knowledge produced by the white race while undermining, ignoring, silencing, oppressing and marginalising knowledge from the Global South (Grosfoguel 2009:18). This is true of what the Euro-North American Empire knows and sees about the colonised; to the latter, Eurocentric epistemologies have not only assumed dominance ‘but have become globally hegemonic since the seventeenth century’ (Escobar, 2007:185).

Consequently, Quijano points out that the Euro-American World concentrated all forms of the control of subjectivity, culture, ‘especially knowledge and the production of knowledge, under its hegemony so as to further imperialism and maintain colonial situations in previously colonized territories’ (Quijano, 2000:540). This has resulted in the control of all epistemologies and the exercise of coloniality regarding what the ex-colonies claim to know. It would sound strange to tell a coloniser that Ogun is quicker in justice than their god. This answers the question of ‘who decides what is just?’: coloniality of knowledge outlines a situation where what is just is being defined by the colonisers rather than allowing the ex-colonies to decide what is just in their view. For example, in Yorubaland, any offender that swears by Ogun before committing a crime will either die of an accident or as a result of injury from an iron-related object. This knowledge about the god of iron is being swept under the carpet; instead, the people are made to know that there is a place for grace if they embrace the Western religion. As a result of this, crime and fraudulent acts are rampant both in government and in local authorities.

Coloniality of knowledge sectioned epistemology, implying that those from the Euro-North American Empire are regarded as more knowledgeable than those from the Global South, thus creating an unbalanced knowledge structure in the world. Coloniality of knowledge also concerns itself with who generates knowledge, from where and for what purpose, and who controls and monopolises this knowledge. Ndlovu-Gatsheni records that endogenous and indigenous knowledges were being driven to the margins while privileging Western knowledges. In his words, ‘Africa is today saddled with irrelevant knowledge that disempowers rather than empowers individuals and communities’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013c:11). This is a call to decolonise all the knowledge that had been imposed regarding the god of iron.

Furthermore, with the extension of Western modernity, what seems to have been known by the colonised before the advent of colonialism was found not to be useful to the colonisers and was either repressed or displaced, only to be replaced by alien Eurocentric knowledges<sup>45</sup>. Ndlovu-Gatsheni laments that Western thinkers and scholars in the mould of Foucault, Gramsci, Zartmann and Galtung have overshadowed subaltern thinkers such as Ali Mazrui, Claude Ake, Achille Mbembe, Gandhi, Sunnie Ododo, Ahmed Yerima, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Mamdani whose ideas are more relevant to the subalternised. The darker races of the Global South are seen as incapable of producing knowledge worthy of consumption by the North. Southern epistemologies have been overshadowed by those of Western thinkers who have barricaded themselves away from those thinkers in the global South. Not only have the Western thinkers influenced what some scholars have written about Ogun, they have also dictated how the god of iron is to be represented in scholarly works.

The locus of enunciation of the ex-colonised world has been greatly influenced by Euro-North American-centric epistemologies. Despite the fact that territories were formally decolonised, the minds of the people have not been decolonised; they remain epistemologically colonised. As mentioned earlier, Mignolo (2000) argues that we always speak from a particular location in power structures, such as: class, gender, spirituality, race, ethnicity, ideology. Though nominally independent from their colonisers, some Africans still perceive issues from a Euro-centric perspective although they may physically be located in Africa.

Some Africans think like white Europeans in London, although they may have been raised and schooled in Ekiti, Nigeria. This is what Argentinean-Mexican writer Enrique Dussel, as quoted

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<sup>45</sup> By using ‘knowledges’, I refer to what is being known by people who live in the alleged subalternised part of the world; what they knew before the advent of what the coloniser refers to as civilisation.

in Grosfoguel (2007:213), refers to as the geo-politics of knowledge. In this case, such a form of knowledge exists when one may be located geographically in Africa but thinks as though she or he is in Europe, whereas a situation whereby one is African but thinks like an European colonialist is what Grosfoguel calls ‘the body politics of knowledge’ (2009:14). Thus, the imagination of the African people, for instance, has been played upon by the coloniser. Ogun is perceived as a strange god by some people in Yorubaland (Yoruba translates the rites as *esin ajoji*, ‘strange religion’), and his worship as performing something strange<sup>46</sup>.

This thesis therefore encourages a decolonial perspective which questions Ogun being regarded as a wicked and arrogant god. Sunnie Ododo’s facekuerade (2008) idea offers a decolonial perspective of how African ritual performances can be visualised from a positive vantage point rather than as a negative identity. Facekuerade explains how generalisation can alter the representation of a subject. Facekuerade is developed from the performance by masquerades that perform without their mask (Ododo, 2008: 287). Ododo’s view outlines that any attempt to represent Ogun, for example, based on what modernity dictates could be misleading to anyone who intends to adopt Ogun as a patron god.

Sunnie Ododo’s facekuerade assumption helps one to delink from the concept that some ritual performances in Yorubaland, the Ogun festival for instance, are not theatrical and as such not dramatic. The facekuerade idea assists in understanding festivals as theatre because of their performative essence, along with vibrant ritual processes (Ododo, 2008:284). Facekuerade will serve as a decolonial theory for analysing some of the plays and will offer insights into the repressed positive features of Ogun in the texts. Ododo’s theoretical position is a traditional idea of identity formulation which helps in understanding the construction of Ogun as a god of justice in Sunnie Ododo’s *Hard Choice*, god of peace and harvest in Peter Omoko’s *Battles of Pleasure*, the reformer in Ahmed Yerima’s *Mojagbe*, and the obstacle remover in *Morontonu*.

Ododo’s notion of facekuerade presents the theatre in a manner that interrogates Antonin Artaud’s postulation on ‘Theory and its Double’ (Artaud, 1978:59), which believes that theatre should be an interaction between the audience and the actors on stage (Ododo, 2008:302). The audience visualises the personality of the actor but respects the spiritual significance of the performer. Ododo’s theory of facekuerade is based on a link between the world of the spiritual and the living, Ogun and Yoruba people for example. This concept is employed in this thesis

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<sup>46</sup> See Adeola (2010: 212).

as a decolonial perspective sub-theory that is analysed in Ododo's article titled 'Facekuerade' (2008). Facekuerade is developed from the performance by masquerades performed without the mask (Ododo, 2008:287). The theory delinks from the generalisation that ritual performances are not drama and cannot be classified as such. The intention in this thesis is to study how Ogun, rather than masquerades, is being constructed by the Yoruba people as a god of justice, peace and unity, as a reformer and remover of obstacles, after migration to various communities, as explored in the selected plays.

Coloniality of knowledge consequently exposes the effects that former colonisers still impose with regard to methodologies and knowledge production. This thesis constantly emphasises that although there are arguments that colonialism in many parts of the world has come to an end, its influence persists. For example, Western tools of analysis, methods and theories are still employed in the realm of knowledge. Coloniality of knowledge has awoken the interest in the people of the ex-colonised world, the author of this thesis for instance, and has resulted in their having a mind-set in which they feel that they are still colonised despite the fetters of colonialism having long since been removed.

### **1.5.3 Coloniality of being**

The third concept, coloniality of being, 'assists in investigating how African humanity was questioned, as well as processes that contributed towards "objectification"/ "thingification"/ "commodification" of Africans' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b:12). Coloniality of being speaks of how African subjects were rearticulated according to the racialised stereotypes of otherness and how they are being made to feel inferior.

Coloniality of being dictates a social classification of the world's population centred on the idea of race. Race becomes the basis on which the global structure is defined, where whites of Western European descent are found in the higher levels of the global social hierarchy and enjoy privileges over other racial groups. The ex-colonised people found in the continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America, darker races in general, are regarded as inferior to the Caucasian former colonisers from Euro-North America, who are perceived as superior.

Although they are not the basis of discussion in this thesis it is worth mentioning that the rights, privileges and levels of development that are enjoyed and accrued to these races are determined by the colour of their skin. This has resulted in ascribing the word inferiority to the conquered races and superiority to the colonisers. Maldonado-Torres posits that, 'under coloniality the

Cartesian “I think therefore I am (human)” was replaced by “I conquer therefore I am” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:253). The Cartesian formulation promotes the knowledge that hides coloniality of knowledge (others do not think) and the coloniality of being (others are not human). This knowledge provides the opportunity not only to discriminate but also to eliminate the conquered darker races owing to their having been conquered and thereby regarded as a sub-human, non-thinking, dispensable population.

Owing to this, the humanity of the darker races comes into doubt, in line with Frantz Fanon’s argument centred on ‘damne’ (Fanon, 1968). Fanon opines that the black race, in other words the wretched, the condemned and the oppressed, emerges in the eyes of the white race as a race perceived to be distant from humanity when compared to light skinned persons (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:253). Whiteness in this world is considered to have greater ontological density than blackness. Maldonado-Torres opines that ‘the “lighter” one’s skin is, the closer to full humanity one is, and vice versa’ (Maldonado-Torres 2007:244). As noted earlier, this implies that blacks occupy the zone of non-being, while the privileged white race endowed with full humanity is seen as occupying the zone of being. Mignolo perceives striking resemblances between racism and the coloniality of being (2007:480). At the centre of the coloniality of being and racism is discrimination against people in the pursuit of domination.

The concept of coloniality of being helps to analyse and understand how the ontological organisation of a society that promises modernity and civilisation breeds only violence and underdevelopment in the zone of non-being while development and peace are situated in the zone of being. This explains that dehumanised Africans are viewed by the white race as being at the bottom of the human ontological ladder, located in the domain of violence, war, rape, diseases, death and mourning. Most of the mentioned occurrences had been termed to have been caused by Ogun, and the people are made to think that the god is violent and wicked. Thus, to the colonisers, African people are characterised by lacks and deficits; lacking history, lacking civilization, lacking development, lacking good governance, lacking democracy, lacking human rights and lacking ethical leadership (Mignolo 2007; Grosfoguel 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

The concepts discussed above help shed light on the challenges faced in discovering the identity of Ogun among, or without, the views of scholars influenced by modernity. These crops of scholars determine what or not Ogun should be known as. Thus, the search for definitions and representation of Ogun’s identity in the selected plays will be guided by

understanding the three pillars of coloniality. The concept of coloniality therefore presents perhaps the most promising conceptual space to undertake a study on identifying the features of Ogun that had been repressed or misrepresented.

## **1.6 Application and significance of the pillars**

Each of these concepts will be applied in a dedicated chapter. To locate the origin and relevance of the African subject for this thesis, it is pertinent to note that the concept of coloniality of knowledge will be a useful resource. The influence of modernity has caused much misinterpretation as to exactly what Ogun represents to people who believe in him. Making use of the definitions of Mignolo, I note that modernity was coupled with coloniality in order to accord Ogun several negative references that have caused the Yoruba people to forget either who the god is or what the deity represents in the community. Mignolo explains the meaning of the two keywords, coloniality/modernity: ‘coloniality is constitutive of modernity, and that there is no modernity without coloniality’ (Mignolo, 2009:132).

While elucidating the concept of coloniality/modernity, Mignolo observes that ‘[D]evelopment’ is a companion concept to modernity. ‘Underdevelopment’, however, is not the equivalent, in economic terms, to coloniality in historical and philosophical terms. Underdevelopment is what development proposes to overcome. In contrast, modernity does not propose to overcome coloniality, but rather ‘tradition’, ‘barbarism’, ‘fanatic religious belief’, and the like (Mignolo, 2009:132). A question stemming from this enquires: if modernity is salvation why does it create inequality, injustice, and exploitation? To date, it has continued to produce governments that result in corruption, authoritarianism and anarchy. In order to understand the significance of Ogun to Yorubaland, references will therefore be made to events that have occurred and are still taking place in the political scene of Nigeria.

Responding to earlier references in which a number of scholars explore Ogun’s personal attributes and liken him to a stubborn, wicked, unfriendly and sometimes paradoxical god, this thesis will instead focus on Ogun’s constructive contributions to Yoruba society in selected Nigerian plays written in English and published in South-Western Nigeria, where Ogun is deified. Moreover, it appears that there has not been any close analysis of the selected texts in this thesis and how Ogun is being reimagined.

The thesis will consider the reconceptualisation of Ogun characteristics in four Nigerian plays published between 2008 and 2012. The intention is to foreground the dialogue and interactions



taking place across the selected plays and to investigate certain characters' different conceptions about Ogun. In addition, the study aims to assess how each play engages with a particular history of pre/postcolonial Nigeria. The selected plays also attend to prevailing issues including social differences (ethnic, religious and regional), unresolved national tragedies (Boko Haram, militancy), widespread poverty, poor governance, endemic corruption and a political climate characterised by 'ex-military men' and the legacies of protracted military rule.

These plays were selected for their exploration of playwrights' different decolonial notions of Ogun. To reiterate, a closer look at the primary materials this thesis explores suggests Ogun's strong connection with rituals and cultural festivals. These plays exemplify African ritual theatre. According to Biodun Musa, 'typical of any African child who lived in the village, the world of African festivals, traditional rites and rituals, mask and masquerading and so on are always part of the cultural revivals and the undying communal ethos frequently performed' (Musa 2006:221). Being a member of the Yoruba ethnic group, I have an extensive knowledge of how festivals are performed. The Ogun festival is an annual celebration among the Yoruba, where African idioms of puppetry, masquerading, panegyric, music, dance, mime, invocation, evocation and several elements of drama are incorporated into the performances. The mentioned elements, especially Ogun's panegyric, will assist in discussing the positive aspects of Ogun rather than the alleged accolades of being a wicked god.

### **1.7 Relevance of Yoruba oriki (panegyric) to the understanding of Ogun**

Yoruba people's knowledge about their oriki has nonetheless been colonised since they have been made to see some of these oriki as primitive and barbaric. De Angelis defines oriki as a 'primitive daily conversational poetry derived from the western African language, Yoruba' (De Angelis, 2003: 14). Oriki appears in the chosen texts as part of commemorating Ogun's contribution to the development of certain characters in the play. For example, Mojagbe's oriki in *Mojagbe* and the satirical praises in *Battles of Pleasure* are instances where oriki serves as a medium to understanding the construction of Ogun. The playwrights achieved the intended representation of each character as possessing strength and determination of Ogun in their individual role in the play. The panegyrics in the selected plays also explore some societal issues such as the cause of Logbo's impotency in *Battles of Pleasure*.

The primary selected materials for this thesis are concerned with contemporary issues such as profound social differences, religious and regional issues, corruption and leadership mismanagement, among others. By using specific insights from Henry Louis Gates's research

in *Signifying Monkey* (Gates, 1983), this study interrogates how Ogun is translated as a cultural and spiritual or religious artefact, from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century wars in South-Western Nigeria to the modern Yoruba towns. The investigation of Ogun is sparked by an explosion of narratives concerning him, as evident in the selected texts. According to Gates, what makes these translations possible is a process he calls ‘signifying’. Warren links the relationship of Gates’ idea of signifying with the text. Warren also discusses Gates’ involvement with the text which serves as a rationale for knowledge acquisition by the writer of this thesis (1990:226). Warren argues that, ‘Gates’ first move is to trace the revisions of a trope called “the talking book” in a series of slave narratives. The trope is derived from claims made by early black writers that, before they learned to read, they believed books actually talked to men’ (Warren 1990:226). In a typical Yoruba setting, traditions are passed from one generation to another in order to preserve such traditions. This transfer of knowledge makes the concept of reworking of the myth possible among Yoruba people.

Gates’s terming the ‘signifier’ a ‘monkey’ indicates that his proposition of understanding and reversal of the signifying is rooted in the mythologies and story-telling practices of West Africa (especially the Yoruba people). Gates adopts a West African folktale where Esu is presented in the form of a monkey (a Yoruba animal who plays tricks). He is the trickster figure embodied in poems where the Monkey tells the Lion fables about things that the Elephant had supposedly said<sup>47</sup>. The monkey tale celebrates what the Yoruba characterise as the Esu’s cleverness. In the folktale, the monkey is seen as having the capacity to repeat words and to introduce new meanings. Gates therefore describes the signifying monkey as ‘he who dwells at the margin of discourse, ever punning, ever troping and embodying the ambiguities of language – is our trope for repetition and revision, indeed, is our trope of chiasmus itself, repeating and simultaneously reversing in one deft, discursive act’ (Gates 1983: 686). In the *Signifying Monkey*, the path back to power takes place through repetition, especially of the ‘master tropes’, often reversing or repeating them in different contexts in order to nuance specific meanings or differences.

Gates’ concept for the articulation of meaning is ‘trope’. According to Ross Murfin, a ‘trope is one of the two major divisions figures of speech (the other being rhetorical figures). Trope comes from a word that literally means “turning”; to trope (figuratively speaking) is to turn or twist some word or phrase to make it mean something else’ (Murfin 2009:526). Gates’

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<sup>47</sup> According to Gates, the Monkey took advantage of some information received from the Elephant, a friend to the Lion and the Monkey. The Monkey turns the information into an insult which the Lion interprets differently and, in return, attacks the Elephant (Gates, 1983:690).

explanation of the West African master trope embodies the ambiguities of language employed by the native speaker, who wreaks havoc on the signified<sup>48</sup> because he or she has become a master or mistress of the figurative, saying one thing, but meaning quite another.

In Gates' analysis of the West African societies and the signifying monkey stories, he comes to the realisation that the tricky issue of language and of representation is itself the fundamental feature of the stories. In Yoruba tradition, the performer recites some of the panegyrics to give him or herself confidence. For example, in *Mojagbe*, the chiefs repeat the king's name several times and recite his panegyric to avert his wrath whenever he is angry. In other words, the concept of the trope refers to using figurative language through a word, phrase or even an image for artistic effect. The Yoruba people will call this 'ena'<sup>49</sup>, which also means 'code-talking' (Isola, 1982:43; Opefeyitimi, 1995:156). The Ogun festival performers often inflect<sup>50</sup> some words in the festive incantations, referring to Ogun's exploits while on earth. For example, Ogun panegyric may declare:

Onile ajori eja, ajoji a je ori eku (2ce)	the freeborn will eat the head of the fish, the stranger will eat the head of a mouse
Ope mi po ope mi po, Ope se bi eni ti ku	my thanksgiving is huge, my thanksgiving seems dead (over)
Ope o ku o, e wo mariwo ope o	the palm tree is not dead, come and see the palm frond from the palm tree. (Direct translation of the song from the Ogun festival)

Some words, for example, 'Ope' and 'mariwo', in the above-mentioned song literally allude to Ogun. Ogun, as the hunter in the song, killed a rabbit and a fish. He gave the rabbit's head to the freeborn (citizen) but to the slave the fish head. 'Ope' is the Yoruba name for palm tree, but in the second line it means 'thanksgiving'. In the third line of the song, 'Ope' refers to Ogun, whom some people believe is dead, though the performer emphasises his immortality.

<sup>48</sup> Gates (1988:58).

<sup>49</sup> Ena is a form of Yoruba language in which Yoruba words are altered according to a simple set of rules understandable only to the initiated. It affords the users some privacy and in its simplicity, can totally confound the uninitiated (Villepastour, 2010:91).

<sup>50</sup> According to the Oxford Dictionary Online (2014), inflection refers to 'a change in the form of a word (typically the ending) to express a grammatical function or attribute such as tense, mood, person, number, case, and gender'.  
Available: <http://0-www.oxforddictionaries.com.oasis.unisa.ac.za/definition/english/inflection?q=inflection>

As noted earlier, ‘Mariwo’ is the Yoruba name for a palm frond, and Ogun is associated with wearing these to war. The performer stresses ‘Ope’ (palm tree) to communicate Ogun’s relevance in the community to the viewer. However, Ogun is troped in various ways by different communities in Yorubaland. As they migrated, each community’s signifier rendered the poetry of Ogun differently during performances.

Likewise, in the primary bibliography, Ogun is deified in diverse forms across different tribes in Yorubaland. In Peter Omoko’s *Battles of Pleasure* (2009), the phrase ‘Uhanghwa gbi’ on page 42, as recited during the Ogba-urhie festival in the play, denotes ‘Ogun saves’ to which the audience responds with ‘gbi’, which means ‘yes’<sup>51</sup>. Such an action in the Ogun festival performance also applies to what the performer will say, ‘Ogun ti mo ni (Ogun that I have)’, and the audience will thus respond, ‘ni mo fi ngbari’ (this translates directly in the Ekiti dialect as ‘that I am sure of’). Ogba-Urhie translates directly as ‘the powerful one’, which reveals that Ogun is the central deity being worshipped through this festival. This literally denotes that the performer and the audience are confident that their Ogun saves. The ‘saving’ Ogun in Peter Omoko’s *Battles of Pleasure* requests the blood of a royal in Ododo’s *Hard Choice* because of negligence on the part of the people, saying, ‘yes, Oguguru shrine and only the blood of the princess will provide the tonic of recovery’ (Ododo, 2011:27). There is an emphasis on the word ‘blood’, and it is often repeated in *Hard Choice* (2011) and *Morountonu* (2012), showing Ogun’s association with blood in Yorubaland. The reason for the association with a request for blood is what the thesis aims to explore. Ogun does not make such a demand unless a social order is broken or disregarded. Thus, Famule Olawole’s traditional connective approach will serve as another decolonial standpoint sub-theory that will assist in answering some questions such as; why is Ogun often associated with blood in Yorubaland? ‘Who are the Ogun worshippers or principles?’ (Famule, 2005:62). The sub-theory can also be used to determine why a particular costume is used during Ogun festival performances instead of another one. Famule opines that connective theory could be used to associate how Ogun could be found in every item of equipment, either in part or whole, made of the iron. The sub-theory will also be used in discussing how drama components interconnect or co-exist in the selected plays.

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<sup>51</sup> Ogba-Urhie translates as ‘the powerful one’.

## 1.8 Conclusion

Hence, the selected plays present Nigeria's current crisis which encompasses social differences, religious and regional issues, corruption, and leadership mismanagement, among others, with Ogun as a significant player in the processes of transformation. The selected plays demonstrate that Ogun's personal attributes, as interpreted by certain observers who might have been influenced by modernity even though they are African, might be misleading if the societal attributes are not correctly explored, as translated across Yorubaland. Colonial rule is long gone, but still existing in Nigeria today are prevailing multiple national dilemmas including profound social differences (ethnic, religious and regional), unresolved national tragedies, widespread poverty, poor governance, endemic corruption and a political climate characterised by 'godfather'<sup>52</sup> politics and the legacies of protracted military rule. These are themes elaborated on in the selected texts, referring to how Ogun is constructed in the community. The chosen texts for this study are written by male writers which raises the question 'are there no women dramatists writing Ogun?' There are female playwrights in Nigeria such as Zulu Sofola, Stella Oyedepo, Irene Salami-Agunloye, Bunmi Julius-Adeoye and Foluke Ogunleye who have written about Yoruba gods in their plays. A challenge is the difficulty of accessing Nigerian literature from South Africa since many of the published texts are hardly sold online but are mainly available in local Nigerian bookstores.

The following chapter offers a discussion of the first play, Peter Omoko's *Battles of Pleasure*.

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<sup>52</sup> In the words of Nelson Goldpin, Obah-Akpowoghaha highlights 'Godfatherism, tribalism, ethnicity, nepotism, sectionalism among others as barriers to achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria' (Obah-Akpowoghaha, 2013:81). Godfatherism refers to the influence of rich or ex-military leaders over current politicians.

## CHAPTER TWO

# 2 OGUN, THE GOD OF PEACE IN PETER OMOKO'S *BATTLES OF PLEASURE*

## 2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a review of decolonial theory and an indication of the three pillars of the theory as a basis for analysis in this thesis as a whole. In it, I defined the concept of such theory and how it could be applied to identifying the position of Ogun as an African subject that has been misrepresented and misinterpreted in scholarly texts. In addition, the chapter mentioned the different modes of gaining knowledge that have influenced my choice in exploring the identity of Ogun. The definition of keywords that are peculiar to decolonial theory afforded an insight into how Ogun as an African subject has been a topic of misrepresentation. The chapter mapped out the subject Ogun and how the god of iron was applied to both religious and social texts by the Yoruba people. The selection of the term 'Yoruba people' was also justified, in order to avoid the confusion of making these people appear a monolithic whole. The critical exploration of existing scholarship and the development of my theoretical framework in that chapter will now inform the analysis of the selected primary texts in succeeding chapters.

In this chapter, my critical analysis focuses on themes that are associated with the characteristics of Ogun as the Yoruba god of peace, which has been a subject of misinterpretation by those scholars mentioned in the previous chapter as having been influenced by modernity. The definition of modernity was linked to coloniality as a concept in the previous chapter. Coloniality visualises colonialism as still being in existence despite its supposed ending after the colonisers had departed. This chapter will delink its discussion from views that Ogun causes chaos and violence; a narrative will be created to analyse the reason behind such associations.

The play that will be used for analysis in this chapter is Peter Omoko's *Battles of Pleasure*. I rely heavily on decolonial theory from the said epistemic perspective to examine Ogun's representation in the text. As mentioned in the previous chapter, such a perspective is a critical theoretical approach that initiates an epistemic break from Eurocentric knowledge, one which focuses on crisis rather than solutions. Coloniality has caused crisis by instilling the belief that

Ogun is a chaotic god or that the god's worship is barbaric, outdated and outmoded. Therefore, decolonial theory deals with foundational questions that are relevant to conditions which dictate the representation of Ogun as an African subject, for example, and the manner in which such an existing crisis can be resolved.

## **2.2 Coloniality: Ogun and Ogun festival**

I will be employing the concept of the three pillars of coloniality: of power, of knowledge and of being, to analyse the constructions of Ogun as a god of peace, harvest, and protection in *Battles of Pleasure*. This chapter seeks to explore how Nigerian traditional drama is still being interpreted from a colonialist perspective which undermines its religious value. *Battles of Pleasure* highlights the representation of Ogun as a god of peace, harvest, and protection, as represented in songs and practices that are rendered to the deity during Ogun festivals. In this study, attention is drawn to the elements that depict the characteristics of Ogun in *Battles of Pleasure*. Examples of such elements include songs, dance and costumes, various combinations of which have resulted in assisting audiences to realise how Ogun is represented in the play. These elements, as argued in the previous chapter, have been subjugated by coloniality. The notion of what an African drama is called or how it is referred to has been dependent on how it has been visualised by African scholars who might have been influenced by modernity.

I have in mind the definition of scholars such as Ruth Finnegan, cited in Echeruo (2013), who might have been influenced in this way, as evident in what she refers to as African drama in its entirety. She comments on the absence of 'linguistic content, plot, represented interaction of several characters, specialised scenery' (Echeruo, 2013:30). To Finnegan, African ritual performance lacks the development that could be compared to that of Greek dramas. In contrast to Finnegan's view, Peter Omoko presents a play that explores the rich cultural performance of a festival associated with the god of harvest and productivity. Tanure Ojaide applauds Omoko's effort in adapting the 'rich performance genre of his people to create suspense, action, music, and poetic flamboyance' (Ojaide, 2009:7). The elements examined by Ojaide differ from the view of Finnegan that African ritual festivals are not fully developed.

Giving an example of Egungun (masquerade) performance as an African ritual performance, Echeruo opines that the music, dance, rhythmic gestures, drumming and verbal commentaries are elements that make masquerade performances satisfying to their audiences (Echeruo, 2013:30). It is pertinent to note that elements such as music, dance, gestures, and drums are

also an important part of the alleged Greek drama (Campbell, 2010:67). Thus, to my knowledge, ritual performances in their very manifestation, as dramas, are a communal activity of adherents coming together to define their notion of god. These require, and involve, groups of audiences at all stages of their enactment. This participation might be through dance, songs, gestures, and verbal commentaries, which are elements that enable such performances to convey meaning for their audience. Concurring with Echeruo, I consider that drama flourishes best in a community which has satisfactorily transformed ritual into celebration and converted the mythic structure of action from the religious and priestly to the secular plane (Echeruo, 2013:30). Echeruo's view falters, however, by relying excessively on having African ritual performance trace its origin to Greek drama, rather than arguing that African ritual drama had developed as fully as the latter, though in different ways.

However, I shall make an epistemic decolonial turn away from what scholars such as Finnegan and Echeruo regard as drama. Definitions of terms originating from Africa should be given African consideration, rather than Eurocentric definitions that regard Afrocentric knowledge as inferior to that of the former. Thus, as discussed in the previous chapter and also relevant in this one, the Euro-North American 'empire' perceives knowledge that is being produced in the zone of non-being as inferior and not capable of producing what is termed knowledge in Euro-Northern eyes. In correlation with this concept of an interpretive turn, Grosfoguel (2007:211) suggests an epistemic decolonial turn, which concerns transcending and decolonising those aspects which are regarded as the Western canon and epistemology. Such a turn discusses the process of undertaking the production of a radical and alternative knowledge that is different from what modernity influenced scholars refer to as 'normal or right' knowledge.

Similarly, according to Grosfoguel, Santos views the colonised as having been categorised in the zone of non-being at the bottom of the social structures and as being targets of misrepresentation (Grosfoguel, 2016:12). Ogun, being a Yoruba god, of iron, and having an African origin which is an alleged zone of nonbeing in terms of colonialism, is on the receiving end of such definitions and associations. It was previously argued that the god has been misrepresented to the African and to those outside Africa as being a cruel deity. The ensuing discussion will form a basis for exploring songs and practices in this chapter that symbolise the god as being important to his people in a positive manner, rather than merely a trouble making divinity. This chapter attributes the misinterpretation to the introduction of modernity and its darker side of oppression in the three spheres of coloniality: being, knowledge and power. To



Grosfoguel, global coloniality was being reproduced at the periphery (2014:638), causing the European settlers to regard Africans as primitive subjects who had not developed any writing system and possessed no history, and were therefore not capable of defining their notion of what a god is.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this chapter also concerns itself with how coloniality, a surviving condition of the colonial experience, continues to pollute and infest our imagination, knowledge and political communication as Africans today (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:243). It is relevant to note that what seems to be right or wrong is determined by the people on the upper part of the abyssal line. As an African, I note that the African experience in the supposed zone of nonbeing is presented in books, academic performance, cultural patterns, self-images of Africans and so many other aspects as part of what the colonisers view us to be and not what we view ourselves to be.

Commenting on the effect of Eurocentric ‘knowledge’ on the knowledge and being of the colonised, Anibal Quijano observes that ‘the Eurocentric perspective of knowledge operates as a mirror that distorts what it reflects, as we can see in Latin American historical experience... Consequently, when we look in our Eurocentric mirror, the image that we see is not just composite, but also necessarily partial and distorted’ (Quijano, 2000:556). While the locus of enunciation and Latin American colonial experience influence the thoughts of Quijano, it is evident that his views correctly reflect the African colonial experience, where African knowledge(s) was (were) distorted, disfigured, and displaced as European colonists sought to replace the existing knowledge system with a Eurocentric sense and sensibility, in what would be understood as epistemicide. Boaventura de Sousa Santos defines epistemicide as the extermination of knowledge and ways of knowing (Santos, 2014:92). Santos’ view implies the intentional manner of allowing Euro-North American knowledge to dominate other forms of knowledge that emanate from the colonised part of the world. In line with the foregoing, Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that the teaching of history from a Eurocentric perspective is an epistemicide meant to eliminate Africa’s glorious past (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:51). The existing and trusted indigenous African knowledge was marginalised if not eradicated and replaced by colonial Western oriented knowledge.

Furthermore, upon examining several constructions of Ogun by scholars influenced by modernity, it is obvious that the coloniser not only aims to distort the history of the colonised; he or she also destroys the existing African knowledge systems. The coloniser intends to empty

the heads of the colonised and convince them to understand that their belief is a taboo. She or he tends to undermine the colonised people's self-confidence and manipulate them to believe that they cannot live without colonial domination. Labels such as "laziness", "drunkenness", "backwardness", "violence", "dirtiness", "stupidity", "ignorance", "bad luck" and "spiritual damnation" constitute manufactured accusations against the colonised. For example, after persuading the colonised people to believe that they are nothing without the colonisers, the latter pretend to intervene and save the colonised from the many deficits that plague him or her. Dominating the knowledge of the colonised polishes the ego of the coloniser, which reduces the subaltern to a being of shortages and inabilities while the coloniser is elevated to the status of munificent saviour and benefactor whose intentions 'must' not be questioned. The colonised is left in an unfamiliar vacuum and expected to be grateful for colonialism, which is oftentimes packaged as civilisation, modernisation, and development. One might pose the question here: is Ogun antithetical to civilisation? In answer one should consider the belief of the Yoruba people that Ogun embodies the metals used in wiring the streets and homes, the cars and buses we drive and the trains and planes we ride in, as mentioned in the previous chapter. This exemplifies the view that all iron implements belong to Ogun and they represent him in their society.

This chapter regards Ogun as a god of harvest, protection, and peace by exploring themes that relate to his characteristics in Peter Omoko's *Battles of Pleasure*. In principle, Yoruba people believe that no farm is ever productive without the protective care of Ogun and, consequently, according to Ebeogu, 'Ogun must be showered with sacrificial offerings before any planting begins' (Ebeogu, 1980:86). His fury will only become manifest when a code is broken which might affect the harvest for that season, as explored in *Battles of Pleasure* (Omoko, 2009: 23).

*Battles of Pleasure* is a mimesis of the Ogun festival and as such efforts will be made to briefly mention the association between the play and the traditional festival. The imitations of actions of song warfare during Ogun festivals are the basis of what constitutes the people's cultural dramaturgy. Aristotle's reference to drama as a 'mimetic process', that is, an imitation of an action, becomes relevant in this discussion. Mimetic action, in the context of the Ogun festival, is the organised presentation of festival procession, mock heroic dance, abusive songs, and display of an effigy, which are very significant to the people and are explored in *Battles of Pleasure*. In simple terms, activities that reveal evidence of imitation, enlightenment and or entertainment in their style of presentation, in their purpose, and value, could be said to be

dramatic. This is possibly identical to Goffman's opinion on performance as quoted by Philip Page: that 'all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers has some influence on the observers' (Page, 2011:24). A traditional Yoruba performer in Ogun festival, for example, intends to convey a message in performing his or her role, thereby engaging in role plays that entertain or educate the audience.

The Ogun festival dramaturgy can thus be described as a combination of traditional and performing arts in a cultural milieu which contains mimetic impersonation either of human actions or of spiritual essence. In other words, it comprises traditional dramatic content such as dance displays, music, as well as secular performances. This stems from the fact that the festival integrates all the features which constitute typical African religion and secular theatre. The most important point to make is that African theatre has developed without major restrictions placed upon it by physical limitations, or time barriers, such as traditionally proscribe the form and length of much European and American theatre. Thus, the representation of Ogun characteristics by employing a mimesis of the presentation of an associated festival in *Battles of Pleasure* is an attempt to define, in style, that each performance during the festival is unique, possessing its own aesthetics, colours, music, dance, costumes, spectacles and audience. *Battles of Pleasure* is therefore written from the perspective of songs rendered to appease Ogun during the Ogba-Urhie festival of the Igede and Ubigen community<sup>53</sup>. Similarly, Ikere Ekiti, from where the researcher originates, also celebrates Ogunoye to appease Ogun, the god of harvest. For the moment I will provide a synopsis of *Battles of Pleasure*.

### **2.3 *Battles of Pleasure*: A Synopsis**

The decision to present a synopsis of the primary text in this chapter is generated by the fact that the play has not been researched or criticised as at the time of writing. The songs presented in *Battles of Pleasure* are written in verse form, termed *oriki* in Yorubaland. As stated in the previous chapter, the *oriki* of Ogun is a song sung at every mythical point during the Ogun festival, rendered in a fashion that makes Ogun proud and ready to support his people during wars or civil commotion. By mythical point I mean some sacred section of the community adopted to offer sacrifice to Ogun. During the said festival, various community age groups sing

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<sup>53</sup> Ubigen and Igede are the names of the two fictional communities adopted by Peter Omoko in *Battles of Pleasure*.

songs and poetry to increase the harvest, and bring peace and love to the community. Peter Omoko's play relies on songs and dance traditions to bring about a new worship dimension as regards Ogun in the play, especially in the performance of the Ogba-Urhie festival. This festival is a mimetic representation of the Ogun festival in Yorubaland adapted by the playwright.

*Battles of Pleasure* is a modest, recreated song of rivalry between Igede and Ubigen, performed during the Ogba-Urhie festival. The major characters, Saniyo and Logbo, two leaders of each community's singing troupes, trade insults in the songs' texts. This type of song is also performed during Ogun festivals across Yorubaland, often by age groups representing a section of the town. These groups compose songs that exaggerate each other's private parts: for example, during the Ogunoye festival of Ikere Ekiti where different age groups in the community sing songs about each gender's genitalia (See Osundare, 2008:10). Omoko consequently borrowed from the abusive songs' poetic repertoire, rendered in the Udje festival of Egbo-Ide, from where he hails. Uhanghwa in *Battles of Pleasure* represents Ogun, since the priest referred to as Curator in the play offers libations to him (Omoko, 2009:56). The materials used during the libation rite suggest the type of sacrifice given to the god of iron during worship.

It is pertinent to note at this stage that each 'act' in the play is called 'Happening'. Omoko uses this term instead of replicating the traditional pattern of Acts which is borrowed from Greek drama and Euro-American playwriting. The playwright's adoption of 'happenings' is itself a decolonial perspective of moving away from the so-called established Euro-American models of stage performances. Happening I sets the stage for the ensuing rivalry between the Ubigen and Igede communities. Saniyo and other members of the singing troupes of the Igede community, namely Amudu, Odjiko and Oloba, gather to reminisce over the Ogba-Urhie festival which has just concluded, where they became the object of the abuse in the festival songs. Saniyo, being the leader of the Igede community, becomes the target of members of the Ubigen community. As a result, he feels his troupe has been betrayed and he calls those responsible to confess. The group concludes it will forgive whoever is responsible for the disclosure and decides to prepare new songs for the next season's festival. Saniyo in turn suggests adding a new song maker to the troupe (Omoko, 2009:17). Ololo becomes the chosen one for this role, to compose new songs for the community.

In Happening III, Ololo, Amudu, and Saniyo devise the plan of visiting the Ubigen secretly in order to learn their weak points (Omoko, 2009:21). Ololo volunteers to go to Ubigen to explore

Logbo's weaknesses (Omoko, 2009:26). On arriving at Ubigen in Happening V, Ololo approaches his friend Ekakoto, a member of Logbo's troupe, and collaborates with him to invite Logbo to his house in order to gain access to his private life. Ekakoto agrees and invites Logbo and Mukoro. While Ololo is hiding in the bedroom, the trio discuss vital parts of Logbo's life and leak all his secrets to the hidden spy (Omoko, 2009:34). Ololo in return comes to know that Logbo is impotent and decides to compose a song that undermines the latter's personality.

In Happening X, the Ogba-Urhie festival for the next season takes place. The Ubigen singing troupe presents its song, its intention being mainly to demoralise Saniyo. Repeating the previous season's song had little effect on Saniyo and his troupe member who had devised other plans (Omoko, 2009:63-65). During the presentation of the Igede singing troupe, a statue is brought to the stage to symbolise Logbo while songs of abuse stem from the Igede corner (Omoko, 2009:66). Saniyo's troupe wins the contest. After the contest, the people from both communities make peace and dance out of the stage. It is essential to mention that despite the abuses thrown at each other in the Ogba-Urhie festival, there are evidences of friendship and marriage between both communities. Another purpose of the festival is its ability to provide an avenue for bachelors and spinsters to meet their lovers from either Ubigen or Igede. Examples of such marital associations include Saniyo and Odjiko's wives who are from Ubigen (Omoko, 2009:15). Ogun is therefore constructed in the play as the only god who can give abundantly in the areas of harvest, protection and maintain peace in the community.

## **2.4 Constructions of Ogun in *Battles of Pleasure***

Peter Omoko adopts the musical aspect of the Ogun festival in his portrayal of Ogun as a god of peace, protection and harvest in the play. Significantly, the attributes of Ogun in the text are mentioned in the conversations between the characters preparing for the festival. It might not have been the playwright's main intention to analyse Ogun and how the god is being represented in the community, but the use of words that symbolise his characteristics as a god of harvest is paramount in the play.

### **2.4.1 Construction of Ogun as a god of harvest**

In Happening I, Saniyo, Amudu, Odjiko and Oloba meet together in order to decide on the repertoire of their songs for the upcoming festival. The characteristic of Ogun as a god of harvest is implied in the conversation of the three singers when they agree to approach Ololo,

who has left the community owing to famine, as their lead song maker for the festival. It is revealed in their conversation that the community is suffering from severe famine, and the only means to avert the occurrence is to make use of the upcoming Ogba-Urhie festival to appeal to Ogun. The festival is in honour of Ogun, the god of harvest; therefore whatever happens during the festival implicates Ogun. Saniyo specifically makes reference to the benefit of having the support of the god of harvest in the following conversation:

SANIYO: (*faintly.*) I think we need a good songmaker.

AMUDU: (*Surprise.*) Why do we need one? Are you afraid of being our lead singer? Or are you trying to tell us that all the good vocalists we have in the community cannot sing melodiously to capture the attention of the audience from our rivals?

SANIYO: That was not what I meant. I still think we need a good and talented song maker who must first compose beautifully before our vocalist can sing melodiously.

OLOBA: I think he has a point there.

ODJIKO: Who do you have in mind then?

SANIYO: (*Thinks.*) What about Ololo, the son of Kpoto? He is one of the best song makers in the community.

AMUDU: Oh, oh, oh...! Where is my head? I have almost forgotten him. Where is he now?

SANIYO: (*Embarrassed.*) Why ask me where he is? Don't we need him? (*Pauses.*) He used to fish at Odimodi River, whether he is still there now I don't know.

OLOBA: I think he is still there. It was only last week I saw Titi, the second wife of his younger brother, Takpan at Okagbe. She confirmed that her husband, Takpan and his brother, Ololo are still in Odimodi. According to her, she only came to sell some goods to enable her increase their stock of food.

ODJIKO: Let's send word across to him then.

AMUDU: The problem is not sending words to him, but who do we send? Besides, the times are hard. Nobody has that kind of money to send a message to the creeks.

OLOBA: (*Thinks.*) What about Sajini, the eldest son of Okagbaire? The one that drives a speedboat. He travels through the creeks... He can easily get someone who can get to Odimodi... and our message is 'kpam' on his table.

SANIYO: (*Excited.*) That is brilliant. Let's bring him home then. With Ololo in our midst again, we'll become invincible, indomitable, untouchable and unstoppable. (Omoko, 2009:17-18)

This conversation is quoted in full for the purpose of providing a complete picture of how the people are affected by the famine in the land and how they plan to use the upcoming festival to make their request known to Ogun. From the conversation, it is evident that the singers are

looking for a solution to the famine in the land. Although Ogun is not directly mentioned in this conversation, words that relate to harvest and farming are used as emphasis to refer to his contribution to the community. Oloba is the first person to highlight the extent to which the people are suffering in the community by recounting his experience with Titi, Ololo's younger brother's wife, who came to the city to sell her goods in order to obtain food for her family.

Amudu affirms the intensity of famine in the community when he says that 'the problem is not sending words to him, but who do we send? Besides, the times are hard. Nobody has that kind of money to send a message to the creeks' (18). A notable point is that the primary occupations of the people in southwest Nigeria are farming and fishing (see Faborode, 2014:67). Fishing is the most common occupation in the riverine areas of Yorubaland<sup>54</sup>. Like the fictional Igede, in Odimodi and Ubigen communities in *Battles of Pleasure*, the main mode of transportation is by water. The troupe could not afford transport money to go to the next village owing to the famine in the land. The solution according to the people is appeasing Ogun, the god of harvest and surplus, in the next festival. Saniyo acknowledges Ololo's presence to compose new songs that will encourage Ogun to bless them in the coming season. Saniyo says that the troupe will be 'invincible, untouchable and unstoppable' (Omoko, 2009:18) in appeasing the god of harvest, reinforcing the significance of worshipping Ogun in the right manner.

Previously in the play, Saniyo and his troupe became angry, exited the last season's contest and failed to appease Ogun with their songs. The result is the famine that the community is experiencing. Saniyo and his troupe had to perform their quota in order for the community to be blessed by the god of harvest. Omoko highlights the importance of worshipping this deity with the right song so that his blessings will be abundant. In the stage directions of the play, Omoko emphasises how the Igede people experience difficulty in finding the right song to appease the deity:

*AMUDU looks at OLOBA in the eyes, gestures him to the floor. OLOBA replies the look by pointing at ODJIKO with his face. ODJIKO decodes, he starts a number, but with the wrong key. Pauses, tries again but still no improvement. (Omoko, 2009:18)*

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<sup>54</sup> In his description of the riverine areas of Youbaland, Ololajulo avows that 'in the riverine areas, houses are built on stilts with networks of boardwalk connecting a village. There are virtually no roads and as such the main mode of transportation is water. Dugout canoes and modern speedboats are common features of the transport system. Ilaje local government is occupied wholly by Ilaje people, a Yoruba subgroup' (2010:5).

The above stage direction depicts the current state of Saniyo's band and how they are unable to get discover the right song and voice to appease Ogun. They seem to have lost their relationship with the god of harvest; hence the famine in the land. It is therefore significant to note that without the appropriate song and voice during the festival, Ogun might not be sufficiently propitiated to assist the people. The Igede people believe that Ogun should be worshipped with the correct song and voice, which caused them to approach Ololo to compose new songs for them. Ololo was part of the troupe before he left Igede for Odimodi, because he was unable to cater for his family due to famine. According to Saniyo, 'Ololo used to fish at Odimodi river' but he was now unable to do so because the rivers were drying up owing to the people not rightly appeasing Ogun, the god of harvest.

Ololo finally arrives in Happening III to visit Saniyo. In their discussion about the upcoming festival, the feature of Ogun as the only god to pray to for a bumper harvest becomes paramount. During the conversation, Ololo complains about the famine that is threatening to destroy the people's lives as the harvest of the last season was very poor, owing to the extreme floods that almost wiped the people out. He specifically makes persistent reference to Ogun as the only deity that is able to ensure a record crop so that families can feed and remain healthy. The following conversation demonstrates this point:

AMUDU: You are still the best, my brother. How is everybody at the camp in Odimodi?

OLOLO: We are all fine except for hunger that is threatening to wipe us all out.

SANIYO: May the gods be praised. At least you're healthy.

OLOLO: They all send their regards.

AMUDU: We send ours too... this year, with the level of rains that have flooded our bushes, it promises to be a year of bumper harvest of fishes. As the saying goes, it is only at flood time that the poor plans for his life well.

OLOLO: (*Laughs.*) That is what the elders are saying. We all pray it turns out so. Remember they all predicted the same thing last year. At the end what did we see? Nothing? The blames were apportioned to the dry season that came rather too late. Hunger almost drove out some families from the trade. It was the brave like us who ventured deep into the forest that were able to locate some shallow streams that sustained us for the period, with huge amounts of debt piling in wait for the next fishing season.

AMUDU: (*Shrugs.*) I was told most of our brothers fishing in Ayakoromo sold out most of their fishing gears just to meet up for the next fishing season.

SANIYO: We just pray that this year will be different *o*. (Omoko, 2009:23)



The conversation between the above three singers further portrays Ogun as the god of the harvest. In this conversation we can how the characters make reference to the importance of Ogun in the welfare of the people. Saniyo in his contribution to the conversation frequently reinforces the point that Ogun is to be praised despite the calamity that is befalling the community. Ogun is implied in this conversation as being the only means for survival. Saniyo admonishes his troupe to pray to Ogun and be encouraged to perform their best at the upcoming festival. Ololo expressly says, ‘we all pray that it turns out so’ (23) in order to have a good harvest that will guarantee food security for the community. It is implied at this point that Ogun is a god that gives generously to the people. It is pertinent to note that, within a culture that associates each deity with a particular life need, the reference to prayer in a conversation about food production can only imply a reference to the very god whose role it is to provide a bumper harvest of crops, in this case Ogun. The prayer in the quoted conversation concerns a change in circumstances of living through an end to the famine. As the words above illustrate, Ogun is not a wicked god who will deliberately starve the people; he is a deity that the people believe may come to their aid in difficult times. It is thus implied that Ogun’s response is however conditional: he gives in proportion to what he receives. Ogun, the god of harvest, is therefore not an unreasonably cruel god as modernity would have us believe.

Despite the Igede troupe’s preparation to attack the Ubigen community’s band with abusive songs, they did not alter their focus on performing well during the festival’s song challenge. The other members of the Igede troupe joined the conversation as the Curator, the Ogun priest in the play, prepares the people for the contest. The stage direction where the Curator joined with Saniyo, Amudu and Ololo to offer sacrifices to Ogun bears a similarity to the rites that are offered during the Ogun festival for an abundant harvest:

*(CURATOR emerges, dressed in full traditional regalia, carrying the symbol of Uhanghwa, sculpted from the wood. Chanting continues while participants stand in reverence. The Uhanghwa symbol is kept on a stool upstage. Chanting stops. CURATOR falls in deep communion with the god. He accompanies his devotion with the customary offerings of gin and kolanuts to solicit the assistance of Uhanghwa in the impending festival. As this goes on, all the participants remain in a frenzy. He turns and passes his eyes from one participant to another... He offers benediction for each of the songmakers.)*  
(Omoko, 2009:23-24).

Ogun might be a generous god, but his giving is also conditional on the people fulfilling their duties to Ogun. The Igede troupe in the excerpt above offers the sacrifice of Kolanut and gin to Uhanghwa, the Ogun emblem in the Igede community, in preparing for the yearly festival. Importantly, this suggests that Ogun will bless the people with an excellent harvest, but they also have to play their part in pleasing him. The above extract points out that Saniyo and his troupe also have a part to play before they will receive such a harvest from Ogun. It was earlier mentioned that Ogun blesses the community or individual that worships him rightly. Kolanuts and gin are some of the items used to appease Ogun in Yorubaland. In line with Omoko's adaptation of these items during Ogun worship, Ekundayo opines that 'the god of iron in Yoruba and some other tribes, is often offered kolanut, wine and dog, or rooster' (Ekundayo, 2015:106). This implies that a ritual to Ogun without kolanut and gin is incomplete. The significance of the kolanut is its ability to produce many nuts in a pod, so that a larger supply of the kola results in abundance for the community. Thus, offering Ogun kolanut embodies hope that he will reciprocate by unleashing an abundance of harvest.

The manner in which Omoko constructs Ogun shows that as much as the god is generous, his generosity is directly related to the people's generosity towards him in terms of giving him yearly sacrifices and in the form of praising him with songs during the festival. As stated earlier, the latter are extremely abusive ones. The participants will not use this avenue to cause chaos in the community but, instead, make peace afterwards. After the victory dance which marks the end of the annual festival, it is not permitted in the community that anyone should sing abusive songs. Participants are expected to be at peace with one another, which will make Ogun the god of peace to bless the people. At this point, the understanding of Ogun that is derived from this aspect of the play actually contradicts established understandings of Ogun as a god that destroys rather than gives. Omoko from a decolonial perspective counters the distortion of Ogun as a destroyer by portraying his generosity in assisting the people of Igede in obtaining sustenance for their families. Omoko thus constructs Ogun as a god of peace and not of conflict.

#### **2.4.2 Construction of Ogun as a god of peace**

This understanding of Ogun in *Battles of Pleasure* redirects one's thinking of him as a destroyer, as depicted by modernist theories. Instead, this understanding helps one to appreciate the local indigenous knowledge system as providing a more conflict resolving society in spite of the seeming disagreement in terms of abuses during the festival. Both troupes resolve their differences because they both believe that with Ogun as the god of peace the society has to be

free of rancour and chaos. Ogun is not a wicked god that intends one person's downfall to bless another one. Omoko has constructed the people of Igede in a decolonial manner to examine the weakness of Ubigen as antagonists for the upcoming festival due to Logbo's direct attack on Saniyo in the previous year's contest. Saniyo makes reference to how Logbo boasted of his victory rather than celebrating with the Igede troupe after the contest. The following conversation is informative in several respects:

ODJIKO: (*Swallows hard.*) Are you now accusing me of selling out?

AMUDU: I did not accuse anybody of selling out. But it was obvious from all circumstances that we were sold out.

OLOBA: I think we should all be careful. The designs of a man's heart are different from those of the face. Or is it not the teeth that one uses in laughing that he also uses in biting?

SANIYO: (*Impressed.*) Just imagine ... how they boasted of their prowess after they noticed the audience's overwhelming reception of their song ...

AMUDU: Look, Saniyo, they have capitalized on our weakness, fine! Should we then sit down and allow them to drink water peacefully? If the snake loses its venom, my brother, children will use it as a mere rope to play. (*Grin.*) They cannot have their cake and eat it. We are not known to be cowards. (*Pause, then sternly.*) I must tell you this, if we fail to avenge this affront, then our honour as a people is besmeared. Besides, it could be interpreted to mean an admission of cowardice. I don't think we are prepared to bear this stigma. Are we? (Omoko, 2009: 15-16).

The impression one gains from the conversation between Odjiko, Saniyo, Amudu and Oloba is that Ogun is a god of conflict. At this stage, it is evident that Saniyo and his band members are complaining about how Logbo and the people of Ubigen had celebrated after the previous festival without making peace with the people of Igede. Ogun is a god that discourages disobeying the community's codes of conduct. The significance of the Ogba-Urhie festival is the rendering of abusive songs in honour of Ogun but making peace afterwards. The above extract voices the disparity on the part of Logbo and the Ubigen troupe; they exchanged abuse in their songs but failed to reconcile with each other subsequently.

The rivalry between Igede and Ubigen community during each year's festival as portrayed by Omoko aims to assist the reader to understand qualities of Ogun that are often misinterpreted. The attribute of Ogun as a god of peace emerges as one of being a deity who aims to mediate conflict between two communities that are participating in the annual festival. The previous year's festival affects both communities because they refuse to reconcile after the contest. The

aftermath of the previous season's festival commences the action in Happening I. Oloba, Amudu and Odjiko visit Saniyo and immediately notice the effect of the previous season's abuse on Saniyo, the target of the Ubigen troupe. Saniyo was angered and his eyes became red because of how he had been represented in the song by this troupe. Hence, an implied significance of Omoko's portrayal of Saniyo is the depiction of a misinterpreted quality of Ogun by the modernist commentators. The following excerpt explores the significance of Ogun's association with the colour red that is often misinterpreted:

*A thatched square-like conference hall, supported from falling by forked posts. About four chairs are placed side by side at the right hand corner of the hall. SANIYO, a stoutly built man sits on a three-legged chair at the left corner of the hall, thinking. The atmosphere in the play shows that a contest has just taken place. Enter ODJIKO, OLOBA and AMUDU. SANIYO concentrates on his thoughts, pretending not to notice the men's presence... as each walks to the other corner of the hall to collect chairs for themselves.*

OLOBA: *(Light-heartedly.)* Hope nobody has died in this compound? *(Surveys his face, notices no change of countenance.)* Saniyo, hope you are not sick? Your eyes are red like the buluku of the odede of Ade cult.

SANIYO: Sick! Sick, did you say? Sickness is better? A sickness may be cured with time but the effect of an insult remains forever.

OLOBA: *(Surprised.)* Don't tell me you are still reminiscing about the event at the last performance. You are sad as if the heavens have refused us a favour. But you can't remain like this all day.

SANIYO: *(Hysterical.)* Why won't I? Why won't I be sad? Just look at the image and metaphors with which I was represented in their songs. (Omoko, 2009:13)

It is evident from this conversation that Saniyo is still angry as a result of the previous season's performance. The characteristic of Ogun that is being misinterpreted in this conversation is the redness of Saniyo's eyes. Ogun is not directly referred to in this conversation, but a physical feature that is often linked to his being a cruel god, after being provoked, is implied in this dialogue. Oloba explicitly comments on the redness of Saniyo's eyes and compares it to the colour of the buluku often worn by an Ogun priest. Oloba says, 'your eyes are red like the buluku of the Odede of Ade cult' (13). A buluku is the red cloth always tied to the waist of an Ogun priest during the festival or whenever he wants to carry out a rite in honour of the god. Omoko might not have intended to precisely demonstrate this physical quality of Ogun, but in a decolonial perspective, he attempts to explain the association between Ogun and the colour red.

This physical quality where Ogun has a red eye is often associated with fury and aggression by scholars who are influenced by modernity. It is thus necessary to disagree with John Pemberton (Pemberton, 1997:165) who associates Ogun's favourite colour, red, with fury and aggression without exploring the cause of the redness. Omoko's construction of Saniyo's red eye offers a contrasting view to Pemberton's association by emphasising dissatisfaction with evil as the reason for the red eye. Note Oloba's reference to Saniyo's look in comparison to the colour associated with the Ogun figure in their community. The redness of Saniyo's eyes does not signify violence but, rather, the effect of the abuse in the festival song on him. It is therefore implied that Ogun may become angry if there is no peace after the festival rites. This simply suggests that Ogun expects both communities to be reconciled in order to avoid calamities such as famine, as mentioned in the discussion on construction of Ogun as a god of harvest.

The feature of Ogun as a god of peace also emerges in Happening V during the preparation for the Ogba-Urhie festival performance when both troupes unite to be blessed by the Curator. During their conversation Saniyo and Logbo lead their troupes to partake of the blessings given to participants before the contest. There was no form of abuse or fight during the encounter with the Curator. Omoko presents a situation where both communities come together under one roof to perform. The Curator prays for both Ubigen and Igede singers under one roof and nowhere in this scene does Omoko record that there was an exchange of abusive songs. It is also evident from the response of the participants that everyone, including performers from Igede and Ubigen, participates in the ritual. The conversation and stage direction below reveal both communities' participation during the rite:

*Curtain rises and reveals the Uhanghwa shrine of Igede. The CURATOR in full traditional garment enters carrying a bowl. He settles the bowl at the threshold of the room and in customary displays, paces round the stage, scanning through the faces around. Suddenly he freezes, his eyes focus ostentatiously on the Uhangwa symbol upstage, he utters some chants and moves closer to it. Pours libation, sprinkles some sacred white chalk and resumes another round of dignified dancing amid chanting. The scene also ushers in Ubigen's ritual performance.*

CURATOR: ... U ...hanghwa... The god of attractive and flawless performance  
It is you we have come to greet  
Give us retentive memory on the arena of performance  
Make us invisible to hostility of rivals  
Who would use diabolic means to stop our voices ...

May we know nothing like stage fright ...

*(Returns to the participants, picks up a small bundle of Ugboduma and ties it to the hem of each participant's dress.)*

ALL: Ise-eee. (Omoko, 2009:56)

Ogun is a god who will not only create peace among individuals but also among communities such as Ubigen and Igede, as evident in the above extract. The Curator prays the same prayers for both troupes to symbolise unity. This is a direct contrast to what happens in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*. Kurunmi opposes settling differences between communities, but appreciates adopting war as a means of achieving peace, which later led to his death (Rotimi, 1971). Omoko records at the end of Happening X in reference to the conclusion of the performances by both communities that both the victorious and non-victorious joined the celebration. One should note Omoko's epilogue to the play after the season's song presentation when both communities are reconciled and participate in the final dance of the day:

This is Udje ...

The battle of poetic wits

A battle of pleasure

And a display of choreographic splendour

The victorious must sing and dance

The non-victorious also ...

Sleep of course is free for both the rich and the poor.

And so, let the ecstasy grip you to judge.

But the rivalry between the Ubigen and Igede

Continues ... (Omoko, 2009:68)

The contest was supposed to create enmity between both communities, but in order to avoid the incident of the previous year when Saniyo and his troupe refused to present their songs and the resultant factor was famine, both the Ubigen and the Igede community joined in the celebration. This signifies that Ogun must be worshipped in the right way in order for the god to bless the people. Omoko writes that 'the rivalry between the Ubigen and Igede continues' (68) to symbolise that the annual Ogun festival will resurface when the next festival season comes. The rivalry is a prerequisite for the festival to take place since the performance concerns rival communities performing to outstage each other. The very blessing of Ogun depends on this

rivalry manifested in the performances during the festival. However, this rivalry does not equal enmity; the principles of the festival demand that reconciliation be achieved after each festival to invite the blessings from Ogun. In a sense, the rivalry itself is only a performance necessitated by the festival. From a modernist perspective, Western education has contributed to the present lack of participation in the festival rites. Most people from the communities have embraced Western culture and perceive the festivals as barbaric and outdated due to their religious practices. Omoko's representation of Ogun as a god of peace reconstructs the worship of the latter as a means of obtaining peace and security in the society. For example, the victors' and the losers' dances after the Ogba-Urhie festival significantly portray two communities that were supposed to be each other's enemies celebrating together after the festival. Looking at the event before the final celebration, Omoko in the stage direction during the Ogba-Urhie festival records the feeling of Logbo and his family in order to justify the effect of the festival songs:

*(Cheering continues. SATI amid sobbing, drags LOGBO from one corner of the stage to another and then offstage, HWOOFADON and MOSHUE following. Clinking of glasses and shouts offstage. Song continues amid cheers as curtain is lowered.)* (Omoko, 2009:67).

This action happens after the Igede community presents its own version of the abusive song. Sati, the second wife of Logbo, becomes the target of the abuse due to her inability to give birth. The song text of the Igede troupe contains information about the ordeals of Logbo and his family. The excerpt from the Igede troupe's song below is enough to cause enmity between Logbo and Saniyo, if not the Ubigen and Igede communities:

2ND SOLO: Logbo is the name of Sati's husband  
 As I sing Sati's song observe her closely  
 This is the much-talked about barren  
 Oh, types of barrenness are legion  
 The one who loses babies frequently has her identity  
 Sati's barrenness is natural  
 Sati went for marriage in Logbo's household  
 It is Hwofadon's children Sati nurses there  
 Oh Sati, the world is a tricky place  
 Hwofadon has had children for Logbo  
 It is you who are the unlucky one  
 What a great pity! (Omoko, 2009:67).

Persistent reference to barrenness and children in the excerpt appears antithetical, but it is a way of reinforcing the situation of Logbo in Ogun's eyes. Sati's barrenness becomes the topic for the rivalry song of the Igede people. It is pertinent to note that this is a song rite in honour of Ogun, but that someone who is not conversant with the Ogun festival would expect war or commotion between both communities after the festival. A person influenced by modernity, for instance, would use this as an excuse to preach to the people on how it is not right to curse or abuse one another. Unbeknown to the modernised person, the people have their own way of performing their duties in order for Ogun to bless them. Omoko's construction of the songs offered during the sacrifice is intended to portray how tense the atmosphere might become during the festival; yet the people still find a way of making peace with one another. The Igede troupe's composition raises a fundamental question: does the song not indirectly beseech Ogun to come to Sati's aid, since Ogun is a god of justice? An attempt to answer this question is made when analysing Ogun's contribution to peace and harvest in this chapter.

### **2.4.3 Ogun as a protector and a custodian of wisdom**

Ogun is also constructed in the play as a god that protects his followers. Ogun's protection ranges from protection from death caused by iron related implements to death from accidents and deadly diseases. The characters in the play, as previously mentioned, persistently pray to Ogun each time they are encountering one difficulty or another. Ekakoto and Ololo's conversation offers vivid evidence of how the people of Igede and Ubigen rely on Ogun for protection. When Ololo asks Ekakoto about his family members, it is clear that people often commit their ways to Ogun before embarking on any journey. The following excerpt attests to this assertion:

*Three days later. The scene is the house of EKAKOTO, OLOLO'S friend at Ubigen... A locally brewed gin and a little saucer with kolanuts and two small glasses on it are centrally placed on the table.*

OLOLO: A crime done a child ...

EKAKOTO: He never forgets it.

OLOLO: The money you have presented, I'll keep but the gin we'll drink together.

EKAKOTO: (*Laughs.*) Always as funny as usual. Let's drink and forget our difficult times... (*Drinks.*)

OLOLO: (*Serves himself some drinks.*) How are the children and your wife?

EKAKOTO: They were perfectly okay before they left for the farm, but as for now... only the gods can say. (Omoko, 2009:33)



This scene deals with Ololo's visit to Ekakoto, a member of the Ubigen troupe. The visit highlights the significance of friendship among the Ubigen and Igede people despite the abuses thrown at each other every season during the festival. In the extract above, Ololo has arrived to convince Ekakoto to trick Logbo to reveal his family matters, in order to have material to base his songs on. Omoko's reference to gin and money in the conversation reminds one of the cowry and gin offered during the ritual performance of the Ogun festival. Similar to such a practice, Ekakoto presents Ololo with wine and also refers to Ogun who continually protects his family. Ekakoto remarks, 'only the gods can say' (33). There is a possibility that Ololo and Ekakoto while drinking the gin will pour some on the floor to reverence Ogun. This is often done in Yorubaland: when an individual wants to drink an alcoholic drink, for instance, he or she will pour some on the floor in honour of their patron god whom they believe is always present to protect them (see Karade, 1994:63). This is a practice that has been distorted and been made to be forgotten. Its significance is to honour Ogun who is the god in charge of transport, farming and every iron implement that is on the surface of the earth.

The practice of offering Ogun libations during the festival is so that he will be swift to grant requests. In Happening VII, the Curator also makes reference to Ogun as the protector. In his appreciation expressed to Ololo who had undertaken a mission to look for song material to be used in the contest, the Curator acknowledges that Ogun will always protect him. The extract below highlights how Ogun is being implied in the Curator's remark to Ololo and other band members of the Igede troupe:

*(General cheers from the spectators and participants who stand in ovation as the men bow comically to acknowledge the cheers.)*

CURATOR: (Steps forward.) Uhanghwa gbi!

ALL: (Together.) Gbi

CURATOR: Uhanghwa gbi!

ALL: (Together.) Gbi!

CURATOR: (In renewed vigour.) Uhanghwa gbi!

ALL: (Together.) Gbi!

CURATOR: (Waits until the noise dies down. To Ololo.) You have shown to us that the community can rely on you in whatever capacity in song composition. (To AMUDU and ODJIKO.) You have all done well. The gods of our forefather will always protect you ... Guide you and bless you. (Omoko, 2009:47-48)

The Curator in the above conversation is not directly mentioning Ogun, but owing to the nature of the upcoming festival in honour of the god that protects the people the Curator, one may assume, prays to Ogun to continually guide and protect the people of Igede. It is also evident in this excerpt that Ogun encourages hard work and commitment to the community's growth. The Curator appreciates the commitment of Ololo, Odjiko and Amudu to the compositions of the song and prays to Ogun to protect them. Omoko's construction of Ogun in this extract hinges on people's commitment before Ogun will bless them.

In Happening VIII, the Curator also makes reference to Ogun as the people's protector from any form of harm. During the opening day of the festival as the performers prepare for the contest, the Curator blesses the singers and refers to Ogun as their protector. Consider the Curator's words during the preparation prayers:

CURATOR: (*Displays an amulet.*) This is the etanmu charm made from egbri plant and a monkey's tail. (*He fastens it to each dancer's waist.*) The agility and steadfast grip for which the monkey is reputed will be your lot. Whatever acrobatic movement you attempt, you'll return to an erect and safe position. (Omoko, 2009:57)

The reference to how the monkey performs its acrobatic display signifies how the people will be able to perform without the fear of hurting themselves on the stage. The Curator continues his prayers to Ogun by committing to him the singers' physical exercises during the festival. The Curator assures the performers that they are safe and will 'return to an erect and safe position' (57) if there is any need to perform traditional gymnastics during the festival that might result in physical injuries<sup>55</sup>. Significantly, Ogun is not directly alluded to in the conversation; nevertheless the prayers of the Curator are to Ogun, the god the festival aims to appease. The Curator makes implied reference to him, the god of protection, who will cause the singers to be invulnerable to the hostility of rivals and those who might want to use diabolical means to silence their voices, as quoted above (Omoko, 2009:56). The stage direction introducing the Igede youths during the Ogha-Urhie festival reveals certain noteworthy aspects of Ogun as a protector from physical injuries:

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<sup>55</sup> Note the reference to the display of the effigy by Igede youths below (Omoko, 2009: 66). This is also practiced during the Ogun festival in Ikere-Ekiti. Two age groups representing middle aged people in the community participate in a mock duel, which takes the form of a wrestling match. During the duel, it is possible one fighter might dominate the other, which might lead to the loser collapsing. It is the duty of the Ogun priest present to take care of the affected fighter. The presence of the priest during the mock duel represents the significance of Ogun in the community: the Ikere Ekiti people believe Ogun is always present to prevent them from accidents.

*As they set to perform, vigorous drumming and dancing are heard a far off, gradually revealing fiercely costumed youths bearing an effigy of Logbo in an Egbada fist. They place it on a stool upstage in a dramatic accolade. Cheering in an unending crescendo. (Omoko, 2009: 66)*

The youths were involved in a mock battle when they displayed the effigy of Logbo. Omoko defines Egbada in the play's glossary as 'a warring fist' (Omoko, 2009: 69). An important point to make here is that it is possible for the youths of Igede and Ubigen to clash at this stage. The Curator's prayer to Ogun becomes significant in order to protect the performers from physical harm. Thus, Omoko's construction of the festival from a decolonial perspective aids in preserving knowledge about Ogun's characteristics, as a god of protection, that have been abandoned. This is the knowledge that the god is capable of protecting his adherents from any spiritual or physical harm. Some people that come from places where Ogun is being worshipped, Yorubaland for example, have now embraced a Western religion and preach against prayer to Ogun for protection. The Curator in *Battles of Pleasure* makes sure that the singers are committed to the care of Ogun before they embark on their contest. Such knowledge might seem barbaric to anyone who had converted to a Western faith.

The knowledge of Ogun as a protector is gradually diminishing in Yorubaland, a process which begins when an individual is exposed to Western knowledge. This is because religion was the basis used by the ex-colonisers to gain the trust of the ex-colonised. In agreement with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's view concerning knowledge produced in Africa, 'what is even more disturbing is that African children and youth begin a journey of alienation from their African context the very moment they step into the school, church, and university door' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b:11). For instance, it is too easy for youths participating in an Ogun festival to forget most of the rites that are performed owing to their embrace of Western epistemologies. The youths in this case are taught to hate their ancestors and regard them as demons. They are being taught that all the knowledge they acquired before exposure to Western epistemology is nothing but 'folk knowledges, barbarism and superstitions that must be quickly be forgotten' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b:11). Thus, Omoko's construction of Ogun is an encouragement to any individual born in the ex-colony, Yorubaland for example, to embrace his or her culture and take pride in performing the rites associated with the god.

To this end, the Curator also prays to Ogun for a fertile memory during the prayer for protection. This is evident in the prayer for Ololo, Amudu and Odjiko as quoted above. The prayer

continues after the response of the trio to the prayers of the Curator. The conversation below is also relevant to the discussion of a decolonised knowledge:

CURATOR: (*To Amudu and Odjiko.*) You have all done well. The gods of our forefathers will always protect you... guide you and bless you.

SPECTATORS: Ise ee ...

CURATOR: Aridon's virtues shall be upon you and you shall continue to have fertile memory. (Omoko, 2009: 48)

The import of the Curator's words is to prevent the 'murder of the knowledge' (Santos, 2014:92) the people might possess regarding the worship of Ogun. Any attempt to forget or unintentionally forget a process in the worship of Ogun might bring calamity to the community or individual. In this extract, Omoko also accords Ogun the attribute of knowledge preserver. Telling the singers that they will be blessed with fertile memory to remember how the god is being deified is worth mentioning. Omoko constructs Ogun not only as a god of protection but also as a custodian of wisdom, from whom all creativity comes. Ogun therefore becomes the deity of creativity, harvesting, hunting, fishing, and invention.

Omoko's play evidently portrays Ogun as having positive characteristics, as against the tenets of scholars such as Ogunjobi (2011). Ogunjobi defines the songs rendered to Ogun during the annual festival as 'the Yoruba oral poetry in praise of Ogun in which all his attributes, such as the violent warrior, god of hunting, fertility, justice, warfare and owner of all iron implement, are rendered' (Ogunjobi, 2011:98). Ogunjobi's definition encompasses all the themes Omoko employed to reconstruct Ogun as discussed earlier, except the description of Ogun as a violent warrior. The reason for the association of Ogun, the god of protection, harvest, creativity, peace and custodian of wisdom, with violence or destruction, without exploring the reasons behind such an association, might be misleading to an individual who is not conversant with the attributes of the Yoruba god of iron and war.

## **2.5 Implied significance of coloniality in *Battles of Pleasure***

As mentioned earlier, the adaptation of songs and performance in *Battles of Pleasure* bears resemblance to how the Ogun festival is being performed in the community from which the writer of this thesis comes. As a mimetic representation of the Ogun festival, Omoko portrays two communities preparing to perform abusive songs to ridicule each other during the Ogba-

Urhie festival. The songs are not designed to anger the opposing section of the community but, as indicated, are rendered in order to appease Ogun, the god of peace and protection.

Omoko constructs Saniyo and his troupe as the protagonists in the play, while Logbo and his band represent the antagonists. In the opening part of the play, Saniyo is seen discussing with the members of his troupe the effect of the abuse from the Ubigen troupe. Saniyo becomes angry after discovering that Logbo and his troupe members are singing about his inability to provide for his family and about the fact that it was his wife who managed his bills when debt collectors arrived. In the following conversation Saniyo intends to discover how his family affair became known to the rivals:

SANIYO: (*Softly.*) Who would believe that? You know people tend to remember the bad things they hear about other people, even if they are later shown to be false. My problem is not even their songs. How did they get to know the story in such detail? That it was my wife, Babi, that paid my debt when the messengers from the Igbon cult from Oto-Ughiewen were summoned to my place? How did they get to know the story in such detail? Answer that. (*Turns his face from the men, crosses his legs.*)

ODJIKO: (*Embarrassed.*) Come on, Saniyo! You know it was all exaggerated ... Besides nobody in this community in his right senses would take a scandal of such magnitude to our rivals

SANIYO: (*Not convinced.*) If they were not told as you claim, now tell me. How come about that part that says I hid myself under my bed and my son Ghwuba, took them to my hideout?

ODJIKO: (*Embarrassed.*) It could just be a mere coincidence ... you have been ... I mean, you are just a mere victim of masked character. I still don't think someone from this village told them anything.

AMUDU: The antelope gives birth to children that when they grow they will fend for themselves, but what happens when the hunter arrives?

ODJIKO: Your words are pregnant with meanings!

AMUDU: What! Have I not warned against our romance with the people of Ubigen? No one embraces a tree with thorns.

ODJIKO: Ha! Are you saying ...? But we can't boycott their market, besides, my father-in-law is from Ubigen. I can't avoid my in-laws because of our rivalry o (Omoko, 2009:14).

The above extract indicates that there are marital links between the two communities. The reference to Saniyo's wife in the song text points to the notion that she is from Ubigen. It is also obvious from the discussion that Odjiko's wife also comes from there. Although this does

not constitute over-reliance of the communities on each other, because the people of Ubigen still engage independently in their own matters, this chimes with the colonial notion that the ex-colonies cannot exist without the support of the Euro-North American countries. Although there is nothing wrong in Saniyo asking his wife for assistance, the intention of Logbo's troupe is to tamper with the ego of Saniyo using his family affairs. The relationship between the two communities can thus be linked to the type of bond that exists between the ex-colonisers and ex-colonised in Nigeria, for example. Despite the resistance of the ex-colonised before the advent of the coloniser there were forms of trade that existed between the colonised and their colonisers.

The fault therefore is also to be laid at the door of ex-colonies which refuse to decolonise themselves completely from the grip of the colonisers after colonialism. Grosfoguel's assertion is relevant here; he refers to the reliance on the Global North as 'incomplete decolonization of the world and the continuation of colonial power relations in post-independent nations' (Grosfoguel, 2003:18). Linda Alcoff also terms this 'colonial difference' (Alcoff, 2007:87), where coloniality produces, evaluates, and manages all forms of socio-economic situations. It ensures that most of the developing world remains in colonial conditions even though its members are no longer politically controlled by any particular colonial power. One may observe this situation in the manner in which multi-national bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the UN Security Council are influenced by Euro-American domination. These institutions have been financially and economically dominant in their relationship with ex-colonised states, to which they dictate terms and conditions. Therefore, political-economic control over the ex-colonies has been totally shifted to the North.

Often, powerful states such as Britain and the US use their economic, political and diplomatic muscle to dictate terms to weaker nations (for instance, former colonies) that are dependent on them for aid. For instance, Logbo and his troupe believe that the leader of the Iggede troupe is inferior to them because of the financial aid offered to him. As is evident in the above quoted conversation, Saniyo had to avoid contact with his benefactors who lent him money because he was unable to pay back his debts. According to Saniyo, 'how did they get to know the story in such detail? That it was my wife, Babi, that paid my debt when the messengers from the Iggun cult from Oto-Ughiewen were summoned to my place?... If they were not told as you claim, now tell me. How come about the part that says I hid myself under my bed and my son,

Ghwuba, took them to my hideout' (Omoko, 2009:14). It is accordingly implied that Saniyo might have been threatened to pay back what he owed, thereby being relegated from having a 'voice' in the community. For him to have hidden under his bed when the debt collectors came shows the inconvenience to which the exorbitant interest on the money could have led. Similarly, former colonies are relegated to having little or no voice in international gatherings and have been obligated to ally themselves to former colonisers in order to cause decisions to be passed in their favour. Any form of opposition to the control of the colonisers may result in a loss of aid from the coloniser and sometimes humiliation. For example, Saniyo and his group could not perform during the song rites due to the mortification created by the song regarding the assistance rendered by people from Oto-Ughiewen quarters of Ubigen village, as quoted above (Omoko, 2009:14). This appears to be metaphorical for the form of coloniality in which countries from the Global South receive aid, loans and grants with conditions attached to them by multilateral institutions controlled by the North. Some of these countries do not possess sufficient resources to pay back the money; the consequences have been debt crisis, aid, dependency and poverty in the South. This situation has promoted unequal global power relations wherein ex-colonies are subordinate to former colonisers.

Additionally, the inequitable economic imbalance between the Global South and North has impelled certain scholars in Nigeria, for example, to publish articles and books that only appeal to researchers from the North. Some items are intended to promote the knowledge endorsed by the ex-colonisers by exposing the weakness of their people and culture. The scholars portray themselves as weak individuals to people outside the community. In the above extract for instance, Amudu opines that the romance with the people of Ubigen had cost the people their dignity (14). Marital unions that exist among people from both communities might have resulted in vital information being leaked. Due to promises of better education or international recognition, the opinions of scholars influenced by modernity may have emanated from the desire to attract positive responses from the North, rather than representing Ogun in a way that would appeal to individuals from the so-called global south. In contrast, Omoko questions the impact which the influence of modernity has on the thinking of ex-colonisers.

Noting the continuation of the conversation between Saniyo and his troupe, Saniyo becomes critical of the fact that some of his troupe members are giving the people of Ubigen material that can be used against them. He emphasises that 'if they were not told as you claim, now tell me. How come about the part that says I hid myself' (Omoko, 2009:14). Saniyo's point would

have been that only a present member of the community's band would have leaked information to people from Ubigen. Likewise, the Ubigen people might have offered money or made use of their daughters, the wives of some of the Saniyo troupe members, as a threat in return for personal information to be used in their songs. Their in-laws from Ubigen might threaten to take their daughters back and return any dowry paid on their behalf. Evidently, Omoko reveals the fact that Ubigen people have been giving their daughters in marriage to the Igede people in order to have access to their private lives. The marriage between Ubigen and Igede is not to be condemned because it is also a means for Ogun to increase the number of people. Quoted previously, but significant here, is the conversation between Amudu and Odjiko about Odjiko's marriage to Mukoro's daughter:

ODJIKO: Ha! Are you saying ...? But we can't boycott their market, besides, my father-in-law is from Ubigen. I can't avoid my in-laws because of our rivalry *o*.

AMUDU: You are too busy with marriage, that you can't avoid the daughters of that tortoise. Mukoro eh eh is a tortoise. Our people say that the man that uses a live goat as a bait is expecting no less than a lion. (Omoko, 2009:15)

Mukoro is an important member of the Ubigen troupe. The above exchange indicates the extent to which the Ubigen people tend to colonise the people of Igede. Relevant here is the discussion on coloniality of being, where the Igede troupe members, particularly Saniyo, were being oppressed by the Ubigen troupe's songs in previous contests. Omoko's choice of words such as tortoise, goat, bait and lion draws attention to the significance of coloniality. The tortoise symbolises how deceptive the Ubigen people might be in their quest to obtain what they want. The use of a live goat signifies promises such as democracy, Christianity, industrialisation and modernity, while expectation of nothing less than a lion represents the 'coloniality' of every sphere of ex-colonised lives. It is therefore germane to note from a decolonial perspective that colonialism promised civilisation; the result is that coloniality permeates every sphere of the existence of the ex-colonised. In the views of the ex-colonisers, African subjects lack among other things morals, civilisation, epistemologies, peace, cognitive strength, Christianity, industrialisation, sexual mores, democracy, and human rights; the former promise to educate and civilise these subjects. This explains coloniality and its intention to absolve and humanise or transform the African subject by bringing salvation to her or him.

In order to delink from the Western dominated knowledge and power, Omoko proposes the appreciation of indigenous tradition. Amudu, Oloba, Odjiko and Saniyo suggest using the



Ogba-Urhie festival to promote the identity of Ogun as the god of peace and harvest. Oloba in the excerpt below admonishes the rest of Saniyo's troupe to use the upcoming Ogun festival to their advantage. In his words,

OLOBA: What has happened calls for our commitment. We can use it to our advantage.

We must be battle ready. We have the Ogba-Urhie festival ahead of us. I think we should plan and make it the best arena to show them that Igede is the land of great bards. We are going to make this year's festival a poetic and a theatrical warfare.

ALL: You are very correct, Oloba.

AMUDU: The die is cast. We need to get started right away.

ODJIKO: We can't just start like that. We need to renew our repertoire of songs. (Omoko, 2009:16)

The festival aims to promote the knowledge the people possess regarding the god. The songs that are composed and sung at every annual festival construct Ogun in diverse forms to remind the people of what he is capable of doing. As said earlier, this is also a way to remind the god of issues in the community. For example, Oloba in the above extract encourages the other troupe members not to forget how to appease the god to come to their rescue in their composition of songs. The Igede troupe aims to use the festival songs to communicate with Ogun. They want to avoid the mistake of the previous season when famine was the result of their negligence. From a decolonial perspective, it is necessary to signify that Omoko's constructions point to the relevance of decolonising from any knowledge or any alleged power that seeks to dominate existing native knowledge. This is because the Igede troupe, for instance, recognises that appeasing Ogun with the right song and means will result in the god providing for and protecting them.

## **2.6 Significance of festival materials and association with Ogun**

On the day of the festival, a libation in the form of palm wine is poured out at Ogun's shrine and the materials for the sacrifice, for example, palm-oil, kolanuts and dogs, are brought before him. Worshippers begin by offering kolanuts to Ogun as exemplified in *Battles of Pleasure* when the priest, as mentioned, 'pours libation, sprinkles some sacred white chalk and resumes another round of dignified dancing amid chanting' (Omoko, 2009:56). This signifies a renewal of the bond between Ogun and his worshippers. The materials offered for sacrifice during the preparation also signify an appeal to Ogun, not to remember the evil committed by members of the community during the season preceding the festival. Therefore, the sacrifice is meant to

calm Ogun's anger and wrath that might be exhibited if the codes and customs of the community are transgressed. In some instances, the sacrifice is not intended just for placation but also for the elimination of sins, especially those committed against Ogun, and those committed against neighbours, and for the restoration of the good favour of the offended. In this way, the Yoruba people reinforce Ogun's relationship with them and renew the bonds of unity among themselves.

Another significant symbol during the festival as evident in *Battles of Pleasure* is the red buluku worn by the Curator during the festival. As discussed and defined earlier, it symbolises the influence of Ogun during the rite. The colour red here signifies life and calmness as evident in the stage direction during the festival.

*The scene changes almost immediately to reveal the last rehearsals of the Ubigen community, leaving the stage settings as it was with Igede community. As light falls on the stage, participants, women, youths are seen seated in a semi-circle while others are standing without. Voices of women having private chats cover the stage. CURATOR enters through a passage, dressed in a resplendent red buluku. He gazes from one end of the stage to the other. A general calmness is restored. He makes an ostentatious movement upstage with his buluku dangling behind.*  
(Omoko, 2009:49)

The above stage direction depicts the settings during both communities' rehearsals for the main festival. The scene also demonstrates that the people reverence the representative of the god in their midst. The red buluku is not designed to frighten the people but is a way of showing them that the god whom the festival honours is present. In this case, Ogun is represented by the red garment. This is also applicable in most Ogun festivals in Yorubaland as either the egungun (masquerade), the Ogun priest or the leader of the community's middle aged-group will wear a shirt or blouse containing red in the design. It does not symbolise danger or aggression as argued earlier but respect for the god of peace and strength. The association of colour red with strength will be examined in the next chapter on *Hard Choice*.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In spite of the abuses thrown by troupes at each other during the Ogun festival as exemplified by the Ogba-Urhie festival, the songs are largely for entertainment, not intended to cause chaos

in the community. The songs are used to convey social commentary to Ogun, for the god to be aware of any challenge his followers are experiencing. The audience during the Ogun festival performance either comes to experience the re-enactment of Ogun's exploits and its contribution to the community, or attends in order to enjoy the music and performances. *Battles of Pleasure* constructs Ogun as the Yoruba god of peace, protection, harvest and custodian of wisdom.

Hence, the worship of Ogun appears not to be barbaric or outdated, in terms of its significance to the community. Omoko's adaptation of his community's Ogun festival explains that most rites performed during the festival aid preservation of culture and a bountiful crop. Thus, Ogun is not a chaotic or a wicked god but a deity in charge of procreation and harvest. This knowledge about the god is one that is supposed to be encouraged, not to abash those who intend to take the deity as their patron god. This implies that what is just - or not - should be the priority of the so called ex-colonised, not of the colonisers. This chapter accordingly contributes to the existing knowledge of Ogun traditional festivals from a decolonial vantage point. The festival's drama and song project the Yoruba people's worldview and identity; they portray Ogun's characteristics as a god who protects, provides for, and guides his adherents through hard times. If modernity dictates Ogun to be aggressive and wicked, Sunnie Ododo's *Hard Choice* in the next chapter offers an insight into understanding Ogun as a god of justice.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3 OGUN, THE GOD OF JUSTICE IN SUNNIE ODODO'S *HARD CHOICE*

#### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the reconstruction of Ogun as a god of peace, harvest, protection and a custodian of wisdom in Peter Omoko's *Battles of Pleasure*. In it, I explored issues pertaining to how the god has been misinterpreted as a deity of conflict and as one who is capable of causing chaos and destruction. I critically analysed the conversations of the characters in the play and ways in which the preparation for an adapted Ogun festival aids one to decolonise from views that relegate Ogun to a god of destruction. I also explored how Omoko constructs two sections of a community attempting to appease Ogun in the upcoming festival. In the chapter, I discussed the effect that breaking a community's code of conduct might have on such a community. This chapter also discusses how the mending of relationship between two communities could assist in reconstructing Ogun.

This chapter discusses Ogun's characteristics as an object of mistaken identity among scholars, researchers and critics. To reiterate, Ogun has been misrepresented by several Nigerian writers, including Wole Soyinka. Nigerian political conditions after independence influenced Soyinka's representation of Ogun in *A Dance of the Forest* (1963). In this play, Soyinka represents Demoke, an Ogun-like character (De Mel, 2008: 30), as an arrogant and obstinate god-like principle who originates conflicts and riots in the play. This contrasts with Sunnie Ododo's representation of Ogun as a god of justice in his play *Hard Choice* (2011), thereby departing from Soyinka's representation of Ogun as a god of war. Through an analysis of *Hard Choice*, this chapter demonstrates that Ogun is represented not as a god who engages in reckless devastation of life, as is commonly argued in criticisms of the Ogun figure in literature, but a deity who seeks justice when wronged. The three pillars of coloniality discussed previously, in conjunction with Ododo's traditional idea of identity formulation which will be discussed later in the chapter, will also assist in understanding the construction of Ogun as a god of justice.

The main thrust in this chapter is to delink from the argument that Ogun is a bloodthirsty god: as indicated, a characteristic well represented in the studies of scholars that might have been influenced by modernity. Ogun's association with blood has been constantly misinterpreted in texts. For example, Adu-Gyamfi argues that Ogun does not taste the blood of animals, but has

a taste for human blood, which describes Ogun's ferocity in war and association with his fierce nature (Adu-Gyamfi, 1997:79). This is in contrast to what the Yoruba people believe. In the Yoruba cosmology, it is believed that when Ogun is unhappy or vexed, he makes requests that pertain to bloodletting. This is a form of warning to his people who will not wish to break any code of conduct for fear of Ogun demanding blood sacrifices. It is also believed that the request will maintain law and order in the society.

Adepegba further highlights the reason for the association as a precaution against accidents caused largely by the use of iron implements. In his words, 'Ogun can even prevent death involved in using metal implements – knives, hunting tools, weapons of war, cutlasses, spearheads, swords and guns – as well as present day dangers of death or accident by motor vehicles' (Adepegba, 2008:110). Ogun's association with bloodshed is misleading to individuals who could hasten to conclude that Ogun is fierce or wicked. However, the significance is that on occasions which might lead to bloodshed, a faithful adherent of Ogun will gain the god's support and will be saved from any unfortunate circumstance. The next section offers a synopsis of the play, *Hard Choice*.

### **3.2 Synopsis of Hard Choice**

Ododo's *Hard Choice* presents the situation of a marital communion between the Igbo community of Emepiri and the Igedu community of Yorubaland in Nigeria. This is achieved by instituting a traditional royal marriage ceremony between the families of Eze Okiakoh of Emepiri kingdom and King Iginla of Igedu land (Ododo, 2011:13)<sup>56</sup>. The play opens at a traditional wedding ceremony between Azingae, the Princess of Emepiri, and Oki, the Prince of Igedu. As a result of this coalescence of culture during the traditional wedding, the people of Igedu have the support of Ogun as their god, as much as Emepiri has the backing of Oguguru. The influence of these African gods is evident in the manner in which the traditional wedding is performed. The ceremony continues until three men in masks commissioned by Chief Ubanga, a chief in the Igbo kingdom of Emepiri, interrupt the ceremony and seize the crown of King Iginla (Ododo, 2011:14). Owing to the missing crown, King Iginla, the father of the groom, and his entourage are unable to return to their Yoruba community. The abduction of the crown causes a tense atmosphere in Emepiri kingdom as both communities which are supposed to be celebrating a wedding divert attention to locating the royal object. In their refuge

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<sup>56</sup> The Oba is the monarchical head of a typical Yoruba community, while the Eze has the same status in the Igbo community. Community here refers to a group of people within the same geographical space.

in Emepiri, the Yoruba monarch and his chief warlord, Bashorun, plan to wage war on Emepiri if the Emepiri rulership fails to retrieve the crown (Ododo, 2011:19).

The interruption of the traditional wedding ceremony plotted by Chief Ubanga, who is in a conspiracy with the Queen of Emepiri, is unknown to both King Iginla and Eze Okiakoh as each ruler suspects the other of dishonest actions (Ododo, 2011:20-23). To reinstate peace in the community, the Eze alongside the council of chiefs summoned the Dibia, the chief priest of Emepiri kingdom, who reveals that the missing crown is in the Oguguru shrine. The Dibia proposes that Oguguru, the god of justice and oath taking in Emepiri kingdom, is to be appeased and a vow needs to be fulfilled before the crown could be recovered from the god's shrine (Ododo, 2011:27). The Dibia reveals that the vow involves Princess Azingae's blood (Ododo, 2011: 29).

The treacherous theft of King Iginla's crown uncovers a series of atrocities perpetrated by Queen Amaka and Chief Ubanga. Queen Amaka needed to collaborate with Chief Ubanga, who also had a selfish interest in marrying the princess, to snatch the crown of Igedu to be offered as an alternative sacrifice to Oguguru in order to save Princess Azingae (Ododo, 2011:36). In her confession to Eze Okiakoh, Queen Amaka confesses to being part of the snatching of King Iginla's crown. She confirms her collaboration with Chief Ubanga to do so as a substitute for her pledge to Oguguru (Ododo, 2011:36). The vow relates to her quest for power and the kingship tussle in the Emepiri kingdom before the coronation of Eze Okiakoh (Ododo, 2011:45). Uchenna, the Eze's stepbrother, being the only possible opposition, appeared a few weeks before the coronation and contended with Eze Okiakoh for the kingship stool (Ododo, 2011:45). As Eze Okiakoh's elder brother, Uchenna qualifies to be the king of Emepiri. Unable to stand the shame of Uchenna becoming the Eze in her husband's stead, a pregnant Queen Amaka approached Oguguru to eliminate any opposition to the throne (Ododo, 2011:45). Oguguru grants the queen's demand in exchange for the fruit of her womb. Queen Amaka reveals that she agrees to the god's request that the unborn child will return to Oguguru on her wedding day. She also divulges dedicating the princess' life in the belief that she was going to give birth to another child (Ododo, 2011:45), which unfortunately did not happen. Oguguru succeeds in killing Uchenna before the coronation of the new king, thus enabling Eze Okiakoh to become the monarch, to the satisfaction of Queen Amaka. Now the Queen seeks to breach her pledge to Oguguru by offering him the Igedu crown instead.

The final part of the play centres on Princess Azingae, who is the only child of Eze Okiakoh, and her willing submission to become the sacrifice to appease Oguguru whose anger at being deceived by the Queen spells doom for the entire Emepiri kingdom. This final part also presents the valour of Prince Oki. Prince Oki involves himself with investigations to discover the missing crown before Bashorun and the Igedu Kingdom launch a war against the Emepiri Kingdom (Ododo, 2011:21). Prince Oki overhears a conversation between Chief Ubanga and Queen Amaka about their plan to offer King Iginla's crown to Oguguru (Ododo, 2011:37). Ironically, the crown which is now in the Oguguru shrine serves as the object of a reminder to the Queen about her debt to Oguguru, while retrieving it now requires the life of the princess. It must be pointed out that the Queen's bargain with Oguguru two decades previously (Ododo, 2011:45) would simply have resulted in Princess Azingae serving as a priestess of Oguguru in the Oguguru shrine. But now, greatly offended by the Queen's attempt to abrogate the terms of their agreement, Oguguru demands blood, no longer service, failing which the entire Emepiri community will be wiped out. The Queen strongly disagrees with the sacrifice of her only daughter for the harmony of the community, but the princess willingly gives herself for this purpose (Ododo, 2011:44). The ritual is eventually conducted, and Princess Azingae retrieves the crown and gives her royal beads to Oki as a sign of regal continuity. The royal bead allows Oki, a Yoruba prince, to marry any woman from Emepiri and to produce an heir apparent to the Eze's throne, and also become the Eze of Emepiri. Oguguru accepts the sacrifice as the princess dies and Prince Oki is able to continue the regal duty of both kingdoms after the Dibia endorses Princess Azingae's decision to entrust Oki with royal responsibility (Ododo, 2011:51). The question that arises from this synopsis, therefore, is: how does Ododo reconstruct Ogun, owing to the primary setting of the play being an Igbo space? Ogun is embodied in this play mainly through the characters of Bashorun and Prince Oki and his characteristic in this instance is principally as a god of justice.

### 3.3 Critical scholarship on *Hard Choice*

Scholars such as Utoh-Ezeajugh (2013), Amaechi (2014), Obi (2014), and Omolayo (2016), have researched how Ododo presented *Hard Choice* as a contribution to the nation building of Nigeria. Amaechi explores the play as a creative discourse as well as its contribution to the development of the electoral system in Nigeria, but does not make any connection to Ogun (Amaechi, 2014:837)<sup>57</sup>. In her definition of the democratic process, Amaechi relates the

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<sup>57</sup> According to Familusi, 'the appointment of kings in Yorubaland for instance, is customarily preceded by an electoral process by a select group of elders called kingmakers. The process of appointing a king in Yorubaland

choosing of leaders to the selection of monarchical heads in Nigeria, particularly Yorubaland. Although there is a striking relationship between the electoral system of Nigeria and the selection of kings in the latter region, Amaechi fails to identify the influence of Ogun in both systems. This is perhaps because Ogun is merely implied in the symbolic worship of Oguguru and does not feature directly in Ododo's play.

Amaechi argues further that 'tough choices may be inevitable in order to engender the steady development of democratic practices in Nigeria. Development is a process geared towards change, which could either be positive or negative; but a creative discourse is one that certainly is productive, builds relationships and leads to positive turn around' (Amaechi, 2014:837). Amaechi opines that democracy can be achieved through discussion and round table talks but her discussion of the 'tough choices' that are inevitable is not strongly defined. This chapter, however, relates such choices to reverencing African gods in selecting people to lead the people.

*Hard Choice* draws attention to one of the challenges of selecting a king in Igboland: corruption. The coalescence of culture during the traditional wedding allows one also to relate such corruption to Yorubaland. In the case of the Emepiri Kingdom, the kingship tussle influences Chief Ubanga's selfish interest to marry the princess, hoping that he will be king as husband or that their first male offspring will become king after the demise of the reigning one (Ododo, 2011:17). Queen Amaka also knows that once the princess has been sacrificed to Oguguru, she will not be able to marry or give the kingdom an heir apparent. Princess Azingae is to become the priestess of Oguguru and not to die as it turns out in the end, but interference with the process by Queen Amaka and Chief Ubanga's actions modifies the intentions of both Ogun and Oguguru. The plan to influence the kingship process in this kingdom initiated the conflict in the play<sup>58</sup>. The corrupt nature of those elected to occupy political positions in Nigeria is similar to the influence of Chief Ubanga and the queen on the governance of the Emepiri Kingdom. Ododo in *Hard Choice* proffers a solution to corruption in Nigeria, suggesting that elected leaders should swear by the gods of the land. This will result in politicians discharging

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may differ from one kingdom to the other, but there are some striking similarities with electoral process in Nigeria. Candidates are expected to be free born, people of integrity, sound mind and not physically deformed' (Familusi, 2012:26).

<sup>58</sup> Familusi argues that, 'In the modern time, the influence of politicians is significant as they have discovered the advantage of having friends in position of authority in the traditional setting' (Familusi 2012: 26). Chief Ubanga hopes that marrying the princess of Emepiri will automatically make him a member of royalty.



their duties responsibly, being cautious of not attracting the wrath of the gods. This point also forms part of the issue this chapter will discuss.

Utoh-Ezeajugh's discussion on *Hard Choice* initiates arguments about dramatic parables that are synonymous with the situation prevalent in Nigeria today (Utoh-Ezeajugh, 2013:24). Most of the atrocities in the Nigerian government are intentional acts committed by the leaders who want to enrich their pockets. Nigerian politics features people who are willing to enlarge their empires at the expense of the masses. Chief Ubanga and Queen Amaka's conspiracy and interests form the basis of discussion of actions in *Hard Choice*. Chief Ubanga aspires to royalty while the queen wants to save her only daughter in order to continue being the royal mother of the community. Utoh-Ezeajugh's comments on *Hard Choice* hinge on democratic processes and the aftermath of electing corrupt leaders to government. Thus, in her suggestion for a better community and governance, Utoh-Ezeajugh argues 'for a return to the African traditional mode of worship which bound people together and fostered peaceful co-existence among communities' (Utoh-Ezeajugh, 2013:12). Although I do not concur with Utoh-Ezeajugh's idealisation of precolonial society which also results in its own difficulties, I do agree that there is a need to retrieve some of the positives of the precolonial system. Part of what this thesis agrees with is her suggestion of embracing cultural values, norms, and ethos as vehicles through which the minds of the people can be reached. Utoh-Ezeajugh further proposes the use of songs, chants, incantations, appeasements and sacrifices in worship and traditional festivals as means through which peace can be achieved. Although she appraises several modes of traditional worship, there is no mention of Ogun as a god of justice. This might be because a direct reference to Ogun is only mentioned in the prayers during the traditional wedding.

Omolayo likewise discusses *Hard Choice* and representation of diversity in the Nigerian society. In the article 'Diversity in the Nigerian Society: How it can be Erased and Represented using Ododo's *Hard Choice* as a Paradigm', Omolayo portrays the plurality of the Nigerian social order and its multicultural communities. In his words, '*Hard Choice* projects the theme of plurality in its structure, identifying the various strands of diversity and identity/construct as listed; cultural diversity, individual diversity, religious diversity, family diversity, social group diversity' (Omolayo, 2016:3). Omolayo highlights different qualities of people and how these could affect the lives of those they come across or govern. The relevant aspect of his discourse is the discussion on religious diversity and reference to the belief of the Igbo community in

traditional worship. Omolayo mentions the Igbo societies and their connection to the belief in gods and ancestral spirits which links to the rituals of passage rite and transition into the world beyond, as explored in *Hard Choice* (Omolayo, 2016:5). Despite the reference to religious matters, cultural diversity and rites of passage by Omolayo, no link is being made in his article to how Ogun in collaboration with Oguguru influenced the request in *Hard Choice*, nor to how appeasing the gods might result in a peaceful society.

Amaechi, Omolayo and Utoh-Ezeajugh have greatly contributed to understanding *Hard Choice* as an endeavour to foster good governance and the return to a traditional mode of worship. However, none of them points to or explicates the ‘hard choice’ that is to be taken when a code of conduct is broken in the community, nor how the community’s god of justice will react. The understanding in this chapter is the coming together of two cultures that celebrates the relevance of African gods in the community. Oguguru and Ogun, an Igbo god of justice and a Yoruba god of justice respectively, are adopted by two communities from two different geographical locations as their deity, which is evident in the conversations and rituals performed. As mentioned in the play’s synopsis and as will be explored in this chapter, the issue is the way in which Oguguru demands a just resolution to the dilemma created by Chief Ubanga and the queen, and also why Ogun becomes angry as a result of the disrespect towards the royal authority of the Yoruba king. The unity between the Yoruba community and the Igbo community during the ritual aids one’s grasp of decolonising the concept that African gods in general are unfriendly and wicked. The intention in this chapter is to correct the erroneous belief that Ogun, the Yoruba god adopted by the Igbo community in Emepiri, is a bloodthirsty god who unjustly demands the death of people. The mode of worship in the Oguguru shrine and the celebration during the traditional wedding portray the symbolic significance of how Ogun is being worshipped and celebrated in Yorubaland. This chapter however aims at investigating how Ogun can be reconstructed in the community and ways in which the worship and reliance on the god could assist to achieve justice there. Two main characters in the play, Bashorun and Oki, will be analysed to make clear how Ogun is being constructed among the Yoruba people. Facekuerade in this chapter has been adopted as a sub-theory of the decolonial perspective to analyse the doubling effect of these two major figures in the play.

### **3.4 Facekuerade: A decolonial perspective**

Ododo defines facekuerade as ‘a performance masquerade character without mask. Even though his audience encounters him face-to-face, the spiritual essence of the masquerade

character is not devalued. He is still revered and held in high esteem' (Ododo, 2008:287). The word facekuerade is derived from three words: 'face', 'Eku', 'rade'. The word face denotes the human physiognomy, while 'eku' is coined from the Ekuechi festival performance. 'Rade' is the third term derived from 'masquerade'. According to Ododo, the Ekuechi festival mask performance influenced the use of the term 'eku', which means 'the domain of the dead and masquerade' (Ododo, 2008: 284). The theory is based on the appreciation of ancestors, in contrast to how modernists portray all masked characters in Nigerian drama as 'masquerades'.

Ododo's notion on facekuerade begins a dialogue and possibly delinks from Antonin Artaud's postulation on 'Theory and its Double', which believes that theatre should be an interaction between the audience and the actors on stage (Ododo, 2008: 302)<sup>59</sup>. The audience visualise the personality of the actor but respect the spiritual significance of the performer. Ododo's theory of facekuerade is based on a link between the world of the spiritual and the living. This concept constitutes a decolonial cultural perspective that is analysed in his article titled 'Facekuerade' (2008). The aim in this chapter is to study how Ogun is being constructed by the Yoruba people as a god of justice in various communities and not how masquerades are constructed by the people.

Although the theory discusses how the identity of masquerade characters is being discovered, it is also relevant when attempting to establish the reconstruction of Ogun as a god of justice in *Hard Choice*. In the case of the seized crown of the Yoruba kingdom represented in the play, the Oba is still being referred to as the ruler of Igedu regardless of the abominable act performed by the conspirators from Emepiri Kingdom (Ododo, 2011:19). Ogun, being the Yoruba god of justice, becomes provoked because of the stolen crown. The Yoruba god of justice has his principles and there are characters or individuals in the society who embody him. This is similar to the manner in which the characters of Bashorun and Oki symbolise Ogun in the play. Bearing in mind the symbolism of the Ogun celebration during the traditional wedding in Emepiri kingdom, Ododo borrows from traditional knowledge about Oguguru, with the aim of unearthing the rich culture, philosophy, folktales, rituals, and other art forms, which coloniality had tried to bury under the guise of modernity to construct the god of justice and comment on the practice of oath taking in *Hard Choice*. The relevance of facekuerade as a decolonial sub-theory in this chapter is that it assists in establishing how the play positions King Iginla as the representative of the gods of Igedu land, Ogun being one of them. Even when he loses his

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<sup>59</sup> Artaud (1978:59).

crown, the symbol of his esteemed position, he remains the king. King Iginla is still respected and served by his subjects, which is why Bashorun must do something about the missing crown. Bashorun's actions embody Ogun principles which will be discussed later in this chapter. Thus, facekuerade not only drives the plot of the play but also enforces a physical manifestation of Ogun through Bashorun and Oki.

The knowledge about African gods has been distorted by colonial ideology and, to reiterate, there is a need to decolonise from theories that use the Western epistemological order to interpret what is African. The question that needs answering, therefore, is: does this mean that African traditional systems of thought are illogical and cannot be made explicit within the framework of their own rationality? Facekuerade offers an attempt to answer such question. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, facekuerade in this chapter serves as a decolonial perspective in terms of its treatment of identity formation. Facekuerade delinks from the notion that a general term should be given to masquerades who do not don masks. It is also a theory that departs from conventional European identity theories which have shaped discussion on traditional elements in Africa in particular. Thus, relevant here is the discussion on coloniality as positioned by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b:13), as the theme of global imperial designs that have been in place for centuries. This is also in harmony with Maldonado-Torres who also argued that coloniality emerged as a result of colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, quoted in full earlier). Also mentioned previously were the ways in which colonialism defines culture, labour, intersubjective relations and knowledge productions in structures that supersede colonial administrations, in developing and sustaining the system of domination that once existed (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Considering Ndlovu-Gatsheni's views with respect to creating an African epistemology, facekuerade is a worthy attempt to come up with a traditional identity theory. In reference to decolonial theory, the so-called Euro-North established research methods are 'never accepted as neutral' but are considered technologies of subjectivation that potentially prevent the emergence of alternative ontologies and epistemologies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b:11). To the Euro-North, there is no other logic and world view, which brings to mind the discussion in the introductory chapter concerning the manner in which African children begin a journey of alienation from their African context the very moment they step into the school, church and university door (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b:10). The journey of alienation from one's culture and

knowledge breeds coloniality in every aspects of life. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's position thus aids to determine the relevance of adopting facekuerade as a decolonial perspective in this chapter.

The issue of a doubling essence is another feature discussed in *Facekuerade* (Ododo, 2008:300). According to Ododo, 'the base of facekuerade theory is formidably rooted in the duality and doubling essence of Ebira masking practice' (Ododo, 2008:300). Duality and doubling essence refers to representation of nature in pairs; heaven and earth, for instance. In *Hard Choice*, Ododo also presents his characters as displaying a cause and effect characteristic, whereby individuals act in pairs to uncover the mystery behind the missing crown and the relevance of Oguguru and Ogun to justice in the community. For example, they investigate such clues as the crown and the king, Chief Ubanga and the throne, Bashorun and Oki, the queen and Oguguru's request, Eze Okiakoh and the council of chiefs, Ogun and Oguguru, Emepiri and Igedu; most elements in the play are doubled. In relation to the doubling effect, the discovery of the missing crown lies in the relationship between the people and the Oguguru shrine. This is what Ododo refers to as human and spatial interaction carried out in order to uncover the identity of masquerades without their mask (Ododo, 2008:301).

Ododo's views on identity and doubling essence are the bases for choosing the concept of the facekuerade as a decolonial theory for reading *Hard Choice*. This selection of facekuerade is further explained by Ododo as follows, 'When the mask is absent we apprehend the "self" presence of the performer but that same "self" is doubled by the ancestral mystic presence, which assumes prominence above the "self" of the performer (as it recedes into absence). In this instance, the spiritual performs the secular (a doubling effect), which then becomes the height of ritual orgy' (Ododo, 2008:302)<sup>60</sup>. The costumed performer is regarded as an incarnated ancestor who brings messages from the world of the dead to that of the living. The performer becomes an ordinary person without his or her mask but is still revered by the people as one of their dead ancestors, in Yorubaland especially (Ododo, 2008:287). The performer is not viewed as his or her original self but a spiritual entity representing the world of the ancestor.

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<sup>60</sup> The Yoruba people believe that their ancestors visit them once a year during annual festivals. The performance is carried out by costumed actors from the family that is in charge of the festival. The costumed actors are regarded as the spirits themselves, respected by the community appropriately as befits their spiritual characters (Ododo, 2008:285). Ododo points out that some parts of Yorubaland perform the ritual with the performers not wearing their masks (Ododo, 2008:286). This does not affect the people's notion that these costumed performers are incarnated ancestors.

The unmasked characters as propounded by Ododo in *Facekuerade* exhibit a similarity to the present state of the Igedu community in *Hard Choice*, where King Iginla was forced to remain in exile in Emepiri after armed men seized his symbol of authority, the crown (Ododo, 2011:19). King Iginla's attendant refers to him as a facekuerade owing to the fact that his symbol of authority has been taken away from him. The crown's absence does not permit anyone the privilege of disrespecting the king; nonetheless anyone who is not from Igedu will treat the king as an ordinary person. This does not devalue the king who is still responsible for guarding and leading his people. The attendant's word becomes relevant while discussing the present state of Igedu kingdom:

CHIEF SHAMU: You're the Bashorun, the grand commander of Igedu army, what do we do? In a foreign land, we have all been humiliated; we cannot go home without the crown; what is a masquerade without his mask?

ATTENDANT: Facekuerade.

CHIEF SHAMU: Shut up, is this a time for careless jokes?

ATTENDANT: It is not a joke, sir. A masquerade without a mask is a facekuerade.

CHIEF SHAMU: I say, shut up; you fool (*ATTENDANT murmurs.*) Please Bashorun. (Ododo, 2011:19)

The act of stealing or taking away the crown without authorisation is sacrilegious in Yorubaland<sup>61</sup>. The Oba in Yorubaland is known as the second in command to the gods<sup>62</sup>. He is to wear a crown as a symbol of authority from the gods. The king becomes an ordinary person without his crown, which is the 'self'. The king serves as a link between the gods and his people. Similarly, King Iginla is still the Igedu monarch despite his taking refuge in Emepiri land, yet he cannot live without his crown because his link to the ancestral world has been cut off. Therefore, facekuerade as a decolonial concept is apt because it projects African kings as neither plain human nor plain masquerade, as colonial thinking constructed them, but rather as

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<sup>61</sup> It is a taboo for anybody to wear or steal the king's paraphernalia without permission. In particular, his Ade (crown), Opa Ase (sceptre) and Bata Ileke (royal beaded shoe) are objects of veneration and must not be worn by anyone other than the king himself (Afe, 2012:100; Atanda, 2007:116).

<sup>62</sup> Adelowo (1990) reinforces the role of Yoruba Obas as ritual leaders in their community. He further highlights the relevance of Ogun during the coronation of kings and their daily activities. In his words, 'In the cultic activities of a town the Oba is usually the head of the ritual leaders. He is the priest-king. In He-Ife, for example, the Ooni of Ife, Alase Ekeji Orisa is usually the Pontifex Maximus, He is the *olori Awon iworo* -the head of all the priests. He assumes this office in consequence of his sceptre (*are*) which is derived from the divinity to whom he is vicegerent. The office still stands even though the Ooni does not now officiate directly at any particular shrine and only performs certain customary rituals as tradition decrees' (Adelowo, 1990:163). It is compulsory for most Oba in Yorubaland to visit the Ogun shrine before being crowned. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, most kings in Yorubaland trace their origin to Ile-Ife and adopt Ogun as their patron god.

dual entities straddling the physical and ancestral worlds. This chimes with Ododo's position that, 'just as we have character doubling, so also spatial doubling exists in facekuerade theory' (Ododo 2008:303). King Iginla is accountable to his people who travel with him for the traditional wedding and those who remain in Igedu Kingdom. There are other forms of spatial doubling evident in *Hard Choice*: for instance, the Igedu and Emepiri communities, also, King Iginla's hideout and that of Chief Ubanga's men. Ododo also presents character doubling in the play; King Iginla and Eze Okiakoh, Chief Ubanga and the Queen, Oki and Princess Azingae, Bashorun and Chief Ubanga. Ododo's representation of the spatial and character doubling in facekuerade assists in grasping the role culture and characters play in reconstructing the gods of justice, Ogun and Oguguru, in *Hard Choice*.

The culture of the Yoruba people manifests in their day to day activity and interactions with one another. These people for instance have in the past maintained codes of conduct which already shaped their existence. Desecrations of these values, codes and norms attract sanctions and disciplinary procedures; it is important to note that each man and woman knows the traditional codes and reverences them. However, Maldonado-Torres explains that colonialism arrived with its attractions such as civilisation, development, technology and amalgamation of varied cultures and triggered the trend amongst the ex-colonised, particularly Africans, to abandon their values, beliefs and norms for an imported Western culture (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:257). Some African youths have abandoned their African philosophy, and in embracing the Western version fail to respect what is African and sacred. Coloniality has succeeded in making both old and young Africans vulnerable to perceiving their culture as inferior. Lack of interest towards African tradition is caused largely by mass drifting into Christianity in which Western philosophy and codes are highly packaged. The recent outbreaks of violence, kidnapping, thuggery, and bombing are signs of alien cultures which are indications that Africans have lost their authentic identities (Utoh-Ezeajugh, 2013:14). Examples of this outbreak explored in *Hard Choice* are terrorism and kidnapping (Ododo, 2011:14-15).

These deeds are the antithesis of what the African culture symbolises. For instance, in the play, Eze Okiakoh's intention of giving Princess Azingae's hand in marriage to Oki might not have been known to Chief Ubanga, who supposed that the Eze betrothed her to a Yoruba prince in order to strengthen friendship and economic ties with the Yoruba kingdom of Igedu. Eze's intention is to avoid the wrath of Oguguru who is the god in charge of promises in Emepiri. Eze betroths Princess Azingae to the prince of Igedu in appreciation of the heroic exploits of

Igedu's army, influenced by Ogun (Ododo, 2011:31). Unlike Eze Okiakoh, Chief Ubanga's insatiable quest for power and position causes him to nurture a selfish interest: wanting to sabotage the wedding of the princess to a Yoruba prince in order to appear as a hero and marry her. Chief Ubanga organises armed men to disrupt the traditional wedding and also make off with the crown of the groom's father. The following conversation among Chief Ubanga and his mercenaries is informative in several respects:

CHIEF UBANGA: Well boys, well done! We're on course. Now the dice is cast, the battle line is drawn. Are we all together? (*A thunderous 'yes' is replied.*) Look I'm proud of you guys. It was a clinically executed operation. (*Brings out a bulky envelope and hands it over to JASPA.*) That's half a million, more would follow shortly. Always do your own bit and be rest assured that I won't fail you.

ALL: Chief, Chief!

CHIEF UBANGA: Point of correction boys, High Chief Ubanga, the Oyenmeme of Emepiri Kingdom. Now Jaspa, take the crown to where I told you and with your most trusted men, maintain strict watch over it. Under no circumstance must it be released to anyone without hearing from me.

JASPA: Sure, Chief ... I mean High Chief.

EGBESU: What is next, High Chief?

Chief Ubanga: For now, retreat into hiding and wait for further instructions. (*Laughs cynically.*) I now wait to see how the princess will be betrothed to Yoruba prince.

JASPA: Never! Is my chief not good enough for her?

CHIEF UBANGA: Ask me again. The princess thinks otherwise. More importantly, Eze doesn't see anything wrong in marrying his only child to Yoruba prince simply because he wants to strengthen friendship ties with King Iginla. (Ododo, 2011:16)

This conversation is quoted in full in order to highlight the grievances of Chief Ubanga. The scene portrays a betrayal on his part since he was supposed to be the chief of staff of Eze Okiakoh (Ododo, 2011:38). As the words above illustrate, Jaspa and his men had successfully seized the crown of King Iginla, using violence as a means of achieving their purpose. They were instructed to keep the crown and guard it from all comers. Poverty might be the reason why Jaspa and his men engage in the kind of business of kidnapping and terrorising the community. Chief Ubanga offers Jaspa and his men money to carry out the activity. He also regards himself as superior to the likes of Jaspa and his followers. He prefers to be called a high chief. Chief Ubanga's thoughts might have been clouded by the fact that he is rich and is able to do as he desires in the community. He thinks he is superior to the other chiefs or anyone



in the village, which qualifies him to be the one who marries the princess. This is an example of what Maldonado-Torres refers to as ‘aspiration of self and self-image’ (2007:243). Although there is nothing wrong in thinking highly of one’s self this should not be done to the detriment of other people or their culture.

Ododo exposes coloniality and its dark side in the presentation of how Jaspa and his men disrupt the peace of the community during the traditional wedding. The theft of the crown renders the Igedu monarch powerless, in accordance with the palace attendant’s reference to ‘facekuerade’ (Ododo, 2011:19). In reference to Chief Ubanga’s role in the disruption of peace during the wedding, one should recall that the Nigerian political scene is one which is characterised by ‘godfatherism’, ‘selfish interest’, ‘sectional favouritism’ and so on, which are results of coloniality that still exist in the Nigerian government. Obah-Akpowoghaha explicitly highlights ‘Godfatherism, tribalism, ethnicity, nepotism, sectionalism among others as barriers to achieving democratic consolidation in Nigeria’ (Obah-Akpowoghaha, 2013:81). Godfatherism was explained earlier. As discussed in the introductory chapter, direct colonialism is crude, thanks to the efforts of the nationalists that brought an end to it. On the other hand, coloniality divides people from their elected leaders so that, instead of providing true leadership and guidance, the latter neglect the very people who put them in power and carelessly become instruments of suppression. In agreement with Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s view, I consider that coloniality penetrates deeper than is often realised and goes beyond merely focusing on the continuing economic exploitation of the Global South by the industrialised North. It reorients and enlarges the logical dimension, and touches on the imperial complicity between knowledge, racism, and patriarchy (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b:11). Chief Ubanga becomes greedy, disregards the ethics of being a leader and opts for selfish gains.

In summary, Facekuerade as a decolonial perspective therefore acts as a reflection to note that culture is a necessary tool for discovery, advancement and change. An African individual is therefore reminded and encouraged to embrace her or his past heritage as a means of obtaining peaceful coexistence, sacredness and sanctity of life above the material acquisitions, established controls, norms and values that may guide a society. Facekuerade seeks to establish that traditional African culture and religion are African legacies which should be cherished, recalled and embraced because of their unique contributions in achieving peace, stability, spirituality, morality and above all their concern for the great value of human life. However, coloniality clarifies that a total return to African culture and religion may be impossible owing

to Western civilisation and education as well as a high level of exposure to Western culture. Decolonial perspective (facekuerade, in this case) encourages delinking from such exposure and advocates for a retention of those African religious forms and cultural philosophy that promote nation building, peaceful co-existence and restore the African value system. The next section investigates how Ododo constructs characters from the Yoruba community in *Hard Choice* as Ogun principles in the play.

### **3.5 Constructions of Ogun: A close analysis of Ogun Principles in *Hard Choice*:**

The keyword ‘Ogun’ is not mentioned in the play *Hard Choice*; instead, Ododo uses characters from Igedu to convey how the people construct Ogun as a god of justice. While defining the concepts of strength, courage, peace and war, Ododo highlights certain features of Ogun in his representation of his characters. This representation reflects elements that are attributed to Ogun by the Yoruba people. Ododo constructs him as a god that gives strength and courage, as implied in the characters of Bashorun and Oki. The two characters might not be directly referred to as Ogun in the play, but their actions and determination to execute justice on the Emepiri kingdom for snatching the Igedu crown symbolise principles of justice associated with Ogun.

#### **3.5.1 Oki as an embodiment of Ogun principle of order**

Ogun is characterised by means of words such as ‘anger’, ‘bloodshed’, ‘strength’, which are aspects that are also explored in *Hard Choice* from a positive perspective. Ododo presents certain characters who exhibit some of these traits and use them to impact their community positively. Oki and Bashorun are characters who display these qualities in the play. Their roles as principles of Ogun in the drama help the reader to comprehend how the god of iron is being constructed. Ododo constructs both men and the manner in which they exhibit features of Ogun as a reminder of the influence and significance of the god in the community.

Oki is the crown prince of the Igedu throne and Princess Azingae’s groom. For King Iginla’s lineage to continue in Igedu, Oki’s role as the heir apparent is to protect the crown. It is implied that he would eventually become king in his father’s demise. Since Oki has taken up the responsibility of finding and protecting the crown and has not been so selfish as to expect his father’s death in order to become king, this directly makes him a representation of Ogun, the god of order. If the prince protects the crown, there will be order in the kingdom because Ogun

will bless the people but if the former fails to protect the crown, then there will be chaos since Ogun will be angry. Ogun detests disorder and punishes anyone who disrupts or disrespects what he establishes. In this case, the prince is directly accountable to Ogun for what happens in the kingdom. In Oki's case, his awareness of the weighty responsibility he has towards the crown, and Ogun, moves him to act with courage to retrieve the crown. Therefore, his courageous actions embody the Ogun principle of order.

His contribution to the retrieval of the missing crown commences after the king has encouraged him to exhibit the courageous attributes of Ogun as a god of order (Ododo, 2011:21). This is in line with Adeuyan who emphasises that 'kingship in Yorubaland is always a lineage issue and its baton passes from father to son and as such the father makes sure that the son he intends to succeed him is well prepared for the task ahead of him' (Adeuyan 2011:32). It is evident that prior to King Iginla's encouragement, Oki was a timid prince, only concerned about his marriage to Princess Azingae. The conversation that follows constructs Oki as a weak, emotional and indecisive Prince whose love for the Princess at this point clouds his allegiance to his kingdom:

BASHORUN: Shamu.

CHIEF SHAMU: Bashorun.

BASHORUN: You shall come with me.

OKI: And me too.

BASHORUN: No. You remain here with Chief Ajao to look after the king. Marital rites are over, the pride of Igedu kingdom is at stake and actions must be decisive. (OKI *looking askance*.) Or do you have any problem with that?

OKI: Bashorun, but I am at the centre of this?

BASHORUN: Thank God you know, but now that the centre can no longer hold and things are falling apart, should we still trust you with the equilibrating point?

OKI: (*Confused and surprised*.) Wait a minute, am I under suspicion here?

KING IGINLA: (*Coughs and adjusts*.) Son, speak no more. Bashorun, please proceed.

ALL: Kabiesi o. (*Praise chants as BASHORUN and SHAMU leave*.) (Ododo, 2011:20)

In this extract, Ododo presents King Iginla and his cabinet of chiefs in their refuge as they plan to retrieve the stolen crown. Oki, being the prince, is privileged to be in the meeting but at this stage he is regarded as a weakling who is only intent on marrying the princess. Contrasting with Oki's character, at this stage, is Bashorun who is the grand commander of the Igedu army. Bashorun merely perceives a weakling in Oki as the latter is not part of this army. On the other

hand, Oki at this point realises that the avenue used as a cover for the seizure of his father's crown is his wedding, but has not taken any steps to react. Bashorun warns Oki, the groom, saying 'marital matters are over, the pride of Igedu Kingdom is at stake and actions must be decisive' (Ododo, 2011: 20). Bashorun's words depict an indecisive prince who is only concerned about how the wedding could continue or be concluded regardless of the atmosphere. Bashorun serves as a link in this conversation to remind Oki about the missing pride of Igedu Kingdom.

It is consequently germane to note that the said 'pride' is the missing crown which both men are indirectly tasked to locate at this stage. Oladumiye observes that, 'the instruments of power and authority are the crown and the bead, which depict the most important instruments of power in the Yoruba race' (2014:6). In Yorubaland, no decision from a king is respected without his using the crown and the beaded staff. To recapitulate, Ododo in *Hard Choice* presents King Iginla, who cannot go back to his kingdom owing to the abduction of his royal identity by some Emepiri armed men (Ododo, 2012:19). The theft of the crown jeopardises the wellbeing of the Igedu Kingdom; noteworthy here is that without the crown the king will die and there will be disorder in Igedu this kingdom as Oki will be termed unfit to succeed his father. Therefore, if King Iginla leaves Emepiri without his crown, this will amount to him going to his deathbed. The search for the crown is not just to restore honour to Igedu but more importantly to keep the king alive. The stolen crown might incur the wrath of the gods: Ogun, being a Yoruba god of justice, will demand his dues and definitely cause chaos if the crown is not found<sup>63</sup>. Ogun's anger will lead to absence of peace and tranquillity in the community as long as the crown is not returned to the Igedu monarch. The commotion in King Iginla's hideout results in Oki not being trusted as Bashorun queries his dedication to Igedu and indirectly refers to him as a coward, when he says 'thank God you know, but now that the centre can no longer hold and things are falling apart, should we still trust you with the equilibrium point?' (Ododo, 2011:20). Bashorun thus questions the role of Oki as the heir apparent and accuses him of cowardice. He expects Oki to have acted on the matter before his arrival from Igedu (Ododo, 2011:19). After all, it is his father's life at stake. There is an unstated accusation in Bashorun's outburst at Oki. It is as if he thinks Oki's complacency is deliberate because Bashorun wants the king to die so that he can take over, since he is the heir apparent. Bashorun considers that as an heir apparent

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<sup>63</sup> One should recall the earlier discussion about the Igedu people having the support of Ogun, as much as the Emepiri people have the support of Oguguru.

to the throne, Oki should have prioritised the crown and its retrieval immediately his wedding was obstructed by the Emepiri thugs.

Oki, in a bid to correct such an erroneous accusation, took up the mantle to search for the offender, counter to Bashorun's decision to single-handedly recover the missing crown. The king consistently utters words that influence Oki to act swiftly concerning the demands of the present situation of the kingdom. This is evident in the conversation below, between Oki and King Iginla:

KING IGINLA: My son, I know it has been very terrible for you because your wedding ceremony was the platform exploited by God-knows-who to embarrass our royalty and throw our kingdom into chaos.

OKI: But your highness, my loyalty has been questioned here and ...

KING IGINLA: Sheee. I don't doubt you, my son, but in state matters, domestic emotions cannot be accommodated and don't grudge Bashorun for his stand point on this matter. Oki, stand up and be a man. (*Oki looks at the king wandering [sic].*) Yes, stand up and act. This is a moment of crisis, only women run their mouths and weep up emotions instead of their limbs and energy. Or was I wrong in supporting your wedding to the princess of Emepiri Kingdom?

OKI: No, your highness.

KING IGINLA: Then rise and recover my crown and your bride. Only that singular manly valour would qualify you to rule over two most important kingdoms in this region. If I die without my crown you will never qualify to rule over Igedu kingdom; with the princess as your wife, you shall become the crown prince of Emepiri Kingdom.

OKI: Father.

KING IGINLA: Son. (*Sustain a gaze at each other and fade out.*) (Ododo, 2011:21)

As the above illustrates, Oki is constantly encouraged to embody Ogun's characteristics of 'manly valour' (Ododo, 2011:21)<sup>64</sup>. Reference to such 'valour' suggests that Oki needs to be transfigured into an Ogun-like creature to rescue the stolen crown. Note the use of the word 'man' as a synonym for strength and courage, which is also a reference to the masculine attributes of Ogun as identified in chapter one. King Iginla persuades Oki to 'stand up and act' (Ododo, 2011:21). Oki is being persuaded to take on the courageous nature of Ogun the god of order. His attribute of bravery is being triggered when the king reminds him that, 'he will never be qualified to rule Igedu, if the king dies without the crown' (Ododo 2011:21). King Iginla's

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<sup>64</sup> See the reference to the masculine pronoun to represent Ogun in the introductory chapter.

comment reinforces an earlier remark made in this section that, if King Iginla died without the crown, Oki would be termed unfit to succeed his father. In this manner, Ododo emphasises that it takes courage to combat corruption and other societal ills. Oki's bravery in discovering the people behind the missing crown is backed up by the king's constant reference to 'manly valour' (Ododo, 2011:21). The king requires Oki to 'rise and recover' the crown and his bride (Ododo, 2011:21). The king further reminds him that, 'being a strong man would qualify him to rule over the two most important kingdoms' (Ododo, 2011:21). Through the use of words such as 'courage', 'strong', 'stand up', 'act', and 'rule', Ododo portrays Oki as a principle of Ogun in *Hard Choice*. These are the terms on which the king lays emphasis while talking to him.

Another characteristic of Oki as an embodiment of the Ogun principle of order is depicted in the conversation between Princess and Ada, a royal maid of the princess. In the following conversation, Princess Azingae is shown mourning the supposed death of Oki after the latter pursued the hooligans who stole the crown during the marriage rite. The princess believes Oki could have been murdered when he had confronted the armed men, but Ada highlights Oki's courageous display in trying to bring order to the commotion in the community. The scene below conveys Oki's bravery in the Princess' conversation with her maid:

*Somewhere in the palace of EZE OKIAKOH; two royal guards are on surveillance. A supplication and consolatory song fills the air; PRINCESS AZINGAE lies down still recovering from shock and being attended to by seven maidens in uniform regalia. The princess rises to sitting position. All the maidens accord her royal greetings and return to take strategic positions.*

PRINCESS: *(Looks around.)* where is Chinelo?

ADA: Still not here, my princess.

PRINCESS: *(Getting worried.)* And Prince Oki?

ADA: No sign of him yet, my princess.

PRINCESS: *(Yells, and all are startled.)* What's going on?

ADA: Calm down, my princess.

PRINCESS: Calm down? I had a disrupted wedding ceremony, passed out for two days, and no caresses from Oki, my love, and soothing words from the queen, my mother. I sent Chinelo, my chief maid, to get information and she dissolves into thin air; you then ask me to calm down? *(She yells again, ADA holds her down tenderly.)* Tell me, Ada, is the prince alright?

ADA: I believe so, my princess ... the last I saw of him was when he dashed after the masked men and they pulled a shot and his people held him back.

PRINCESS: Ah aah, Ada, they got him, don't lie to me, they did.

ADA: No, they didn't.

PRINCESS: Yes, they did.

ADA: No, they didn't. (Ododo, 2011:24)

Ada's reference to the event that occurred after the masked men interrupts the traditional wedding and seized King Iginla's crown does not signify aggression on the part of Oki, but determination and courage to reclaim what is rightfully his and restore order in both Emepiri and in Igedu. Retrieving the crown will bring orderliness to the Igedu kingdom; the culprits behind the stolen crown will be punished. Thus, Ada's reference counters Bashorun's suspicion that Oki is a coward and a weak prince. Oki's action to claim what is rightfully his is a demonstration of Ogun's relentless desire to claim what is his due from humans. It takes courage to have a confrontation with someone who possesses ammunition. Oki in his aspiration to be a leader of his people is obliged to find an immediate solution to the stolen crown. This is also an attribute of Ogun who is always available to answer the requests of his adherents.

Another noteworthy characteristic of Oki is truth telling and discovery of those who were in charge of the crown's theft. Oki is presented in the play as a link in finding the truth about the corruption that takes place in Emepiri. Oki as a representative of Ogun signifies an ideal political leadership in Nigeria that delinks from the kind of corruption which colonialism has brought to this country's political arena. He serves as symbolising an ideal future of Africa that has been delinked from its colonial past. Oki exposes Chief Ubanga and obliges him to confess to treachery and collaboration with the Queen. Oki's courage in apprehending Chief Ubanga and forcing the truth out of him relates to King Iginla's reference to manly valour (Ododo, 2011:21). In this scene, Chief Ubanga has just concluded a conversation with the Queen regarding the stolen crown and Oguguru's request. Oki took the bold steps of uncovering the mystery behind the missing crown and also saving the princess' life. He overhears the conversation that ensued between Chief Ubanga and the Queen concerning the factors responsible for the upheaval in the community (Ododo, 2011:37) and immediately arrests the former. Ododo describes Oki as a 'heavily built man, tough looking too' (Ododo, 2011:37), which is another physical feature of Ogun implied in Oki's character, in agreement with Agetuyi's description of Ogun as 'a tough, formidable god of war' (Agetuyi, 2002:537). Oki is presented in such a way that he exhibits a characteristic of Ogun during this episode.

In their conversation, Oki overhears Queen Amaka's confession about the missing crown and Chief Ubanga's part in the abduction of the crown (Ododo, 2011:37). The queen had an ulterior motive in this respect, intending to circumvent the promise made to Oguguru. She had planned with Chief Ubanga that King Iginla's crown would be seized during the wedding ceremony and be taken to an unknown place. The queen did not inform the chief of her other plan of taking the crown to Oguguru shrine; she might have noticed Chief Ubanga's desperation to gain Princess Azingae's hand in marriage (Ododo, 2011:37). As Chief Ubanga ponders on the connection between the crown and the shrine, Oki enters and makes the arrest. Consider Chief Ubanga's words before Oki's intervention and the conversation between them:

CHIEF UBANGA: Of course, my Queen; whatever it takes to be your worthy son-in-law (QUEEN *leaves at once and followed by CHINELO.*) Tough woman, she should have been the king ... (*lost in thought.*) I still can't discover the connection between the crown and the shrine. When I delivered the crown to her, she was only ... (*sudden commotion; as he tries to run away he is blocked by a heavily built man, tough looking too; turns to another direction and finds another man of the same built waiting he gives up and watches.*) Who're you people? What do you want from me?

PRINCE OKI: (*Emerges.*) The crown.

CHIEF UBANGA: Aah, my Prince, sorry, I know nothing about it.

PRINCE OKI: Shut up, you cheap lying ingrate. I did my investigation well or how else do you think we're here at this very auspicious moment when you are trading a royal crown for a royal bride, all belonging to Igedu Kingdom? (CHIEF UBANGA *expresses shock.*) Yes, I heard your conversation with the queen, it's no use denying anything. Chief Ubanga, where is our crown? *Reluctant to cooperate,* PRINCE OKI *gives sign to the two men to seize him. They rough handled him, tie his hands, cover his head with a hood and push him along. They all journey towards KING IGINLA's hideout, while action resumes there.* (Ododo, 2011:37-38)

Oki decides to put into practice King Iginla's suggestion of embodying Ogun's characteristics of 'manly valour' and order. In this episode, it is Oki who reveals Ubanga's intention to marry the princess in exchange for delivering the Igedu crown to the Queen. Ododo in this scene intends to present how corrupt leaders in Nigeria could go to any lengths to make life unbearable for the electorate while they are enriching their pockets. Chief Ubanga's portrayal in this scene relates to the typical Nigerian politician who is loyal to his or her godfather. These godfathers, as intimated, are ex-military men and the rich politicians in Nigeria who tend to avoid holding political posts but nurture people whom they can manipulate to hold offices in



the government. These people in turn mismanage funds and direct them to their godfathers. Obah-Akpowoghaha comments on the consequence of ‘godfatherism’ in Nigeria as follows: ‘this no doubt has led to the recycling of political actors, and when new elites are created, they are merely representing the interest of the political elite class (godfathers) through the maintenance of the status-quo of social relations between the political elites and the people’ (Obah-Akpowoghaha, 2013:81). Chief Ubanga and Queen Amaka’s relationship is similar to that between a politician and his or her godfather. Queen Amaka or the chief are not directly involved in the disruption of the wedding ceremony, but Ubanga sponsors Jaspa and Egbesu (Ododo, 2011:16). No one will consequently suspect Chief Ubanga and the queen for playing part in the disorder because they were present in the ceremony as a high chief and the queen of the community respectively. The actions of the dissidents, Chief Ubanga, Queen Amaka, Jaspa and Egbesu, led to a polluted political climate where corruption circulates in Emepiri, as against the virtue of Oguguru and Ogun, who hate corruption. Ogun empowers Oki to reveal those who are opposed to the progress of the community.

Oki also acts as a link between the past, present, and the future. Consider the closing stage direction of the play:

*The two kings come together backed by their people in solemn ritual dance of accord and unity with PRINCE OKI at the apex as a torchbearer for the future- the envisioned unification of the two kingdoms; the people of the two kingdoms now mingle with one another and move out with a well-harmonized song created from avalanche of dialects and languages common to the two kingdoms. (Ododo, 2011: 51-52)*

After the sacrifice to Oguguru, King Iginla returns to being the paramount ruler of Igedu once his crown has been retrieved. Oki remains the prince of Igedu and also retains his role as heir apparent to Emepiri throne. Oki’s double role symbolises the birth of a new dawn where unity and peace is achieved. The new birth represents an intended government free of political godfatherism, embezzlement, deceit, unaccomplished promises, and the like. Ododo portrays culture as a pathway to national unity whereby communities come together to fight a major cause to achieve peace and stability. Ododo constructs Oki to become the torch bearer and the only person to carry on the continuity of both Emepiri and Igedu royalty (Ododo, 2011:52).

Oki represents a decolonised Africa where honest and courageous youths can be leaders as opposed to African politics where elderly ex-military officers turn into ‘life presidents’ and refuse to leave administrations. These ex-military officers also turn to political godfathers who

control the affairs of the state even from the confines of their homes if they are not elected to govern. Oki represents the future of African politics that delinks from its past to give birth to a decolonised present and future. This new dawn and a decolonised, future Africa is depicted in Princess Azingae's verdict before she died. She handed over her royal coral beads to Prince Oki, in order to symbolise the birth of a new era. Thus, ethnic division was erased as Oki, a Yoruba prince, automatically becomes a prospective king of Emepiri Kingdom. This marked a new dawn for bridging the gap between both kingdoms in the play:

PRINCESS: *(She removes the coral beads on her neck.)* Oki, my love, with these coral beads I decorate you to reaffirm the vision we both share. With them I relieve you of the burden of my absence and guarantee a flourishing presence of the dream we both represent. *(Places them on his neck.)* Wear them as a constant reminder to all that a man's destiny is the choice he makes. *(She turns to look at the two kings and smiles with a sense of victory.)* They chose wisely to unite us so that a new world may sprout but the gods are wiser. In death life is found and in life our dreams are secured. *(She wobbles and PRINCE OKI tries to support her but she stops him)...* My strength is failing me ... Oki those beads are the shining spectres [sic] of the new world and you are its custodian, which now makes you a crown prince of Emepiri kingdom ... *(Everyone is surprised; she looks at the DIBIA for confirmation.)*

DIBIA: Yes, she is right. It is one aspect of our customs that has remained a guided [sic] secret because of fear of abuse. Apart from marital ties, any male that an only-child-princess gives her royal coral beads, automatically becomes the crown prince of Emepiri Kingdom. However, if he is not an indigene, he must marry from Emepiri Kingdom or forfeits the right. This way, Emepiri blood is still accounted for in the heir apparent. *(Different shades of reactions from the crowd.)*

PRINCESS: Oki, all isn't in vain. Mine is a transfiguration, a mutation of celestial assurances for human edification. Carry on, Oki, carry on... *(Her voice dwindles and begins to fall; Oki moves quickly to bear her; she dies in his arms.)* Mine

OKI: Princess Azingae, your sacrifice is noble; your courage unthinkable. With your blood the rebirth of a new dawn is here. As your blood paints this new canvas in striking colours, we shall ensure that each colour shines out brighter to light up this new world, never to dim again. (Ododo, 2011:51)

Oki's prospect of marrying another Emepiri woman, made possible by the verdict of the dying Princess, conveys the possibility that Ogun infiltrates other communities, not to conquer and dominate or destroy as modernist thinking would have an individual to believe, but to forge

social cohesion between the Yoruba and other ethnic groups; the case of Emepiri and Igedu. Oguguru in collaboration with Ogun did not physically inflict death on Princess Azingae but was a spiritual exercise aimed at cleansing the community. The Dibia also highlights the relevance of preserving one's culture from the influence of modernity. He further emphasises that the influence of modernity needs to be monitored in order for people not to disrespect tradition and intentionally break the community codes of conduct. Hence, Oki's reference to blood, rebirth, new dawn, and new world signifies that obedience to Ogun and fulfilment of vows will result in a peaceful society. Oki's role parallels Bashorun's character as an epitome of Ogun principles of justice as a result of his influence in exacting justice on offenders in the play.

### **3.5.2 Bashorun as an epitome of Ogun principles of justice**

Bashorun is another character who exhibits the attributes of Ogun in the play. He is a hunter and the warrior leader of the Igedu community. Hunters and warriors in Yorubaland are characterised as Ogun's symbols among the people (Okunola, 2012:1063)<sup>65</sup>. Ogun as a hunter, in a figurative sense, hunts down perpetrators of wrongdoing and executes justice against them. As Okunola observes, 'He (Ogun) is the god of iron and of war and therefore, the god of hunters and soldiers' (Okunola, 2012:1063). Bashorun is a fearless warrior whose courage and strength cause the Igedu community to rely on him for the recovery of the crown. The following lines from scene three of the play are informative:

*In a hideout. KING IGINLA is surrounded by two of his chiefs and his son, OKI, with an attendant fanning him. BASHORUN comes in agitated.*

BASHORUN: How is he?

CHIEF AJAO: still visibly shaken, Bashorun. He has refused food these past two days.

OKI: Any luck?

BASHORUN: I'm afraid not. I saw Baba Onifade before I set out early this morning from Igedu. He consulted ifa and reveals that the crown is now in the custody of some fiery gods fuming with anger. If not recovered in seven days from now, he dies (*Points to the king. Shocking expressions by all present.*)

CHIEF SHAMU: You're the Bashorun, the grand commander of Igedu army, what do we do? In a foreign land, we have all been humiliated; we cannot go home without the crown; what is a masquerade without his mask?

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<sup>65</sup> The worship of Ogun is popular amongst hunters, who believe that he resides in their iron implements, and in what Robin Brooks describes as the 'habitation of Ogun' (Brooks, 2014:167). In fact, a gathering together of types of metal may symbolise the presence of Ogun in the meeting.

...

BASHORUN: My war commanders are already on the alert. They are preparing our warriors for the ultimate; war, if it comes to that. In the main time [sic], I have sought audience with the *Eze* later in the day on the missing crown. (Ododo, 2011:20)

More arresting than anything else in this excerpt is the fact that Bashorun is now in command of the Igedu entourage in Emepiri as the king has been 'disarmed'. Bashorun was still able to travel to Igedu and consult Baba Onifade before returning to Emepiri to plan their course of action, causing him to be a man governing Igedu land from two locations. Being the second in command to King Iginla, Bashorun's strength in seeking the good of his community is emphasised in the above quotation. Similar to Ogun's characteristic of being a fearless warrior is Bashorun, whose martial nature is associated with hunters in Yorubaland. There, anyone in Bashorun's position must not falter in defending the community against potential aggression. Bashorun, the grand commander of Igedu army, has the huge task of finding the crown of King Iginla. Bashorun is therefore ready to wage war against Emepiri should the Emepiri elders fail to find the crown. Like Ogun, Bashorun is enraged by the theft of his master's crown, which is the ultimate sign of disrespect not only to the king but also to the entire Igedu kingdom, as well as to the gods whom the king represents. His anger towards the disrespect shown to royalty and willingness to protect his people are comparable to Ogun's readiness to wage battle with those who disrespect him. In Bashorun's words, 'my war commanders are already on the alert' (20); this signifies his readiness to combat the abductors from Emepiri and prepare his army for war.

From a decolonial perspective, Bashorun's fierceness embodies Ogun in a positive fashion, in contrast to Adu-Gyamfi's submission that Ogun has a 'destructive explosion of an incalculable energy' (Adu-Gyamfi, 2002:106), according him the attributes of being an unpredictable god of war and destruction. Bashorun's last statement in the quotation above also reconfigures Ogun, not as a god of reckless destruction, but one who resorts to violence only when pushed into it. Bashorun says the Igedu will resort to war only 'if it comes to that' which means if they find a more peaceful alternative they will be more than willing to adopt that instead. To prove that he is not out on a blood hunt, Bashorun proposes to consult with the Eze on the missing crown, thereby adopting dialogue as his first strategy to resolving the crisis. War is only an option if dialogue fails. Bashorun's decisive will reconfigures Ogun, not as a god of 'destructive explosion' but as one of immense willpower. As Naveenkumar remarks, 'Ogun has a strong willpower to rescue his adherents' (Naveenkumar, 2013:39). Babalola also supports Naveenkumar's assertion when he contends that, 'Ogun is a heroic figure, who is

strong enough and violent enough to bring dread into the hearts of people, yet protective enough to render them grateful for the benefits that are a product of his strength' (Babalola, 1997:168). Ogun's heroic characteristics have been attributed to people who show determination, 'courage and strength – which are attributes dominant in Ogun's imagery' (Drewal, 1997:239) in helping their people. Ododo portrays Bashorun as a courageous man, 'the generalissimo and akogunmogun of Igedu army' (Ododo, 2011:23). Bashorun is the heroic figure to whom the Igedu people now turn as their kingdom faces its demise; he is the physical representative of Ogun who will rescue the community from annihilation by retrieving the crown from Emepiri. He emphasises his determination in the utterance, 'my war commanders are already on the alert' (Ododo 2011:20). Knowing his position as the representative of Ogun in the community, Bashorun shows his readiness to combat the enemy of his people.

Bashorun organises his armed forces to recover the crown from the Emepiri kingdom, in terms of his position as the war general of Igedu kingdom. This relates to Azeez's interpretation of Aare Kurunmi in *Kurunmi* by Ola Rotimi as the Ogun principle, since Kurunmi is also a 'generalissimo' in this text (Azeez, 2013:104). Yoruba people also give surnames to people who show characteristics of Ogun in their lineage, such as Balogun (a war generalissimo). The act of giving names in honour of Ogun is to preserve the knowledge the people possess concerning the god. In scene three, Bashorun describes himself as the 'generalissimo' (Ododo, 2011:23), who has been assigned the role of the messiah to recover the Igedu crown and restore the community's pride.

The Ogun principles in *Hard Choice* range from administering justice, encouraging truth-telling and combating corruption to exposing evil plans. Bashorun embodies all these principles in the manner he handles the theft of the Igedu crown. He interrupts the gathering of Emepiri chiefs and fires gunshots in the air to signify both the anger of Ogun against the Emepiri kingdom and the backing of Ogun in his visit. The gun, being a weapon of iron, evokes the image of Ogun deploying his tools to wage battle against his transgressors. Bashorun laments during his confrontation with the Emepiri council of chiefs that 'the Igedu aristocratic structure is about to crumble because of a security breach in your domain. You betrayed friendship and humiliated the crown essence of Igedu kingdom' (Ododo, 2011:23). Bashorun projects the capture of the Igedu crown during the traditional wedding ceremony of Prince Oki and Princess Azingae as not only an act of humiliation of the Igedu aristocracy but also a betrayal on the part of the Emepiri council members. As a representative of Ogun, Bashorun submits that the

god of justice detests betrayal (see Okunola, 2012:1063); therefore there will be grave consequences if amends are not made.

Bashorun adopts the tactic of war to remind Eze Okiakoh and his cabinet member about the wrath of Ogun to be visited on the Emepiri community if the Igedu crown is not located (Ododo 2011:23)<sup>66</sup>. This is evident from the conversation in scene four during Bashorun, Takute and Shamu's confrontation with the Emepiri chiefs. Consider Bashorun's words during the confrontation:

BASHORUN: (*Approaches EZE OKIAKOH frontally.*) I am Bashorun, the Akogunmogun and generalissimo of Igedu armed forces. The Igedu aristocratic structure is about to crumble because of security breach in your domain. You betrayed friendship and humiliated the crown essence of Igedu kingdom, why Eze Okiakoh, why?

EZE OKIAKOH: Bashorun, the incidence of the abducted crown is indeed an unfortunate one. My chiefs and I have been brainstorming on how to recover it and save ourselves this mutual embarrassment.

BASHORUN: Good to know, but your highness, your search is rather too slow for us. In case you don't know, the life of our king hangs on that crown. If in three days it is not recovered and surrendered, we shall be left with no other choice but to match [sic] on your kingdom and recover the crown ourselves. I believe you know what that means. In one word... WAR! (*Turns and leaves with his men. The others remain speechless as the message sinks.*)

EZE OKIAKOH: Summon the royal dibia at once! (Ododo, 2011:23)

From a modernist perspective, war is a battle between nations for power and supremacy (Hanson, 2001:19). Modernists understand war to be a battle for the domination of peoples or territories. In the decolonial context of Ododo's play, war serves a different purpose. Ogun is not projected in this play as merely a god of war engaged in conquering communities for selfish interest. Ogun's association with war is always for specific purposes. Bashorun's adoption of war in this regard is not a reference to a battle for domination, but represents a war in honour of a kingdom and in preservation of a king's life. Bashorun's threat of war is designed to exact justice and to defend the honour of a people and their king. It must be emphasised that Bashorun does not irrationally declare war on Emepiri, but warns Eze Okiakoh and his council members

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<sup>66</sup> To avoid repetition, Ogun's association with war has been discussed in other parts of the chapter. As noted, Ogun is a mighty warrior and a blacksmith, the keeper of the secrets of iron (see Fai, 2010:44, Omatseye, 2010:538, Azeez, 2013:105). These characteristics make him a deity of war.

of the imminent danger facing them because of their betrayal. Bashorun's emphasis on 'war' signifies that Ogun's anger is imminent. Because Ogun is the god of war, Bashorun visualises Ogun as being the only deity who is able to retrieve the missing crown when dialogue between the two communities has failed. In his words, 'if in three days it is not recovered and surrendered, we shall be left with no other choice but to march on your kingdom and recover the crown ourselves. I believe you know what that means. In one word... WAR!' (Ododo, 2011:23). Thus, Ogun is constructed here as a god who pursues war only as an alternative to dialogue, who engages in warfare only when every other peaceful method of resolving conflict has failed to yield the desired results.

Bashorun's role in administering justice, encouraging truth-telling, combating corruption and exposing evil in an Ogun-like fashion is further evident when Oki brings an apprehended Chief Ubanga before King Iginla and Eze Okiakoh. Chief Ubanga tries to claim innocence about the missing crown, but under pressure he admits to having seized the crown of Igedu as a protest against the marriage of Princess Azingae to a Yoruba prince who in turn will become the next king at Eze Okiakoh's death. In his confession, Chief Ubanga however refuses to mention his co-plotter; nevertheless after Bashorun threatens him with a dagger, an Ogun instrument of justice, Ubanga reveals that he has been working in conspiracy with Queen Amaka. Note Bashorun's intervention when Chief Ubanga refuses to tell Eze Okiakoh who his accomplice is:

CHIEF UBANGA: I'm not persuaded, your highness. The gods and God will never approve that an Igedu Prince becomes the King of Emepiri Kingdom. Unfortunately you're the only one who thinks otherwise just to keep faith with some unguided promises made behind your council of chiefs. This is a state affair and not a domestic one. Besides, it wasn't my idea. Yes. We planned a protest, but abducting the crown wasn't part of the plan.

EZE OKIAKOH: If I may ask, whose idea?

CHIEF UBANGA: I am under oath not to disclose.

BASHORUN: (*Before now, he has been trying to contain his anger and he is now enraged; moves to jerk CHIEF UBANGA up.*) Enough of this impudence and foolery; who is behind this humiliation?

CHIEF UBANGA: Please be gentle with me.

BASHORUN: (*Tightens his grip and draws a dagger.*) I say who?

CHIEF UBANGA: (Looks at EZE OKIAKOH). The Queen ... Your wife, Your highness. (*All react and confused silence descends.*)

BASHORUN: (*Throws CHIEF UBANGA down and command [sic] his warriors.*) Take him into detention. (*They move in smartly and lead CHIEF UBANGA away.* Bashorun leaves the scene and motions PRINCE OKI to come with him. *Evocative traditional instrumental music fills the atmosphere. The two kings take in the situation and in terrified dignity turn backing each other and move out in opposite directions followed by their aids. Fade out.*) (Ododo, 2011:39-40)

Bashorun's actions here help us further understand Ogun principles in the play, which in turn confirm the construction of Ogun as the god of justice. First, Bashorun forces Chief Ubanga to tell the truth about his involvement in the abduction of the crown. In response to Chief Ubanga's claim to be 'under oath not to disclose' the name of his accomplice, Bashorun threatens him with his dagger, thereby forcing him to admit his alliance with the Queen. The dagger, being an instrument of iron, connotes Ogun's very presence and influence over this truth-telling incident. This suggests that Ogun exacts justice not only by waging war but also by initiating truth-telling by which the tellers bear witness against themselves as deserving whatever punishment is meted against them. Secondly, by arresting Chief Ubanga with the instruction 'Take him into detention', Bashorun eliminates a corrupt influence in Emepiri, making room for the restoration of honest governance within the kingdom. Lastly, Bashorun plays a crucial role in exposing the wickedness of the Queen since it is his intervention that forces Chief Ubanga to name the Queen as an accomplice in his evil deeds. Bashorun's exhibition of these Ogun principles reverses the demise that was to be visited upon Emepiri. Omojuwa states the following about Ogun: 'what constitutes offences to Ogun include the breaking of covenant, lying, falsehood, wickedness and stealing. Whoever is guilty of any of the moral offences would incur the wrath of Ogun. This could manifest in form of accident, untimely death, wound and injuries' (Omojuwa, 2014:88). Thus, Bashorun's action to detain Chief Ubanga for 'lying, falsehood, wickedness and stealing' configures Ogun as a god who punishes transgressors deservedly, not undeservedly.

Ododo constructs Ogun as the god of justice, strength and courage in the play with the characters of Bashorun and Oki. Ogun's unrelenting effort to make sure that his adherents are safe from external attacks and disrespect becomes a theme explored in *Hard Choice*. Another feature of Ogun in the play that assists in understanding the reconstruction of Ogun is that of being a god of peace which becomes evident in how the god is being understood beyond the Igedu kingdom in the play.



### 3.6 Ogun as a god of communal integration

Ogun as a god of communal integration in *Hard Choice* differs from his representation in *Battles of Pleasure* in the previous chapter. The characteristics of Ogun as a god in charge of unity are explored in the preceding events before the removal of the Igedu crown during the traditional wedding. As mentioned earlier, the crown's disappearance symbolises an absence of dignity and authority in Igedu land, which reduces the king to a mere subject. The crown serves as an instrument used to subject both communities to hardship by Chief Ubanga and Queen Amaka. This displays a similarity to how the ex-colonisers achieved subjectivity through religion and the promise of civilisation, while they abducted slaves from Africa. The crown became the target of conspiracy during the traditional wedding. Princess Azingae and Oki's wedding ceremony is supposed to foster peaceful co-existence between the two communities from different geographical locations in Nigeria. The opening stage direction explores Igedu's and Emepiri's communal integration:

*It is a bright evening somewhere in Eastern Nigeria. At a village square, festivities for a traditional marriage ceremony are on and effectively buoyed by colourful music and dancing maidens. A royal bard with trumpeters and dundun ensemble herald in the groom's family dressed in richly embroidered Yoruba attires, led by KING IGINLA I of Igedu kingdom, the father of the groom. They are received by the emissary of the bride's family with pomp and pageantry, also led by the EZE OKIAKOH of Emepiri Kingdom, the bride's father. Royal pleasantries and gifts are exchanged and Angus signals the end of the reception.*  
(Ododo, 2011:13)

The traditional wedding ceremony is adorned with pomp and pageantry as highlighted by Ododo in the opening sequence of the play to symbolise peaceful co-existence between both communities. Ododo makes reference to the rich African culture of using dundun drums, trumpets and colourful attires to symbolise the unity that exists between both communities (Ododo, 2011:13). Reference to materials such as the rich African culture of using dundun drums, trumpets and colourful attires also signifies the influence of Ogun on the ceremony performed in an Igbo space. For example, the dundun is a drum which is used in Yorubaland to inform the king of visitors, and is also employed during the performance of rituals to gods. De Silva (2006:53) and Faseun (2008:60) discuss the relevance of the dundun drum during rituals in Yorubaland, especially Ogun festivals. This drum is used during the wedding

procession in the play as it helps to usher in both royal families. The Igedu people's belief might have caused them to include the dundun in the wedding procession to symbolise reverence for Ogun in their celebration. Drumming, dancing and singing are part of the Yoruba traditional wedding, where drums accompany all dance steps. Although this practice is still applicable in most of Yorubaland, exposure to Western culture has placed more emphasis on a church wedding than on a traditional one. Ododo circumvents the Western practice of a church wedding by presenting an elaborate traditional wedding. As a result of the traditional wedding ceremony, both communities are able to show hospitality to each other rather than trying to fight for superiority. Furthermore, one should note the scene of the marriage ceremony which establishes communal collaboration as the central motivation for this union:

ANGUS: We heartily welcome you all to the wedding ceremony between our daughter Princess Azingae and Prince Oki, our son in law to be who comes from far away Yorubaland. Today is the grand finale of a ceremonial process that started six days ago. Please let the ceremonies commence (*Drums, shouts of joy and ululation.*)

AREMU: We greet you all!

RESPONSE: We greet you too!

AREMU: On behalf of king Iginla I of Igedu kingdom, his family and the entire Igedu people, I thank you all for the warm reception you have accorded us since our arrival in your domain (*the King's Oriki-praise chants interjects.*) Today being the highpoint of the wedding ceremony that brought us all together, we implore *Eledumare* to make the union a fruitful and enduring one.

RESPONSE: Ase, Ise!

ANGUS: On behalf of the family of Eze Okiakoh of Emepiri kingdom and his people, I also welcome you once more to our land and family. As our guests, you are entitled to limitless dosage of our hospitality and you will still get more. Without taking much of our time, let us go to the business of the day. In this arena today, almost every young man qualifies as a suitor because of the beautiful and attractive manner every one of them is dressed. As custom demands, I now call on the bride to come out and identify her husband by serving him this cup of palm wine. (*After identifying the groom, they kneel before the bride's father who prays for them.*)

EZE OKIAKOH: Love that binds and unites shall be your companion always. The freshness and purity of the morning dew shall be the sustaining tonic of this new home. The sweet-soothing spirit of our ancestors will forever abide by you two. God himself shall be your guide. Like the butterfly and flower, so shall the fragrance of your romance

attract peace to our different kingdoms. And there shall be no regret in coming together.

So shall it be!

RESPONSE: Ase, Ise! (Ododo, 2011:14)

The extract, quoted in full in order to convey a full picture of the peace that existed before the theft of King Iginla's crown, illustrates the dark side of coloniality. As stated earlier, terrorism is antithetical to African culture, but exposure to Western elements has influenced people like Chief Ubanga to believe that terrorism and kidnapping will help to meet one's demands. Aremu and Angus further reinforce the significance of peaceful co-existence between both communities. Angus and Aremu are the spokespersons of Emepiri and Igedu respectively. In their words, they show how both communities come together in a bid to achieve friendship through the traditional marriage. In appreciation of Emepiri's hospitality, Aremu extends Igedu's gratitude to them for the 'warm reception' (Ododo, 2011:13), while Angus refers to the 'dosage of hospitality' that the Igedu people will receive from their host (14). Both characters show that the hospitality during rites will encourage unity between the communities as people gather in one place.

Thus, regardless of the differences in culture of both communities, the people of Igedu and Emepiri find a common ground during the wedding. The italicised manner in which the word 'Eledumare' is written is an intentional technique by which Aremu makes reference to 'Olodumare' in order to appeal to the Emepiri audience. Eledumare or Olodumare is the Yoruba term for the Supreme Being (see Ekeke, 2010:214; Igboin, 2014:189; Arinola, 2013:148). This is also a form of finding common ground when it comes to language usage during the traditional wedding: as evident in Aremu's prayers to Eledumare, 'to make the union a fruitful and enduring one' (Ododo, 2011:14), Eze Okiakoh also offers the same prayer but makes reference to ancestors as well as God. Aremu's reference to Eledumare in the prayers does not allude to God in a Western sense. Similar to Western religion's reference to the trinity are Eledumare's sixteen elders of whom Ogun is part (see Oyewo 2003:150). Of these sixteen, the most significant in this context is Ogun. Although Ogun, the god of unity, is not directly mentioned in the prayers of Aremu, it is implied that Ogun being part of the sixteen ministers of Eledumare is referenced in the prayers.

In support of Aremu's prayer, Eze Okiakoh says as quoted in an earlier excerpt, 'the sweet-soothing spirit of our ancestors will forever abide by you two. God himself shall be your guide. Like the butterfly and flower, so shall the fragrance of your romance attract peace to our

different kingdoms. And there shall be no regret in coming together. So shall it be!’ (Ododo, 2011:14). It is also implied from Eze’s prayers that he reverences African gods. Eze’s prayer would not be directed to the Western God because it counters what the Bible states, that: ‘no one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon’ (Matthew 6:24 NIV). The reference to ancestors and God in Eze’s remark signifies that it is not the Western god that the prayers are directed to. Aremu’s prayer is therefore a symbolic representation of the union between two cultures. In coming to Emepiri Kingdom, the Igedu people arrived with the support of their god, which is why Aremu accords reverence to the god of their land. Cohesion of culture is also evident in the response of the people to both Aremu and Eze Okiakoh’s prayers. ‘Ise’ is the Igbo version of ‘ase’ which means ‘so shall it be’. Ododo intentionally writes them together to depict the unity of both Emepiri and Igedu culture.

Ogun works in union with Oguguru to forge the marriage between both communities. In a symbolic sense, both Ogun and Oguguru are depicted as gods of communal collaboration, for in forging a marriage between Oki and the princess, the Yoruba have the backing of Ogun as much as the Igbo have the support of Oguguru. What disrupts the wedding is the fact that Queen Amaka wants to cheat Oguguru. The Emepiri god of justice and oath taking was to claim what rightfully belongs to him during the wedding as referred to in Queen Amaka’s confession to Eze Okiakoh in the following extract:

QUEEN: I went to Oguguru shrine to secure the throne for you and for us with her pregnancy.

EZE AND PRINCESS: Aah!

QUEEN: Oguguru accepted to grant my request to eliminate all obstacles on your way to the throne provided I accept that the child being expected returns to them on her wedding day. I agreed. I agreed, believing that other children would come, and that was the best chance we had at the throne.

EZE OKIAKOH: At the expense of your fruit of the womb?

QUEEN: That was the hard choice I had to make, too. But unfortunately the gods sealed my womb after Princess Azingae was born. Now being the only child I couldn’t stand loosing [sic] her, I had to find alternative sacrifice to placate Oguguru.

EZE OKIAKOH: And king Iginla’s crown is that alternative?

QUEEN: Yes, the royal blood of an influential king. But as it is, it’s only temporary measure, because you won’t fight to retain the crown in Oguguru shrine to save the life of our daughter, the only child. (Ododo, 2011:45-46)

The above extract explains why the peace during the wedding was disrupted. From a decolonial perspective, it is not the intention of Oguguru for the princess to die. Princess Azingae is to return to Oguguru on her wedding to become his priestess and not to die, an event which a modernist would query. The cultural practice of the Igbo is that, when the gods demand anyone for the purpose of sacrifice, the family must be excluded, not emotionally attached to the process. Any such attachment to the individual might exert a negative influence on the rite and might also interfere with the decision of the god in charge (see Nnoromele, 2000:153). Queen Amaka becomes wary of the fact that once Princess Azingae becomes a priestess she will not bear children or marry. Being the only child of Queen Amaka and Eze Okiakoh, Princess Azingae will not be able to produce an heir to the throne. Therefore, to dedicate Princess Azingae to Oguguru as promised will mean the end of Eze Okiakoh lineage's right to become Eze of Emepiri. This accounts for Queen Amaka's fear and the reason behind circumventing the promise made to Oguguru with King Iginla's crown. Coloniality of power becomes relevant here as the queen intends to remain in power while she subjects two communities to hardship and commotion. What is at stake for Queen Amaka is the royal lineage: she wants to remain a member of royalty and cheat Oguguru in order to maintain the glory of power. The moment Princess Azingae goes to Oguguru shrine to become a priestess, Queen Amaka's power as the queen ends, since another family will take over the reins of Emepiri. The queen had to circumvent her promise to Oguguru by making use of a royal object (Ododo, 2011:45). The disrespect towards King Iginla's crown causes Ogun to feature in the Emepiri's situation, while Oguguru becomes angry because of Queen Amaka's intention of denying him a priestess.

The symbolic relationship between Oguguru and Ogun is further elaborated by the drinking of palm wine during the traditional wedding. This is Ogun's favourite drink. It is therefore freely served to the devotees during annual festivals of the deity in all parts of Yorubaland, (see Ogundele, 2007:57; Ebeogu 1980:87). Traditional wedding celebrations in both Yorubaland and Iboland are often accompanied by drinking palm wine. The wedding ritual in the play features this to symbolise the presence of the gods in the wedding rite. Angus encourages Princess Azingae to offer palm wine, accompanied with drum and dance, to her groom as a symbol of unity and faithfulness (Ododo, 2011:14). Drumming and dancing also feature as part of the process of palm wine drinking during traditional weddings in Yorubaland, as the bride takes the calabash containing the wine and dances to her husband to be.

Babalola remarks on the dancing tradition of the bride during a Yoruba wedding that, ‘people thought Ogun was the originator of singing, drumming, and dancing, and started to describe it as *are Ogun* known as Ogun's entertainment’ (Babalola, 1997:149). Ogun’s delight in music causes the people to regard him as a god who is also in favour of communal celebration in the community. Thus, the ritual of taking palm wine during Princess Azingae’s marriage aims at fostering peace and friendship between the two communities in the play<sup>67</sup>. Irene Osemeka describes the essence of palm wine during the marriage rite as the ‘exchange of marital vows’ (Osemeka 2014:65). The intended husband sits among different men of the community, while the bride finds and gives the drink to the qualified suitor (Ododo, 2011:14). The manner in which the engagement ceremony is performed in Yorubaland is different from the way it is carried out in the Igbo community. In Yorubaland, the groom comes to meet the parent of the bride first, while the bride is still sitting inside the room, possibly with her friends. When she comes out of the room, she immediately proceeds to the parents of the groom, where someone with whom she is familiar in the groom’s family introduces her to other family members. Since the traditional wedding celebration presented in the play is performed in an Igbo space, Ogun is therefore implied in the rituals of palm wine, dancing and drumming.

Ogun is also a jealous god that will not allow anyone to counter the peace his adherents are experiencing, especially when the individual misuses implements associated with Ogun. While Ogun is forging communal collaboration, Chief Ubanga and the queen are thwarting the peace by stealing a royal crown, which makes King Iginla a representative of the gods of Igedu land. As stated in the previous chapter, once a code is broken in the community, Ogun is angered and makes demands that might not go in favour of the offender.

Shortly after Aremu, Angus and Eze’s prayer during the traditional wedding, the atmosphere in the play grows tense as armed men prevent the marital agreement between the communities. As mentioned earlier, the upheaval in *Hard Choice* is intended to interrupt a bonding relationship between the Yoruba community of Igedu and Emepiri, which was to be concluded

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<sup>67</sup> As Baruch Whitehead suggests, ‘music can be a catalyst to peaceful harmony on earth, although not all music is used for peaceful purposes’ (Whitehead, 2007:78). This point is furthermore in agreement with Yakubu’s argument that music is also used to inspire Ogun to be more active in battle. Yakubu opines that, ‘Ogun’s arrival is heralded by the sounds of bells amidst the decorated instrumentation of the Blacksmith’s craft. He dances to the music of his own creation, and it is apparent that his steps are symptomatic of war’ (Yakubu 2011:81). Ogun is known to be the creator of Ijala: the song rendered by the hunters during hunting sprees, festivals, or wars (Ogunsina, 1996:84).

in the form of palm wine being taken by both communities (Ododo 2011:14). The commotion is portrayed by Ododo in the stage direction after Eze Okiakoh's prayer:

*Thereafter merry-making continues with bridal dance. Suddenly, there are gunshots in the air; commotion ensues, three young men in masks rush in and seize the crown of KING IGINLA and leave. The king's chiefs surround him chanting incantations and shouting "ewo", "ewo", etc; the Eze escapes; the scene dissolves in fade out. (Ododo, 2011: 15)*

Ododo emphasises 'King Iginla' in the extract to dramatise the extent of the grievous action of the criminals. The Yoruba king is often referred to as 'alase ekeji orisa', meaning second to the god in command. According to Albert, in Yorubaland, 'the Obas are eulogised as "Kabiyesi or kabiesi" (we dare not question him) or alase ekeji orisa (the viceroy of the gods)' (Albert, 2008:2). Ododo exposes colonialism's disruption of the authority of the Yoruba kings. Thus, from a decolonial perspective Chief Ubanga is representative of the colonial master who stripped traditional rulers of their power. Owing to Ogun's support of the Igedu people, any form of rebellion against his people or their king is perceived as breaking a taboo, often referred to as 'ewo' by Yoruba people. Defining taboo, Afe avers, 'the word taboo is called ewo in Yorubaland, that is, that which is forbidden. The action or conduct of one man/woman within the community can affect other members for good or evil' (Afe, 2012:97). 'Ewo' is a sacred term for a set of cultural or religious prohibitions instituted by traditional religious authorities as instruments of social control for protecting the sanctity of their shrines, worship of the gods and the wellbeing of their communities. Ogun, being a custodian of oaths in the community, will not accept disrespect of codes laid down to govern the affairs of the community, especially disregard of royal authority. This places Ogun in the same category as Oguguru. Therefore, Ogun must be equally unhappy that the queen wants to deprive Oguguru of a promised sacrifice. The impending war against Emepiri is therefore justified, as Ogun is indirectly displaying his displeasure.

The deed of the people who came to seize the crown of the king is described as transgressing a taboo against the gods, especially Ogun. Ogun also detests people who intentionally misuse his tools in contrast to achieving peace in the community. In contrast to the manner in which Bashorun, Shamu and Takute made use of the gun to emphasise Ogun's anger (Ododo, 2011:23), Jaspa and his crew employed iron implements for violent means (14). They forcefully invaded the wedding ceremony, wielding cutlasses and guns. In fact, the stage

direction showing the hideout of the dissidents states that, ‘*in a groove [sic], JASPA and Egbesu, tough-looking young men with guns and machetes. are [sic] agitated, prancing up and down. Three masked men rush in with King Iginla’s crown, and hand it over to JASPA as they unmask*’ (Ododo, 2011:16). Ogun was probably referred to as the god of iron and war because of his association with iron implements, as discussed in the previous chapter. These tools are created by Ogun to be used for hunting animals and farming. However, Jaspa and Egbesu employed them to cause violence in the community, thereby subjecting the people to a high risk of war and bloodshed. Ogun through the Igedu army has to wage war against these violators. In this context, Ogun is a god of peace precisely because he will combat those who attempt to take away peace from the community.

### 3.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, *Hard Choice* demonstrates that Ogun is not an aggressive, bloodsucking, warring or arrogant god, as representations influenced by modernity depict him, but a god of justice, truth-telling, honest governance and courageous leadership. Being a play set in an Igbo geographical space, *Hard Choice* also suggests the transcendentality of Ogun as he operates beyond Igedu land to exact justice for his people. The collaboration between the Emepiri and Igedu kingdoms in locating the Igedu crown forges a collaboration between Oguguru, the Emepiri god of oaths, and Ogun, the Yoruba god of justice, which eventually leads to a resolution of the conflict and a continuation of the alliance between the two kingdoms. In many ways, both Ogun and Oguguru function on the same principle of taking what is rightfully theirs, even if this involves shedding human blood. The play’s ending with reconciliation between the two kingdoms symbolises national stability in a multicultural society.

It is useful to reiterate that in this play, Ododo’s representation of the Yoruba and Igbo cultures corrects the erroneous notion that African gods are bloodthirsty gods, just eager to kill. Ododo portrays Ogun and Oguguru as enforcing honest governance, courageous leadership and truth-telling, compelling readers and viewers to revisit their heritage and rekindle interest in what is African. Decoloniality assists one to understand how to delink from views that present African cultures as barbaric and outdated, helping one to see that African gods do not take pleasure in reckless killing; they only become angry when what is due to them is intentionally denied them. Ododo’s representation of Bashorun as the embodiment of Ogun principles of justice in *Hard Choice* helps us to comprehend that African gods work for the good of their communities, not for selfish individualistic interests. They detest deceit, betrayal, lying, disloyalty and



corruption. By contrast, they come to the aid of those who display strength, courage and determination for the common good of their community. Ogun's positive features are also aligned with his role as an active observer of people's activities in the community, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# 4 OGUN AS A REFORMER IN AHMED YERIMA'S *MOJAGBE*

### 4.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I investigated Ogun as the Yoruba god of justice and communal integration in Sunnie Ododo's *Hard Choice*. I analysed how this deity is being interpreted as a god who does not take pleasure in reckless killing but is angered whenever what is due to him is intentionally denied him. In the previous chapter, facekuerade serves as a sub-theory of the decolonial perspective to understand the doubling essence of both character and geographical settings in the play. Oki and Bashorun are the two main characters that aided one to grasp the effect of the characters' doubling. Bashorun embodies Ogun's principles of justice, as Oki also represents an epitome of the god's virtues of strength and courage. In the aspects of spatial doubling, Emepiri and Igedu become useful in the discussion of facekuerade as a sub-theory of decoloniality. As shown in the previous chapter, Ododo also constructs Ogun as a god who collaborates with Oguguru, the Emepiri god of oath taking, to exact justice on those who threaten the peace of the community. This reflection continues in this chapter where I examine Ahmed Yerima's representation of Ogun as a reformer in *Mojagbe*, in contrast to his being a god that takes delight in thoughtless murders.

This chapter discusses how Yerima in *Mojagbe* portrays Ogun as a reformer who expects an evildoer to mend his or her ways by sending several warnings to the individual; failure to heed these leads to her or his ultimate downfall. *Mojagbe* reconceptualises Ogun as a god that expects an individual to work out their own destiny. He does not dictate how a human should live his/her life. *Mojagbe* reconstructs Ogun as a just deity that does not pass judgement without giving the individual an opportunity to change. As part of his identity as a god of justice, Ogun gives humans ample time to change from their wayward course to a course that he approves. He would not be a just deity if he killed a human after a single mistake. Ogun wants the person to stay alive and amend his or her ways. Therefore, being a fair god, he only acts when all opportunities for reformation have been exhausted without any positive outcome. Using decolonial theory, this chapter explores a particular socio-cultural aspect or activity of the Yoruba people, which is the worship of Ogun that is central to his re-imagination as a reformer in the community,. A connective approach regarding how events interconnect in *Mojagbe* will

be adopted as another sub-theory of a decolonial perspective while delinking from opinions such as that of Osanyemi (2017) that Ogun is a wicked god who is only pursuing the death of people in the community. This connective approach will assist in comprehending how events unfold while one is examining the reconceptualisation of Ogun in the text.

Such an approach as a decolonial sub-theory is in line with Famule's traditional approach (Famule, 2005:36) to how drama components interconnect or co-exist. Famule posits that:

connective theory examines the materials that made up a composition individually and then establishes their points of connections. This theory could answer the reason why specific materials and not the others were used in making a given African art work. (Famule, 2005:36)

Famule's position is relevant to understanding how events in the play relate to each other. The appropriateness of the theory as discussed in the next paragraph could assist in understanding why some events develop in the play. According to his proposition, the connective approach can be used to determine why a particular costume is used instead of another one. The theory could also be adopted to understand the interconnection of actions in a play. A playwright could decide to bring an event that most audience would expect to find at the end of the play to the beginning, which might sometimes be confusing to an audience. To deal with the confusion, a connective approach could be employed to analyse such material. For instance, *Mojagbe* presents a dictator king who is rejected by his people; the reason for the rejection is only revealed in later conversations in the play. The revealed events explain why it is Ogun among other members of the Yoruba pantheon that rejects Mojagbe.

Famule further explains the 'connective approach' in relation to grasping how Ogun operates in the community, especially in Yorubaland, which should also aid in understanding the reconstruction of Ogun's features in *Mojagbe*. According to him, connective theory could be utilised to answer the question 'who are the Ogun worshippers or principles?' (Famule, 2005:62). In addressing this issue, Famule emphasises how Ogun might be found in every item of equipment, either in part or whole, made of iron. He further writes that 'Since every human being directly or indirectly benefits from iron (Ogun's representation), by implication, everybody is connected to Ogun. Thus, every human being is entitled to call on him (Ogun), especially whenever inside the vehicles, ships, airplanes, and so on, which are thought of as not only the symbols of Ogun, but Ogun himself' (Famule, 2005:62). This view is also helpful in supporting the claims that Ogun is embodied in all iron related implements as emphasised

in previous chapters. An individual might not grasp the association between Ogun and iron implements if a connective approach had not been employed to infer such a relationship. This is why an Ogun worshipper will not swear falsely with any iron tool in the community.

From a decolonial point of view, the connective approach will be used to analyse how components, costumes and events in *Mojagbe* interconnect or co-exist, so as to gain insight into Mojagbe's situation. Note, at this stage, that characters and the manner in which events unfold will be introduced in the next section on the play's synopsis. Famule's connective approach elicits the need to provide a timeline of action in *Mojagbe* before embarking on giving the play's synopsis. The timeline of action, in order of events, is as follows: Yeye's invocation of Ogun (Yerima, 2008:9), Mojagbe's dream (Yerima, 2008:9), Abese's information about Layewu's physical actions (Yerima, 2008:12), Mojagbe's association with Ogun (Yerima, 2008:13), Esan's planned overthrow (Yerima, 2008:14), Isepe's suspicion and exposure of Esan (Yerima, 2008:15), Esan sentenced to death (Yerima, 2008:17), Abese's reluctance to kill Esan (Yerima, 2008:19), Mojagbe and Isepe's conversation about the village's administration (Yerima, 2008:21-25), Mojagbe and his council members' conversation about events in the village (Yerima, 2008:27-30), Yeye and the naked women's protest (Yerima, 2008:30), report of attacks by people of Igbo Odo (Yerima, 2008:39), declaration of war on Igbo Odo (Yerima, 2008:41), Isepe's warning about war (Yerima, 2008:43), warning about receiving any visitor and lectures on death (Yerima, 2008:45), Isepe's death (Yerima, 2008:46), victory by the Mojagbe village's warriors and distribution of war treasures (Yerima, 2008:51), Isepe's replacement (Yerima, 2008:51), Olori Adeola's dreams and significance (Yerima, 2008:53-55), message of rejection from Oyo Empire (Yerima, 2008:57-61), attack by Oyo Empire (Yerima, 2008:62-63), and Mojagbe's encounter with death (Yerima, 2008:65-71). The principle of ordering in *Mojagbe* ranges from how Mojagbe becomes king, to his rejection and his taking of the booty from the war, a slave girl, Motunrayo, whom Ogun embodies to kill Mojagbe. The connective approach will assist in understanding the synopsis of the play. The reason for providing the latter is for the reader to observe how events interrelate and to show how specific instances that will be mentioned in the given synopsis will aid the understanding of how Ogun brings about reforms in the community.

## 4.2 Synopsis of *Mojagbe*

*Mojagbe* is based on Yoruba mythology, symbolising what took place in a Yoruba community that migrated from the Oyo Empire to a location that is not mentioned in the play<sup>68</sup>. The play is also a fictional enactment of an actual event in Yoruba history when Alaafin Maku who reigned in the Oyo empire from the years 1797 to 1798 faced intense opposition from his chiefs and trusted council members (Yerima, 2008:60-62). Yerima constructs *Mojagbe* as the ruler of a community that migrated from Old Oyo Empire between these years in the play. *Mojagbe* highlights the dilemma of a king who through evil acts claimed for himself the status of an immortal. In his quest for power, King *Mojagbe* kills at will and gives orders for executions as he pleases<sup>69</sup>. The king's arbitrary actions cause the people to plead with Ogun to rescue them<sup>70</sup>.

The play commences with *Mojagbe*, the principal character in the play, experiencing a nightmare<sup>71</sup>. In this dream, four women, regarded as 'Yeye', a generic term for telluric (Earth) mothers, invoke the spirit of Layewu, a frightening masquerade, to take the life of the king. *Mojagbe* wakes up from his nightmare and questions why anyone would want him dead, only for subsequent events to reveal the reason for his recurrent dreams. While he is struggling to understand their significance, Abese, the king's messenger, rushes in to inform the king about the white calabash that had been placed on his throne<sup>72</sup>. This calabash signifies that the villagers reject *Mojagbe*'s tyrannical rule; but, instead of taking heed, he smashes the calabash in the presence of his chiefs whom he calls 'Old fools' (Yerima, 2008:27)<sup>73</sup>. *Mojagbe*'s predicament results in social disorder that affects the village's political structure and harmony. The said

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<sup>68</sup> Yerima did not mention the name of the town where the play is set. This might be an intentional means to underscore the universality of dictatorship which permeates most African countries. He subsequently used names of other towns that are in Yorubaland, such as Oyo Empire, Igbo Odo, to trace the migration of the people from the Old-Oyo Empire.

<sup>69</sup> Yerima often refers to Oba *Mojagbe* simply as *Mojagbe*.

<sup>70</sup> The Yoruba people believe that Ogun is quick to assist his followers, and is always ready to cleanse the community of any evil (Omatseye, 2012:66).

<sup>71</sup> Lancee defines nightmares as 'intensely negative dreams that may lead to awakening – resulting in a fast orientation and clear recall afterwards' (Lancee, 2010:2; Blagroove, 2004:129). *Mojagbe* finds himself in this stage; he awakes and recalls all that happened in the dream. During the nightmare, he unconsciously reacts to every move made by Layewu (Yerima, 2011:11).

<sup>72</sup> The significance of this will be explained later in the chapter.

<sup>73</sup> Salami writes that, 'the traditional Yoruba society could be said to be monarchical, yet the monarch does not enjoy a sole authority of the society, and while the King occupied the highest seat of the society, there existed an elaborate organization of chiefs. Hence the affairs of society were transacted by the King in full consultation with the chiefs and other palace officials which can conveniently be classified as the council of society' (Salami 2006:70). The council of chiefs serves as adviser to the king and acts as checks and balances on his power. This council is further divided into categories that highlight their roles in the community. As elaborated further by Salami, for instance there are civil chiefs, the military chiefs, the ward chiefs and heads of extended families. Also, the conversation of the chiefs in *Mojagbe* allows the reader to determine their function in the play. For example, Balogun is a military chief, while Osi and Otun are civil ones.

disorder includes the threat of war from the people of Igbo Odo and Oyo Empire. This specific instance is relevant when discussing Ogun as the Yoruba god of social administration and reformation. It also reminds us of the concept of Ogun as a god of order, discussed in chapter three.

To overcome his dilemma, Mojagbe seeks solace in his intended association with Ogun. He constantly refers to the latter as his messiah (Yerima, 2008:13, 42). Ironically, Mojagbe's actions anger Ogun so that the god sends a series of warnings to him, hoping he would change his ways. Mojagbe summons Abese to invite Isepe, his personal diviner, and the council of chiefs to establish the cause of the white calabash's appearance (Yerima, 2008:14). But Esan, the son of Mojagbe's predecessor, plans to kill and overthrow him before the chiefs and the village priest could arrive. However, Esan's plan was rendered futile when Isepe, who arrives ahead of the council of chiefs, discovered his plot (Yerima, 2008:15). Mojagbe, therefore, orders Esan, a member of the royal lineage, to be executed in the village market square (Yerima, 2008:17). Esan is Mojagbe's nephew and it is against Yoruba tradition to kill someone of royal blood. This sacrilegious act is condemned by the protesting village women who dance naked outside the palace, singing songs that symbolise a rejection of Mojagbe's dictatorial rule (Yerima, 2008:30)<sup>74</sup>. Ogun's principle of liberation becomes significant in Esan's character which will be discussed below.

The chiefs arrive to discuss the reason behind the upheaval in the village as Isepe leaves to continue his plans to strengthen the king (Yerima, 2008:25). During the meeting, Mojagbe expresses his distrust in the chiefs and accuses them of sending a white calabash and Layewu to the palace (Yerima, 2008:26). The chiefs in their answer deny the allegations and blame the king's predicament on his deliberate neglect of the yearly Ogun festival (Yerima, 2008:27). Mojagbe intentionally avoids commenting on his absence from the festival as he emphasises how the chiefs plan to replace him with Aremo Adewale Jagunmolu (Yerima, 2008:29). During Mojagbe and the chiefs' discussion, Abese interrupts with the news of the protesting naked women singing scornful songs (Yerima, 2008:30). Mojagbe continues to accuse his chiefs of collaborating with the women to plan his replacement and requests Abese to bring in the leader

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<sup>74</sup> Afe Adedayo also opines that, 'the nakedness of the town's women signified the urgent removal of a tyrant king' (Afe 2009:114). Nakedness had been a tool to suggest a total rejection of a leader, either monarchical or political. This technique has been employed in Yoruba history, both past and recent. For example, in Ekiti state during the regime of Otunba Adeniyi Adebayo in 2003, aged women of about 60 years and above took to the streets of Ado Ekiti to protest 'the electoral malfeasances that characterised the April 2003 Governorship elections' (Oyeniyi, 2015:151). The protest was aimed at forcing the incumbent governor to yield to the request of the state by allowing a free and fair election and inaugurating the people's choice.

of the protesting women (Yerima, 2008:31). Yeye, the four telluric women, enter the palace to emphasise how Mojagbe's refusal to budge from his wayward course has led to him being rejected by the gods and the people (Yerima, 2008:34). Mojagbe decides to become angry and orders Abese to release six strong virile slaves to defile the women. The women hurry out of the palace but not before proclaiming that Mojagbe will die a shameful death (Yerima, 2008:38).

Shortly after the women left the palace, Mojagbe and his chiefs receive the news that the Igbo Odo people had murdered some members of Mojagbe's village. Upon hearing this news, Mojagbe declares war against Igbo Odo (Yerima, 2008:41). As Mojagbe prepares for the war in his inner chamber, Isepe enters to warn him not to go to battle because death awaits him in Igbo Odo (Yerima, 2008:43). Isepe also cautions Mojagbe to choose only one item from the war booty, and not to allow any visitor in the palace. The royal diviner teaches Mojagbe the names of death to 'escape death in case it confronts him' (Yerima, 2008:46). Isepe gives him two names of death but when Mojagbe requests the third one, Isepe says he will be there to tell Mojagbe the third name when the right time comes. Moreover, Isepe declares he will fight alongside Mojagbe whenever death reveals itself (Yerima, 2008: 46). Mojagbe kills Isepe because he thinks he now knows all that he needs to know to overcome death and therefore has no need of the diviner (Yerima, 2008:46). Before he dies, Isepe informs Mojagbe that killing him is a mistake because when death comes, Mojagbe will be unable to face it alone. Isepe reinforces the point that much still needs to be done to strengthen Mojagbe (Yerima, 2008:47).

Hence, after the warriors return with plenty of war booty, in obedience to Isepe, Mojagbe takes only one item (Yerima, 2008:51). In contrast to the warning by Isepe that Mojagbe should not allow any visitor into the palace for an interval of three months (Yerima, 2008:45), Mojagbe picks Motunrayo, the daughter of Igbo Odo's herbalist, as this item (Yerima, 2008:51). The king intends to replace Isepe with Motunrayo due to her knowledge as a daughter of the herbalist (Yerima, 2008:52). Unknown to Mojagbe, Motunrayo embodies the death that was prophesied by Isepe (Yerima, 2008:45). Isepe predicted that 'death likes to touch one's forehead lightly before he takes a man' (Yerima, 2008:45). This prediction manifested its truth during Motunrayo's encounter with Mojagbe before she kills him (Yerima, 2008:69). She requests Mojagbe to remove his crown and offers to gently touch his forehead (Yerima, 2008:69). During their encounter, Motunrayo requests Mojagbe to list three names of death, Mojagbe succeeds in giving two, but as intimated, has no knowledge of the third name.

Motunrayo gently whispers Mojagbe's name as the third name of death (Yerima, 2008:70). In the end, he dies at the hands of the slave girl<sup>75</sup> (Yerima, 2008:70).

### 4.3 Existing scholarship on *Mojagbe*

Yerima's plays have become a basis for scholarly efforts in the recent Nigerian literary-critical scene<sup>76</sup>. This might be due to his numerous dramatic themes that include the leadership crisis, military misadventure, national unity, political and ethnic rivalry, and state oppression of the people that plague the nation's sociocultural arena and politics. Other issues explored in Yerima's plays such as *The Lottery Ticket* (2002), *Kaffir Last Game* (2001), *The Sisters* (2001) and *Little Drops* (2009) include corruption and poverty, inadequate health care, environmental problems, and other socioeconomic issues encountered by Nigerian society. These themes will be discussed below. Despite discussion by numerous scholars on such themes as highlighted above, none examines the way *Mojagbe* experiments with Ogun as an appropriate measure for addressing poor leadership in the Nigerian political sphere.

*Mojagbe* is a play with a political emphasis which discusses the subject of autocracy in a typical African setting. Researchers such as Adeoye (2013), Adeniji (2014), Ehineni (2016) and Osanyemi (2017) have investigated how Yerima's *Mojagbe* offers a social commentary on the socioeconomic issues encountered by Nigerian society mentioned above. Adeoye (2013:15) discusses *Mojagbe* as a socio-political realistic play because it represents Nigeria's present political situation where leaders embezzle funds and pass laws which are in their favour and that of their family members. As Adeoye expresses this, 'the play highlights the decadence that had permeated the nation's social and political space over the previous two decades (1990-2010): a period when greed, corruption, unemployment, poverty, political and sectarian violence were at their highest' (Adeoye, 2013:147). Adeoye also emphasises how women are often at the receiving end of societal decadence. In his discussion on feminism as a theme in *Mojagbe*, he highlights women as mere properties acquired by Mojagbe as an 'instrument of sex' (Adeoye, 2013:179). The telluric mothers, the village women, Olori Adeola, and Motunrayo are women who have suffered from Mojagbe's belief that women are mere

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<sup>75</sup> Mojagbe often refers to Motunrayo as 'the slave girl from Igbo Odo'.

<sup>76</sup> Some of these plays include: *Three Plays in Transition* (1980), *The Silent Gods* (1996), *The Bishop and The Soul with Thank You Lord* (1996), *The Trials Of Ovoramwen Nogbaisi* (1998), *Kaffir Last Game* (2001), *Attahiru* (1999), *The Lottery Ticket* (2002), *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees* (2001), *Yemoja* (2002), *Otaelo* (2003), *Limam and Ade Ire* (2004), *The Angels and Other Plays* (2004), *Hard Ground* (2006), *Ameh Oboni The Great* (2006), *Idemili* (2006), *Aetu* (2007), *The Wives* (2007), *Tuti* (2008), *Akuabata* (2008), *Mojagbe* (2008), *The Little Drops* (2009) and *Orisa Ibeji* (2014).



possessions to be used for sexual pleasure. For example, Mojagbe made use of Olori Adeola's womb to gain eternal life and killed his first wife and mother for the sake of acquiring spiritual powers. While analysing the fate of women in *Mojagbe*, Adeoye did not dwell much on the male characters. He largely emphasises Mojagbe's character, as a social commentary on how leaders pursue immortality and permanence in power. He briefly mentioned other characters when providing a synopsis of the play. However, in his exploration of Mojagbe's character, Adeoye did not mention the influence of Ogun's representatives such as Balogun and Esan in the play. Adeoye also explored the theme of death as the only event political leaders in Nigeria fear (Adeoye 2013:18) but did not refer to Ogun in his exploration of death or use Motunrayo as a case study in his discussion.

Similarly, Osanyemi (2017) discusses Yerima's contribution to the discussion on the present social, political and economic reality of the Nigerian state in his discussion on 'Aesthetics of Daydreaming in Reconstructing Colonial History' in Nigeria. Osanyemi explores how leaders' psychological mind-sets have an impact on their governance (Osanyemi, 2017:26). Osanyemi mentions how Yerima causes Layewu to appear to Mojagbe in a trance and to reveal to him that he had been rejected by the gods of the land, the dead and the living. Layewu's appearance becomes the relevant aspect of Osanyemi's exploration. Osanyemi fails to mention the relationship between Layewu and Ogun but links the masquerade to the presence of the Yoruba ancestors whom he criticises from a modernist perspective as 'demon-like characters that take delight in intrigues and wickedness' (Osanyemi, 2017:26). In fact, Osanyemi's description might become misleading because Layewu is Ogun's messenger. Therefore, from a decolonial perspective, Layewu would not have delivered the message of death or rejection to Mojagbe if the king had not offended Ogun. According to Mignolo, 'decoloniality here means decolonization of knowledge and being by epistemically and affectively de-linking from the imperial/colonial organization of society' (Mignolo, 2009:132). Osanyemi, for instance, might have been influenced by modernity to regard all that is associated with Ogun as evil. Osanyemi does not identify what led to Ogun sending Layewu to deliver his message.

Language features of *Mojagbe* have also been explored by scholars such as Adeniji (2014) and Ehineni (2016), who both discussed the interpretations of the proverbs employed in the play. Ehineni and Adeniji each explore the proverbs uttered as performing pragmatic roles such as supporting, warning/cautioning, questioning/querying, reassuring, defending, and accusing, through contextual features of relevance, reference, metaphor, inference, shared situational

knowledge, shared cultural knowledge, and voicing<sup>77</sup>. Adeniji, for example, examines some of the proverbs used in the play and how they are being understood in daily conversation among Yoruba people. Both scholars provide a thematic link between the play and culture through an application of Mey's theory of pragmatic acts (Adeniji 2014:11; Ehineni, 2016:61). Ehineni and Adeniji cite certain examples of proverbs from *Mojagbe*, describing how they are understood in daily conversation and explicating their significance for understanding certain socio-cultural issues in Nigeria. They both regard Mojagbe as a character who largely conveys his messages to his chiefs using proverbs. While most of these utterances contain Mojagbe's reference to Ogun and his saving power, Ehineni and Adeniji did not examine why Mojagbe forcefully associates himself with Ogun as he overconfidently thinks Ogun will avenge his case.

In summary, scholarly studies on Yerima's *Mojagbe* have largely focused on plot structure, thematic analysis, stylistic, and pragmatic features of the text. While the pragmatic studies have examined context-determined meanings of proverbs and politeness features in the play, thematic analysis of the play has only offered discussion of how a dictator king comes to his ultimate end, and very little or no attention has been paid to how Ogun is being constructed as a reformer in the play. This study, therefore, fills this vacuum, by proposing a decolonial perspective on how Ogun becomes a liberator and reformer who does not determine the fate of Mojagbe but gives him a chance to reform from being a dictator. This chapter will examine how Ogun issues several warnings and expects the king to change his evil ways in the community.

#### **4.4 Constructions of Ogun in *Mojagbe*: A close analysis**

Unlike Ododo's *Hard Choice* and Omoko's *Battles of Pleasure*, Ogun is mentioned several times in *Mojagbe*. Yerima, in the play, also refers to several Yoruba gods who are part of the sixteen ministers of Eledumare discussed in the previous chapter. Examples of these are Esu (9), Sango (11), Orunmila (23), and Obatala (36). Relevant and often emphasised among the gods is Ogun. It might not have been the intention of Yerima to dominantly construct Ogun among other Yoruba gods, but allusions to the god in most conversations and costumes in the text allows a reader to construct him as a reformer in a society like Yorubaland. The text assists one to delink from the notion that Ogun is an obstinate god who will do as he pleases in the

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<sup>77</sup> Hills defines pragmatics as 'the social language skills we use in our daily interactions with others. They include what we say, how we say it, our body language and whether it is appropriate to the given situation' (Hill, 2008:1).

community. Mojagbe performs a series of blood sacrifices in the play with the intention to appease Ogun and gain protection from him. He regards Ogun as a bloodthirsty god who only wants blood in exchange for granting people's wishes. In contrast to Mojagbe's belief, the playwright constructs Ogun to be the antithesis of wickedness and stubbornness in the play. The question that should be answered, therefore, is: if Yoruba kings are second in command to the gods as the people believe, as also evident in the play (Yerima, 2008:21), why would Ogun consent to Mojagbe's death as requested by the people? Ogun sent several warnings through Yeye, Balogun, Esan and the council of chiefs but Mojagbe remains obstinate and instead commits further crimes. The reimagination of Ogun as a reformer in *Mojagbe* will be analysed in the next section.

#### **4.4.1 Ogun as the god of social administration and reformation**

As indicated earlier, Ogun is persistently mentioned in the play since Mojagbe believes that the god is his messiah and is able to save him from both internal and external threats. Owing to this view, Mojagbe decides to be a rebel, not willing to listen to and compromise with any resolution except his own. He refuses to listen to those who had elected him to be a ruler (Yerima, 2008:34). Mojagbe believes in Ogun's strength, which relates to his experience as a warrior before being made the king of his people (Yerima, 2008:36). Mojagbe is presented as a warlord who, as mentioned, was chosen to rule his people. In his personal appraisal, he claims to be a warrior, who is always ready to engage in war:

MOJAGBE: ... fools on the false drunken horse of shame and death. Those who wish to repay my kindness with death. [sic] I shall cut down their souls with Ogun's mighty war sword. One by one. (Yerima, 2008:13)

Mojagbe, in this case, is also a warrior from the royal dynasty, who qualified for his throne as a great warrior and the saviour of his people during wars (Yerima, 2008:36)<sup>78</sup>. He believes that in killing his enemies he is executing the wishes of Ogun. The above extract indicates that Mojagbe still possesses some of his war equipment, and is ready to combat his opponents physically. He expresses his desire to wage war and accompany his soldiers on the battlefield (Yerima, 2008:53). Mojagbe's constant invocation of Ogun to deal with his enemies whenever

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<sup>78</sup> Mojagbe proclaims that the people begged him to become their ruler after the demise of his predecessor, due to his military prowess (Yerima, 2008:36). In some parts of Yorubaland, especially in Ikere Ekiti, an aspect of its history indicates that the first king, Ogoga of Ikere Ekiti, was indeed a warlord. Akintoye argues that it seems possible for the Ogoga to have become ruler of Ikere Ekiti not only because of his wisdom but also because of his military might (Akintoye, 1969:543).

he is guilty of offences that Ogun dislikes, demonstrates that Mojagbe believes in the mistaken identity of Ogun as an arrogant god. Yerima also portrays Mojagbe as the leader of the village army. In one of the play's stage directions, he requires that 'Mojagbe is dressed in battle gear' (Yerima, 2008:42), and constantly relies on the guardianship of Ogun, thus:

MOJAGBE: The people of Igbo Odo killed my people, and in revenge Ogun, I have declared war on them. Let us go and come back... give me back greater glory, as I stand in front of my soldiers at war, and I shall glorify thee with befitting sacrifices upon my return. My father, Ogun be with us. (Yerima, 2008:42)

Mojagbe constantly seeks the backing of Ogun, which bears a relationship to the custom in which the Yoruba people often call on Ogun before setting out for war or on expeditions (see Barnes, 1997:7). The tribute paid to Ogun daily is a method of seeking his protection from accidents and mistakes that may cause an individual to lose his or her life. This is because all the iron implements belong to Ogun, as discussed in previous chapters<sup>79</sup>.

In the above extract, Mojagbe seeks the protection of Ogun from external attacks and vows that he will bring treasures to him from the war. Mojagbe perceives himself as the emissary of Ogun in taking revenge on the people of Igbo Odo, believing that the enemies he kills on the battle field will act as a sacrifice to Ogun<sup>80</sup>. On the one hand, Mojagbe, as the harbinger of his own fall, often has recourse to war, which results in his adopting warlike methods as a means of survival. He regards not going to battle as cowardice and laziness (Yerima, 2008:43), believing that weakness is opposite to what Ogun stands for. It would appear, then, that Mojagbe's exuberance about his belief in Ogun influences his conduct. Connective theory in this regard assist in linking Mojagbe's fate in the end and the influence of Ogun in the process. According to Famule, 'connective theory examines the materials that made up a composition individually and then establishes their points of connections' (Famule, 2005:38). Due to Mojagbe's belief in Ogun and his numerous evil sacrifices in order to attain immortality, and also his refusal to repent, he ironically becomes Ogun's enemy.

On the other hand, as a result of Mojagbe's tyrannical rule and obstinacy, the people resort to approaching Ogun, the god of social administration, to bring an end to his reign. According to the stage directions, four women referred to as Yeye who claim to be the ones who enthrone

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<sup>79</sup> Idamoyinbo (2011:248) and Lynch (2010:99).

<sup>80</sup> Ashley argues that Ogun worshippers in Yorubaland do eat the hearts of their slain enemies as a sign of sacrifice to Ogun after the war (Ashley, 2013:29).

Mojagbe later in the play (Yerima, 2008:34), are the first set of people to approach Ogun to come to the community's aid. In fact, the stage direction introducing Yeye begins a dialogue with how Ogun becomes relevant in Mojagbe's community, as stated below:

*Dark stage. Sound of gong, slow movement. Singing backstage. Four women, dressed in white wrappers and sacred Shaki-woven clothes as headties, come on stage each carrying an oil lamp. Slow sound of ritual music at the background, they each hold staffs with attached bells which they bang on the floor in rhythm with the song. They stop at the shrine.*  
(Yerima, 2008:9)

However, from the perspective of connective theory, this opening sequence's reference to words such as bells, gong and lamp indicates that it is Ogun whom the women approach to deal with the king<sup>81</sup>. As discussed in the first chapter, Ogun's association with implements related to iron acclaims him as the god of metallurgy. Both the gong and the bell signify the presence of Ogun in their costume and the manner of their entrance to the shrine. Famule's connective theory can be used to answer the question: why did Yeye in the above passage put on 'white wrappers' and carry 'oil lamps'? It is thus implied that their invocation of Layewu is not intended to cause disorder in the community, since 'white' connotes purity while 'lamp' signifies illumination. They are thus appealing to the god connected to their invocation to shed light on the darkness in the community.

Yeye's dress and setting suggest those of an individual belonging to a secret cult, who performs nocturnal activities. They put on 'Shaki-woven clothes as headties' (9) which usually adorn Ifa priests, the Ogboni cult, witches (Aje), and wizards (Oso) in Yorubaland during their meetings (see Adeniji, 2014:14). Likewise, Yeye refer to themselves as the 'owners of the night and being birds' (Yerima, 2008:9), which literally means they are witches. The word 'witches' might be misleading to a modernist thinker as denoting those who destroy or cause people's downfall in the community. In contrast to this notion, it is of importance to clarify the distinction between those who are good and those who are not, based on the Yoruba people's classification of witches. These people will classify Yeye based on their white costume and nocturnal activity as white witches (see Adeoye, 2013:151). While black witches are known for their destructive tendencies, the white ones are known for encouraging the goodwill of the

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<sup>81</sup> The traditional lamp in Yorubaland is called 'atupa', which is mostly made from brass (see Oyeweso, 2013:5). Atupa is a simple metal construction in which palm oil soaked cotton wick is placed and ignited to provide illumination. In some Yoruba communities, the lamp is made of sixteen sockets which symbolise the sixteen major gods in the Yoruba pantheon.

community which they belong. Yeye's costume here depicts women who are concerned with the progress of the community, rather than intentionally seeking turmoil in Mojagbe's village or the death of the king. They are the ones who initiated the appeal to Ogun to end the violence in the land and restore order, which can only be accomplished if Mojagbe dies. Yeye's activities in the shrine are portrayed in the excerpt below:

YEYE: Tonight is not our night.  
It belongs to the owners of the night.  
A thousand big birds who perches on the sacred tree trunk at the centre of the market square  
...  
Arise!  
Through the groves of the jaded crypt ... Arise!  
The people who own us ... those who enthroned us  
fathers [sic] of the land ... and gave our tongues power to pronounce, sent us, hence we  
summon you.  
Hurry now in the darkness of the wind ...  
To the palace of our King Mojagbe, make swift the heavy feet of Layewu ... move.  
Let Iku take the soul of the king ... let death give our people the respite that they need.  
Mojagbe ... now let us see how well your boasts mount on you on a horse of shame!  
Gallop this instant to the fall which awaits you!  
Galo ... galo ... you mount  
Guli ... guli ... you shall fall.  
Now, where is my father, Layewu?  
One with the shreds of cloth of a basket cowries ...  
The masquerade ... our father who walks in two folds.  
Layewu, it is you that I call!  
Layewu o!  
Layewu o!  
King of the masquerade of life ... father to your people  
But messenger of death to the king.  
Tonight reveal yourself to the sacrifice of the land.  
Reveal yourself, great one.  
Reveal! (Yerima, 2008:9)

The extract is quoted in full to show what fully transpires in the shrine, owing to its depiction of the women's identity; their costume, the manner in which they invoke the gods and the association of their invocation with Ogun, the deity of social administration and reformation.

Using specific insights from connective theory regarding how one could determine the connection of some masquerades with the Yoruba pantheon, Famule highlights Ogun's connection with Layewu as the hunter's masquerade in Yorubaland. He asserts that 'Egungun Layewu symbolizes the spirits of all the departed hunters' (Famule, 2005:30), a point that was mentioned in chapter two. The above extract engages with the Yoruba traditional custom of invoking Layewu from the shrine during Ogun festivals. Yerima refers to how the spiritual and the physical realm in Yorubaland communicate. Yoruba people do summon the spirits of gods and ancestors to intervene in certain issues when the circumstances surrounding these are beyond human power. In this instance, Layewu, the masquerade associated with Ogun worship in Yorubaland, is invoked<sup>82</sup>. Yerima's reference to the market square relates to Ogun's shrine location discussed in the previous chapter: the shrine of Ogun is located either in the palace or the market square. This is based on the sophistication of the ritual that will be offered to Ogun. Yeye in *Mojagbe* hold their meeting in the market square, possibly on or at the base of the tree where Ogun is being worshipped.

Ogun comes into the reader's consciousness as the women offer their sacrifice to the deity which oversees administration in *Mojagbe*. With reference to the discussion on the sixteen ministers of Eledumare in the previous chapter and the relevance of Ogun in their discussion and costume, Yeye refer to the gods as those who 'enthroned the fathers of the land' (Yerima, 2008:9). Their remark relates to Lawuyi's opinion that, 'Ogun asserts legitimacy of social differentiation, and he is the representative of the people's interest in administration... he is the god that can ensure the reality of people's expectations from the leaders' (Lawuyi, 1988:136). This is in accordance with the Yoruba people's belief, that Ogun is a reformer who does not pass judgement unless he has found an individual guilty of persistent crimes. Owing to this realisation and acknowledgement of Ogun's influence in administration, Yeye decide to invoke Ogun's spirit to come to their rescue, as evident in the above extract (Yerima, 2008:9). The telluric mothers might have also realised that Ogun cannot come directly to assist them; he has to send a messenger. In Yeye's words, they request Ogun to 'make swift the heavy feet of Layewu' to deliver the rejection message to Mojagbe.

From a modernist perspective, one may be tempted to conclude that the telluric mothers are wicked and intend only to cause a disturbance through the awakening of Layewu. However, a

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<sup>82</sup> Campbell classifies masquerades in Yorubaland into three categories as egungun Ogun (denotes Ogun's masquerades), entertainment masquerades, and trickster masquerades (Campbell, 2015:47). Layewu falls under the Ogun masquerade category.

counter argument is advanced here: that Yeye do not intend to cause a commotion in the community but to show Mojagbe the severity of his actions. Layewu, being a fearful masquerade as Yerima describes him, is intended to warn Mojagbe of the impending danger. In the above extract, sentences such as ‘the people who own us’, ‘those who enthroned us’, ‘fathers of the land’ and ‘fathers who gave our tongues power to pronounce’, as identified earlier, point to the gods in Yorubaland, which relates to the doubling effect discussed in the previous chapter. These expressions by Yeye demonstrate that they realise they have a moral responsibility to do something about Mojagbe’s cruel leadership. It indicates that they are not acting out of egoism but are in fact empowered by the gods to do so on behalf of the community that needs to be rescued from Mojagbe’s tyrannical rule.

Layewu is the hunters’ masquerade in Yorubaland (Campbell, 2015:47). He is often performed by hunters because he represents the spirit of their deceased associates (Aremu, 1991:12). Yeye’s invocation highlights the relationship between Layewu and Ogun, which relates to the discussion on the relationship between Ogun and hunters in Yorubaland<sup>83</sup>. Yerima presents Layewu as a messenger of Ogun, placing emphasis on the phrase ‘sacrifice of the land’ (Yerima, 2008:10). Without a socio-cultural knowledge of the association between Ogun and Layewu, one might not understand why it should be Layewu who will deliver Ogun’s message rather than any other masquerade in Yorubaland. The relationship between Layewu and Ogun is further reinforced in Yeye’s words in the above extract, ‘where is my father, Layewu? One with the shreds of cloth of a basket of cowries ... the masquerade ... our father who walks in two folds’ (10). While the ‘walking in two folds’ relates to an earlier discussion on spatial and spiritual doubling effects, the cowries are usually attached to signify Ogun, as evident in his costumes and worship, mentioned when the *oriki* of Ogun were discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis.

Indicated already, Layewu’s image is not often paraded in most Yoruba towns during the Ogun festival except on special occasions, which explains Yeye’s request<sup>84</sup>. The latter reinforces the urgency of the matter. Layewu is given the task of delivering the message of impending wrath

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<sup>83</sup> In his discussion on Soyinka’s *The Road*, Fai argues that during the Ogun festival there is a person who parades the Ogun symbol in masquerade attire. The person dances in a moment of possession by the god Ogun when he had literally become the god-apparent (Fai, 2010:46). The moment of possession is what Soyinka refers to as *Agemo*, defined by Fai as, ‘a mere phase which includes the passage of transition from human to divine essence as in a performance during the festival of Ogun’ (Fai, 2010:46). The connection between the world of the living and the divine also signifies ‘walking in two folds’ (Yerima, 2008:9), and refers to Ododo’s notion of doubling.

<sup>84</sup> However, Barnes (1997:133) records that Layewu is performed on the fourth day during the Ogun festival, which is often performed for seven days in most Yoruba towns.



to Mojagbe (Yerima, 2008:9). In this regard it is helpful to recall Poynor's position on Layewu's role in Yorubaland during Ogun festivals. Poynor avers Layewu's primary function 'to [be] one of wiping away death, pestilence, convulsion, and many mishaps in the community' (Poynor, 1978:65-76). Although Poynor mentions some of Layewu's characteristics he fails to record the reason why the Ogun messenger would act in order to cause mishaps in the community. Modernists might deem Layewu wicked, based on his function, and link it to an intentional means of causing a commotion in the community. To the scholars who might have been influenced by modernity, worshipping and invoking African gods are considered barbaric actions and are termed 'underdeveloped', thus affecting the knowledge the people possess regarding their gods (see Mignolo 2009:133). To delink from such a modernist view, Layewu's appearance is not intended to cause chaos but is a means of presenting Ogun's anger towards Mojagbe's stubbornness and wickedness. The nature of the message is what causes Yeye to invoke Layewu. Bearing in mind the connection between Layewu and Ogun, it is Mojagbe's wickedness that brings Layewu into existence.

Mojagbe recognises the emphasis in Layewu's warning and trembles 'in fear and despair' over what the outcome might be (Yerima, 2008:11). The king gains consciousness after the nightmare and recognises the significance of Layewu's appearance coupled with the villagers' demand for a change in the administration (Yerima, 2008:11). Famule's connective theory could assist a reader to link Layewu's appearance to Ogun being a reformer, from Mojagbe's reaction after the nightmare. A number of significant points can be construed from Mojagbe's reference to the words 'head and calabash' as evident in the extract below:

MOJAGBE: (*Panting. Still on the floor*). Was this a dream? What does Layewu want with me? The King's head? Can they dare? (*Slowly, he goes to the shrines in the four corners of the room.*) One by one, to you my fathers, I come for help. Mothers who guard and keep watch on my soul, protect me. A king is not raw meat for the hunter's wife to throw at the dogs. They shall search, and not find me. They shall stare, and not see me. For I am the blessed black strand of hair in the head of the spirit god ... Shango ... Lost ... Lost in the forest of grey ones. *Ewo o*. I am lost to them who search for my downfall. My mothers Osoromogamoga, in your watch, I hide myself blending with the mist of the morning dew, and with tears of the spirit, I wash myself clean of the death call of Layewu. Clean! (*Knock on the door.*) Who? (*Goes to open the door. ABESE runs in panting.*) (Yerima, 2008:11-13)

Although Yerima did not symbolically refer to Layewu as Ogun, this is implied because Mojagbe's reference to the word head literally links Layewu's message to Ogun. Mojagbe asks, 'what does Layewu want? The king's head?' (11) This query significantly points to the ultimate end of Mojagbe which will lead to a change in administration. Noteworthy is the manner in which scholars who might have been influenced by modernity would react to the connection between the word 'head' and Ogun's request for blood which flows from slaughtering an animal by means of decapitating it or beheading a human being. Such commentators may hasten to portray the god as a bloodthirsty deity without considering the persistent offences Mojagbe had committed before all the gods of the land reject him. Mojagbe's reference to the request for his head relates to how a dog is sacrificed and its head hung in the Ogun shrine during the Ogun festival, which symbolises an end to calamities in the community<sup>85</sup>. As such, Mojagbe does not realise that his own reference to the king's head is ironically a strong warning that might lead to his death. Mojagbe's emphasis on the word 'head' causes the audience to become conscious that Ogun is involved in punishing him. He also attributes the request for his head to the 'death call of Layewu' (Yerima, 2008:11). Ogun's intention is to rid the village of bad administration. Layewu's message is intended to signify the severity of the crimes Mojagbe committed; as noted, this is also accompanied by a white calabash that appears on the king's throne. The following lines from the play are informative regarding the implications of the white 'calabash and head':

ABESE: We heard it, Kabiyesi ... We heard the drum of death, and also a white calabash is seated on your throne.

MOJAGBE: Then this is not a joke. It has gone further and now, it aims at my very soul. the [sic] tendon of my muscle. Shango, help me.

ABESE: But the calabash my lord.

MOJAGBE: Keep it until I find its sender, and a head to put in it. Haa, my chiefs dare me! They cut as always close to my patience. Is there more bad news for my royal ears? (Yerima, 2008:12)

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<sup>85</sup> Ehikhamenor describes the process of dog sacrifice in Yorubaland thus: 'the neck of the dog would be slit in one fell swoop with a sharp sword, and the severed oesophagus would be directed towards the shrine, with all of the blood drained onto all of the irons, as if they were taking a cool shower. The head of the dog and its perplexed eyes would be left on the shrine overnight. By morning it would have disappeared, Ogun had come overnight to claim its sacrifice' (Ehikhamenor, 2006:59).

It is also pertinent to note at this stage that all the gods in the Yoruba pantheon reject Mojagbe, as evident in his reference to Shango, but the emphasis on the calabash and its supposed content alludes to how Ogun intends to rid the community of bad leadership.

The second way to understand Ogun as a god of social administration and a reformer is through the appearance of the white calabash and its supposed content. The significance of the ‘white calabash’ in the excerpt is intended to lead to cleansing the community from the king’s corrupt nature. The element that is meant to be placed in the calabash is Mojagbe’s head, as mentioned earlier, an action which is to be performed by the Ogun priest. In Yorubaland, this priest is responsible for carrying out the assignment of executing offenders; the executioners are referred to as ‘abenilori’ in the Yoruba language, which means the ‘beheader’ (Saliu, 2016:44). This is because Ogun and the priest are often embodied in one person, and the people believe that once the person is beheaded, this shows that the evil is eliminated from the community. With regard to the calabash itself, this was a practice in the Old Oyo Empire to convey the message to a tyrannical king that his reign has come to an end. The calabash signifies that the leader should commit suicide (see Adegbam, 2013:57). In the Old Oyo Empire, the calabash is often delivered by some elders, referred to as Ogboni in Yorubaland, who act as a check on the power of the paramount rulers. In *Mojagbe*, as has been pointed out, the calabash appears on Mojagbe’s throne to accompany Layewu’s message. It is a form of non-verbal communication that often contains an ostrich egg which symbolises the notoriety of the king<sup>86</sup>. In this case, the rejected king is expected to kill himself or, at least, go into exile.

The significance of the message in the calabash is also being emphasised by Yeye when they accompany the protesting naked women into the palace (Yerima, 2008:33). The women add emphasis by means of their costumes that symbolise their interconnection with Ogun. Yerima records that the women are dressed in: ‘red aso-oke materials, they also tie the same aso-oke materials round their neckline to their ankle’ (Yerima, 2008:33). The Yeye’s choice of cloth colour signifies the influence of Ogun in their message. While commenting on the ritual and spiritual relevance of red aso-oke, Bridget Omatseye expresses the opinion that, ‘in the Yoruba ritual culture, the red cloth is significant especially in the worship of Ogun due to symbolic representation of his fierceness, violence, anger, fire and blood that are associated with it’

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<sup>86</sup> The Yoruba people refer to the act of sending a non-verbal message as aroko. Abdullahi-Idiagbon defines aroko as ‘the process of sending an item or a combinable number of items to a person from which the decoder is expected to infer a piece of information’ (Abdullahi-Idiagbon, 2010:125). The receiver on the other hand might employ the services of an expert if he cannot interpret the communication or is not sure of his ability to do so.

(Omatseye, 2012:66). Ogun's association with the colour red is often misinterpreted; the reason for this has been analysed in previous chapters. Rather than signifying 'red' to mean aggression and bloodshed in relation to Ogun, the red material worn by the women represents a cleansing of the community whereby the women seek to rid the village of a man who has shed too much blood.

Mojagbe finds himself in the category of an individual who misinterprets Ogun and his association with the colour red and blood. He boasts of sacrificing the protesting women. Mojagbe's bellicose nature causes him to mention 'blood, warfare, Ogun, cutlass, thunder, death' and other words that could be associated with Ogun. Ogun as the god of administration will not allow a leader who sheds innocent blood as he pleases to experience peace in the community. While instructing Abese to enquire about the protesting naked women, Mojagbe metaphorically mentions that he will kill them if he is obliged to come out to attend to them. In his words, 'Abese, ask them from which village they have come... a damned village where the women appear half-naked... half mad... and half-witted that they do not recognise even the obvious smell of death... and the impending foam of their own blood' (Yerima, 2008:32). The smell of death and blood relates to Ogun's demands, which he makes of someone who has violated the social or spiritual order<sup>87</sup>. To Mojagbe, the naked women have performed an abominable deed; hence he will be left with no other choice than to kill them. Mojagbe realises the association of red and danger as he immediately rejects the women's view and claims that 'Ogun shall deny them victory' (Yerima, 2008:36). As indicated, he commands the palace guards to release 'six strong and virile slaves' (37) to defile the women. Mojagbe's reaction makes it plain that he is unrepentant and also not willing to transform himself from his dictatorial ways. The women run out of the palace and seek refuge under the 'big sacred tree of Ogun' (38), where they appeal to Ogun with their 'dance and songs' (39) to bring Mojagbe's reign to a permanent end through death. Taking refuge under the Ogun tree indicates Ogun's influence as the god directing the women's actions. Therefore, unknown to Mojagbe, he is indirectly attracting the wrath of Ogun.

It seems a reasonable supposition, then, that Ogun desires Mojagbe to become a good king and does not wish to kill him; the former issues several warning signs to cause him to change from his evil ways - or die because of his obstinacy. Ogun, who is able to sustain leadership and authority (see Lawuyi, 1988:136), decides to give Mojagbe a chance, hoping the latter would

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<sup>87</sup> See Afe (2013:98).

change his ways. Mojagbe realises the effect of Layewu's appearance; he immediately requests Abese to hurry to Balogun to summon the chiefs to the palace. Ogun also sends his warriors to deliver warnings to Mojagbe: Balogun and Esan, who display the Ogun characteristics of fearlessness and liberation, respectively, in their actions. These characters are important to the understanding of Ogun as a liberator and a fearless warrior; consequently the next section will examine how these two warriors perform as Ogun principles in the play.

#### **4.4.2 Esan as an emblem of the Ogun principle of liberation**

To recapitulate, Mojagbe acts as an opponent of his people throughout the play, which causes him to attract the wrath of the god of liberation. The king's deeds affect the progress of the community, which impels its people to reject his administration and seek the help of Ogun, the liberator. Ogun is a great warrior who fights for his people and liberates them from external attacks. And if Ogun can act fast to liberate his people from external tyranny, it is clear that he will act even faster to liberate them from any internal oppression. Aiyejina highlights this feature of Ogun when he argues that the god is 'a great warrior who leads his men in battle, doing what he did best—slaughtering the enemies of his people' (Aiyejina, 2010:6). Ogun delights in his followers enjoying freedom from both internal and external attacks. He is not only a warrior but also the Yoruba warrior deity whom the warriors invoke to come to their rescue during preparations for any battle. Since Ogun is a warrior god, warriors in Yorubaland are typically perceived as representatives of Ogun. Yerima adopts this same cultural perspective in his play in presenting them as emissaries of Ogun to remind Mojagbe of the necessity to perform his role in the community as the leader of the people - not their antagonist. One such person is Esan. He is the son of Mojagbe's predecessor and is also a warrior in the village, as evident in the following stage direction:

*Dark stage. Sound of a bird flapping and perching cues in the lights. When lights come on to reveal the palace room, ESAN, a young warrior dressed and armed to the teeth for war, stands before the big throne chair which is built so that it can take a man hiding in it.*  
(Yerima, 2008:14)

The above stage direction showcases Esan as a warrior who is ready to liberate his people from the tyrant king. Since he is a young warrior, Esan's character displays a similarity to that of Oki in the previous chapter, who stands for a decolonised future which delinks from a corrupted colonial past where leaders wield power absolutely, to the detriment of their followers. The reference to war here is not an utterance that is designed to combat chaos but one that points to

readiness to combat evil in the society. Esan's role in serving as an essence of Ogun is further reinforced in his words before his planned confrontation with Mojagbe. Esan confirms his readiness to combat the ills in Mojagbe's village, which relates to Ogun's willingness to liberate his followers, as discussed previously. Esan desires to carry out the assignment of overthrowing Mojagbe<sup>88</sup>. He enters the palace with the intention of displacing Mojagbe, which he thinks might bring an end to the crisis in the town. Yerima explores the bravery of Esan so as to relate it to that of Ogun in these lines:

ESAN: I am here like they said, carried by the wind. My fathers, I greet you. My mother's *ibaa*. A child does not whimper in the dark unsure of the tender hands of its mother ready to pick it up. I am ready. If to die is to have my village in peace, let it be, *Iku*. Death. Come and be my companion. Let us strike the heart of the old lion who enslaves my people. Be with me, my fathers, as we strike to remove the dictator, and enthrone the rightful king. Ha, I hear voices. It is him. The usurper of my father's throne. He comes, the aged fox, slowly to his death. My father, be with me. (*He pulls out his dagger and climbs into the back of the chair, and remains. Enters MOJAGBE. He makes to go sit on the throne, but changes his mind and sits on the raised stool for the chiefs instead.*) (Yerima, 2008:14).

Esan's willingness to counter the evil in the village relates to that of Ogun to fight for the good, and ultimate redemption, of his followers<sup>89</sup>. Esan mentions that he is ready to die for his people to experience peace. This reveals that his embodiment of Ogun is on a positive level that is aimed at attaining the freedom of his people from the political corruption of their leader. Esan also refers to Mojagbe as a lion, fox and dictator (Yerima, 2008:14). Foxes and lions are known for their belligerent nature. Sandra Barnes similarly regards Ogun as 'the lion of the thick forest' (Barnes, 1997:15). In association with Ogun's characteristics as a lion, certain modernist scholars such as Puleo (1996), Omatseye (2010), and Vaz (2006) regard him as an aggressive, tough and fierce god, who possesses the qualities of this animal. As king, Mojagbe represents Ogun in his lion-like prowess. However, being referred to as an old lion suggests that he has lost Ogun's support: he is no longer useful. Esan was likewise unable to perceive any positive aspect of Mojagbe, who antagonises his own people as Ogun would not do in the community. This is intended to illustrate that Mojagbe is not representing Ogun in a positive manner;

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<sup>88</sup> Esan's role also reminds one of April 22, 1990, when Major Gideon Orkar succeeded in entering the Dodan Barracks Palace of the Nigerian military dictator, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida (see Adeoye, 2013:183). Major Orkar's failed coup relates to Esan's character in *Mojagbe*.

<sup>89</sup> While discussing a short play titled *Ogun's Sacrifice* Barton highlights the heroic nature of Ogun and his willingness to sacrifice his time for the good and ultimate redemption of his followers (Barton, 2011:38).

instead, he causes one to infer that he enjoys the support of the god of liberation by his constant reference to him.

The method which Esan uses, by wanting to kill Mojagbe, will not be supported by Ogun because the god detests violence. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ogun dislikes using his implements to cause it. Ogun would not support a mission if it is intended to cause chaos or turmoil in the community; because of this, Esan's bid to kill Mojagbe with his dagger fails. Mojagbe discovers Esan in his hiding place with the help of his personal diviner Isepe and commands Esan to be killed right there in the palace (Yerima, 2008:16)<sup>90</sup>. Isepe advises otherwise and encourages Mojagbe to order Esan's execution in the market square<sup>91</sup>. Coloniality of power becomes relevant here since Mojagbe uses his authority as a superior power to inflict death on his subject (Yerima, 2008:17). According to Mojagbe, Esan's execution will serve 'as a warning to all those who dare look at the king straight in the eyes' (18). He intends to force his followers to fear him by ordering Esan's execution to be held in public. Mojagbe's hope is that by killing Esan he will appease Ogun and divert Ogun's judgement. He says, 'kill him! Let him die. With his life, I replace mine' (Yerima, 2008:17). Mojagbe knows that he has offended Ogun and attempts to placate Ogun with Esan's blood. Abese rushes in to warn the king of Mojagbe's intention to sacrifice his subject and recalls the identity of Esan as the son of the late king. According to Abese, 'this is Aremo Esan ... he is of royal blood. Son of Aromire, the late king. We cannot kill a son of the palace. The people will revolt' (18). Abese insists that killing Esan there will only make the villagers angrier. He thus refers to a classical Yoruba folklore saying: that 'a dog does not eat a dog' (Yerima, 2008:19). This reference is indicative of Mojagbe and Esan being of royal blood. According to Abese, 'the death of a prince this way will bring evil to the land' (Yerima, 2008:18). Abese warns that Esan's royal background might fuel the already flaring social crisis in the village. He adds in his warning to the king that he should not 'be in a hurry to show his fangs' (Yerima,

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<sup>90</sup> Being a direct commentary on Nigerian history at large, *Mojagbe* also draws attention to the violence that the Nigerian military regimes exercised towards opposition groups. As Adeoye observes, activists who were not fortunate enough to escape the threats of the current head of state after a failed coup d'état were put in jail or murdered (Adeoye, 2013:148). Such is the case of Oba Mojagbe who kills at will and sentences anyone who is opposed to his rule to jail, as he pleases.

<sup>91</sup> The Ogun shrine in the market square is meant for festival celebrations. As discussed in the previous chapter, depending on the complexity of the sacrifice, Ogun's shrine is located in the forest and in certain strategic points in the town. If the ritual demands human sacrifice, it would be performed in the forest, while dog sacrifices are usually carried out in the Ogun shrine located in proximity to the physical abode of the people.

2008:19). Using a metaphor, Abese makes this appeal to Mojagbe not to become angry and kill one of royal blood.

Indeed, Ogun is clearly not in support of Mojagbe's intention of sacrificing Esan: Ogun embodies Abese to warn Mojagbe and remind him of his position as the king. Esan might have succeeded if he had not mentioned killing Mojagbe. If Esan had come to warn Mojagbe and carefully reminded him of Ogun's position regarding his actions in the community and not to kill him, the god of liberation would have supported his actions. Esan's intention to liberate his people explains the reason for examining him as an Ogun principle in the play. Esan's willingness and courage to confront Mojagbe demonstrate that he is fearless in representing the interest of his people, which is a symbol of Ogun's principle of courage. He is only unfortunate in having adopted a confrontational strategy, with the intention of killing Mojagbe himself. Ogun as a liberator would have wanted Esan to either engage in dialogue or employ a peaceful means of getting rid of Mojagbe rather than determining to kill him. Ogun does not encourage violence, as argued in chapter two with respect to *Hard Choice*, but is a god of peace.

Balogun is another character who displays Ogun characteristics; unlike Esan, he avoids a physical confrontation with Mojagbe and adopts the method of dialogue instead. The next section will analyse Balogun's role as an essence of Ogun's principle of fearlessness.

#### **4.4.3 Balogun as an essence of Ogun's principles of fearlessness**

Balogun is the second in command to Mojagbe and the leader of the community's chiefs. He is Mojagbe's village's chief warrior and generalissimo of the army, which makes him a representative of Ogun in the community. He summons his council members to the palace as requested by Mojagbe. Mojagbe instructs Abese to send for the council of chiefs after Layewu's message and the sudden appearance of the calabash in the palace (Yerima, 2008:12). Balogun and other council members arrive at the palace but to their dismay, Mojagbe refuses to reform himself despite the encounter with Layewu and the appearance of the white calabash on his throne. Mojagbe's autocracy results in his disregarding the views of the chiefs; it will be recalled that he refers to them as 'old fools' (Yerima, 2008:27). According to him, the chiefs are the ones who might have placed the white calabash on the throne (26). Balogun, being a fearless warrior, is the only one who could answer the king's allegations. Unlike Esan, he shrewdly rejects Mojagbe's autocracy by pointing to the atrocities committed by the king that might attract the wrath of the gods. In his words, 'people linked Kabiyesi's refusal to do his



kingly duty to the death of Ogundele, one of the young priests of Ogun, and the marriage of Ogundele's young beautiful wife to Kabiyesi during the period of her mourning. A forbidden act even for a king' (27). Balogun points to Mojagbe's neglect of his duty as king to lead the people during the Ogun festival and his breaking of the sacred custom as the reason for attracting Ogun's wrath.

To further grasp Balogun's role as a bold warrior, it is germane to note the kind of relationship Mojagbe has with his council members. He often employs a satirical tone in order to obtain answers from his chiefs and, in some instances, make them feel inferior. For example, he mockingly responds to his chiefs' greeting during their visit, as follows: 'rise, friends of the throne. Or is it not safe to call you that any more?' (25), because he claims to have recognised their role in contributing to the village's situation. The use of the word 'friends' explains the strained relationship between Mojagbe and his chiefs. Mojagbe believes that the council of chiefs and other Ogun priests in the village are planning to depose him as king; therefore, they are not worthy to be called friends. Regardless of this, Balogun still courageously finds a way to appeal to Mojagbe to handle the happenings in the community with care, by searching his inner being and purging his conscience of the allegations levied against him. One such instance occurs when Balogun bravely requests the king to speak plainly. The effect of Balogun's fearlessness results in Mojagbe emphasising the use of the words 'friends of the throne' by saying 'hands that are clean abhor dirt, unless the owner intends to wash them again. I am worried when you feign ignorance in the face of the consequence of actions taken by you' (25). Mojagbe refers to the hands as a metaphor for the chiefs who still refer to themselves as his friends but are planning how to replace him (Yerima, 2008:25). The dirt alludes to the allegations of Mojagbe killing the village Ogun priest, marrying his youngest wife, not listening to the advice of his chiefs, absence from the Ogun festival, and sentencing Esan to death. Mojagbe queries the chiefs' intent using words that deal with searching one's conscience. At this stage, the king has succeeded in making the chiefs feel guilty, and they all prostrate themselves as a sign of respect to beg for the king's forgiveness. While Otunba refers to the council members as 'careless children', Balogun boldly explains in the following conversation how Mojagbe single-handedly turns himself into Ogun's enemy:

BALOGUN: Shame, Kabiyesi?

MOJAGBE: Yes, shame on you all who failed to cover your king with revered cloak of respect and honour. Shame! Shame! Shame! ... a thousand times.

OTUN: (*Prostrates.*) On the floor we all lie, Kabiyesi ... like careless children ... we go on the floor to ask for forgiveness.

BALOGUN: Yes, on the floor. (*All the chiefs prostrate.*) Forgive our wavering thoughts, Kabiyesi.

MOJAGBE: Wavering thoughts, Balogun?

BALOGUN: Yes, my king. Your accusations that we intend to set the palace on fire, when we insisted on asking our ancestors about the sudden successive deaths of Kabiyesi's mother and first wife. Then Kabiyesi's refusal to lead the whole village to the Ogun shrines during this year's festival. People linked Kabiyesi's refusal to do his kingly duty to the death of Ogundele, one of the young priests of Ogun, and the marriage of Ogundele's young beautiful wife to Kabiyesi during the period of her mourning. A forbidden act even for a king. We were worried. Then today, sitting in our houses while we were pondering about what to do after hearing the fearful sound of Layewu's drums of death, we hear of Kabiyesi's decree that a royal blood be spilt without our knowledge at the marketplace. What are we good for, we kept asking ourselves? Rumour-mongers or stupid old fools that are good for nothing as our revered Kabiyesi often likes to fondly refer to us? So, the stupid old fools ... that is us ... decided to keep mum and at least keep what is left of our dignity ...

MOJAGBE: So, what is left? (Yerima, 2008:26-27)

This extract emphasises Balogun's courage as he acts on behalf of Ogun to expose Mojagbe's folly. He boldly explains to the king how offences such as spilling the blood of an innocent human may result in Ogun's anger. Unlike Esan who intended to use Ogun implements to kill Mojagbe, the quoted extract portrays Balogun who did not physically confront the latter and ask him to prove his innocence, but instead mildly points to all the atrocities the king had committed. Balogun ingeniously adopts this technique with the intention of appealing to the king's conscience. He links Mojagbe's predicaments to his involvement in the death of the village Ogun priest (Yerima, 2008:27). To emphasise his point, Balogun also reveals that Mojagbe killed Ogundele and married the latter's wife, which transgresses the law of the land (Yerima, 2008:27)<sup>92</sup>. This might have been because of Ogundele's role during the planned installation of Jagunmolu as the king, although Mojagbe was still on the throne (Yerima,

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<sup>92</sup> Idialu highlights the fate a widow is meant to endure after her husband's death in Yorubaland (Idialu, 2011:6-9). Idialu explains that widowhood in Yorubaland is another rite of passage, where the woman is expected to mourn her deceased husband for a period of three months. During this period, she is expected to remain indoors with shaved hair and not to change her clothes. The widow is not permitted to wear shoes, slippers, trim her nails, or perform any basic personal hygiene. This is aimed at her not attracting any suitor or having a sexual relationship with anyone. The widow is only permitted to enter any relationship either within or outside the extended family of her husband after the widowhood rites are completed.

2008:25). Isepe in this part of the play reveals that Ogunsakin, the village's Ogun chief priest, collaborates with other Ogun priests and certain chiefs to identify a replacement to the throne. Mojabbe conspires with Isepe to murder all the Ogun priests who were involved in the process. Balogun courageously links Mojabbe's absence from the annual Ogun festival, where the king was supposed to lead the whole community to the Ogun shrine for the celebration, to his role in Ogundele's death. Killing an Ogun priest is an act of gross disrespect towards Ogun. It is a crime serious enough to warrant instant death imposed by the deity, yet Mojabbe remains alive. Clearly, Ogun desires a man to change his evil ways and live, not to die for his crimes. Hence, death is the last resort for Ogun, while reformation is the priority.

The yearly ritual at the Ogun festival is supposed to cleanse the land of the evil of the previous year and usher it into a peaceful and prosperous new year. Owing to the alleged connection Mojabbe has with Ogundele's death and to his premature marriage to the wife of the deceased which is an abomination in the land, Mojabbe intentionally did not attend the festival. It is thus implied that he deliberately refused to lead the people during the festival because he knows that Ogun would strike him dead in the presence of the people due to his involvement in killing the priest. By all indications, Mojabbe has offended Ogun in so many ways that he does not deserve any mercy. Yet, Ogun has not yet struck him dead. Instead, Balogun, representing Ogun, appeals to Mojabbe's reason in order for him to perceive that his crimes are becoming exceedingly numerous; he needs to stop now, so as to forestall Ogun's wrath. This affords further evidence that Ogun does not take pleasure in irresponsible killing. Mojabbe is not merely absent from the yearly sacrifice to Ogun; he refuses to perform it, which in itself is sacrilege.

Balogun's role as an Ogun representative in the play is one that portrays the god in a positive manner. He does not force Mojabbe to confess or seize him by using any of his Ogun implements. It is notable that after Balogun's speech on how Mojabbe kills at will and purposefully avoids the Ogun festival, Mojabbe does not kill him or order any security guards to eject him from the council meeting. Mojabbe, on the other hand, avoids further discussion with Balogun by ignoring him and begins a new conversation with Otun. Having become aware of most of his atrocities, it is evident that Mojabbe determines his own fate and paves way for Ogun's judgement.

#### 4.5 The cleansing: Motunrayo, an Ogun executioner of judgement

Another representative of Ogun in the play is Motunrayo who is, as intimated, the slave girl from a neighbouring village, Igbo Odo (Yerima, 2008:51) and is the character whom Ogun influences to rid Mojagbe's village of bad leadership (Yerima, 2008:71). Scholars such as Adu-Gyamfi, for example, would argue that Motunrayo is imbued with the 'destructive tendency of Ogun' (Adu-Gyamfi, 1997:71), in other words, inflicting death. However, I have emphasised that Ogun does not simply eliminate an offender but gives the individual time to change and make amends. In Mojagbe's case, he desires to kill more people, thinking he is carrying out Ogun's wishes. It is understood at this stage what Mojagbe had done to incur Ogun's judgement. However, for Ogun's request to be fulfilled in the play, Ogun uses Motunrayo to bring Mojagbe's tyranny to an end. Yerima presents Motunrayo as a seductive maid brought from the war to which Mojagbe was warned not to go. She is the unexpected visitor whom Isepe warned Mojagbe not to allow into the palace (Yerima, 2008:45). Consider the ensuing conversation between Isepe and Mojagbe as the king prepares to wage war against Igbo Odo:

MOJAGBE: (*Opens the door.*) speak. The blood boils. We are off to war.

ISEPE: That, too, Kabiyesi.

MOJAGBE: What, too, Isepe? Speak plainly, my warriors will soon be here. We march on the people of Igbo Odo.

ISEPE: No, Kabiyesi. Ogun forbids that you go to war. You sit at home, and peace and victory shall be yours.

MOJAGBE: Sit at home? Me, Mojagbe? Impossible. This is a good diversion, Isepe. A war will blur the argument of my enemies, that I am getting old and weak. A victory at war will bring back the respect I deserve from my people. I must go, Isepe.

ISEPE: Kabiyesi ... death awaits you, if you leave for war. (Yerima, 2008:43)

As noted, Isepe cautions Mojagbe not to go to battle with the people of Igbo Odo, but to collect only one item from the loot on the warriors' return (Yerima, 2008:45). Isepe's intention is that he will still be alive to choose for Mojagbe from the war treasure. The extract lays emphasis on Ogun being a just god, not one desiring the death of an offender. Isepe is no doubt aware of Ogun's wrath against Mojagbe, which may be fulfilled on the battlefield; after all Ogun is the god of war. As a diviner, Isepe can see the danger ahead for Mojagbe and attempts to warn him to avoid it; but Mojagbe is too stubborn to listen (43).

What better way for Ogun to execute judgement on his offender than killing him in battle? Hence, Isepe's warning to Mojagbe as his diviner, evident in Isepe's emphasis that 'Ogun forbids Mojagbe to go to war, but he should sit at home, and peace and victory shall be his' (43). One could infer that Ogun could have decided to let Mojagbe go to war and let him perish, but he still hopes that Mojagbe will reform. Mojagbe presumes that sacrificing to Ogun without becoming sober and repenting will alter the verdict of the god regarding his life. He wants to wage war, kill people, yet still come back to his palace and offer sacrifice to Ogun, as obvious in his words before Isepe interrupts his preparations:

MOJAGBE: My mothers, I have come again. The people of Igbo Odo killed my people, and in revenge Ogun, I have declared war on them. Let us go and come back. We shall not fall. Keep us standing even to the last man. Let us conquer our enemies. Give me back greater glory, as I stand in front of my soldiers at war, and I shall glorify thee with befitting sacrifices upon our return. My father Ogun, shango be with us. (Yerima, 2008:42)

Mojagbe forgets that committing more atrocities will only make him Ogun's enemy. Mojagbe believes sacrificing innocent souls to Ogun will accord him immortality and guidance from the god. Mojagbe's atrocities all stem from his power-drunk state and quest for immortality. These deeds all transform Mojagbe into Ogun's enemy, but cause Ogun to send him several warnings through his emissaries and to give him a second chance. It was intimated that Isepe gives Mojagbe three essential warnings; the first is that he should not go to war. Secondly, he should not accept any gift from the warriors but pick an item from the war booty himself. And finally, he should not receive any visitor in the palace, as evident from this quoted conversation:

ISEPE: All is not lost. For only with your own hands can you bring death to yourself.

MOJAGBE: How, my brother? Speak. Your deeds will not go unrewarded.

ISEPE: Thank you, Kabiyesi. First you shall not go on this war. If you do not go, no one will die. Not even a shot will be fired at anyone.

MOJAGBE: Isepe, what are you turning me to? A coward? I am Mojagbe, the fearless animal in the bush. The hunter of the hunted. My people shall jeer and mock me. My detractors shall say Haahah! At last, I bend to the whims of age, and now I am an easy prey. Mojagbe a weakling? Never!

ISEPE: Indeed, Kabiyesi, but it is still better to have a weakling for a king than a dead one. Two, you shall except for one single item out of all the goods brought from the conquest of Igbo Odo people take nothing more. All the other bounties of war must be shared by the warriors of the land. From the generals to the common boy who carry spears.

MOJAGBE: I listen ... continue ...

ISEPE: You shall not receive any visitor. No matter how great a personality to this palace, Kabiyesi. Death in his greatness may decide to come in the retinue of such visitor. And finally, for the next three months, do not sleep alone or stay alone in the palace. Do not remove your crown or skull cap for anyone. Death likes to touch one's forehead lightly before he takes a man. May I come closer again, Kabiyesi? (Yerima, 2008:43-44)

All these warnings are related to Mojagbe not going to war in order not to fulfil Ogun's judgement. Ogun might have revealed to Isepe that he should warn the king to stay at home and enjoy the victory so that he will not be injured. In Isepe's words, not a single shot will be fired at any one (45). This portrays a peaceful Ogun who does not encourage violence or irresponsible war for the purpose of selfish domination.

Ogun wishes the warriors to go to Igbo Odo to dialogue with and punish the offenders who had unlawfully attacked farmers from Mojagbe's village, as evident in the conversation below, between Mojagbe and Balogun, when the warriors returned from the war (Yerima, 2008:50). In this scene, Balogun leads the warriors in a victory dance to celebrate in Mojagbe's palace. In fulfilment of Isepe's warning, no one from Mojagbe's community died and not one shot was fired. Balogun mentions that the Igbo Odo community leader had already arrested the offenders and beheaded them, when queried by Mojagbe who wants to know the outcome of the war. The following conversation is enlightening in several aspects regarding the fulfilment of Isepe's warning and the outcome of the war in Igbo Odo:

MOJAGBE: Good. How many of our men were killed?

BALOGUN: None, Kabiyesi. Not one single soul died. We met no resistance from our village to their own. The Bale was really generous. He gave gifts to the soldiers and even for the kingmakers.

MOJAGBE: Not a life was lost ... haa, Isepe.

BALOGUN: Kabiyesi o. Do we handover your gifts to Abese? Kabiyesi o!

MOJAGBE: (*Lost in thought.*) Huum? No. Go yourself and pick only one slave, preferably a female for me. The rest of my gifts you will share among my chiefs. (Yerima, 2008:50-51)

The above shows that Ogun does not support violence. Balogun returned victorious from the war without having had to shoot at anyone on the battle field. Ogun's warning is fulfilled; Mojagbe remembered what Isepe had said before he killed him. Mojagbe determines his own

destiny by choosing a slave girl from the booty brought from Igbo Odo. Ogun did not choose for Mojagbe nor instruct any herbalist or warrior to ask him to do so. Unconsciously, his death becomes imminent when he requests such a girl. Unknown to Mojagbe, the slave girl is the visitor whom Isepe warned should not be allowed into the palace. This is the same point highlighted earlier: that Ogun does not take pride in reckless killings or in shaping an individual's destiny; he allows them time to make amends and change.

Mojagbe requests Balogun to pick 'only one slave, preferably a female' (Yerima, 2008:51). Motunrayo turns out to be the said woman. Balogun describes her as a 'fair and beautiful slave girl that was found loitering the bush during the war and she is also the daughter of Igbo Odo's chief priest' (Yerima, 2008:51). The irony is that Mojagbe knows the entire body of herbalists in Igbo Odo, including their family details, but has never heard of Motunrayo (Yerima, 2008:52). Mojagbe's words are accurate, because she has not existed until now. She is death in human form. Ogun caused death to take the form of a beautiful girl with a family history, whom the warriors claim 'ran into their arms' (Yerima, 2008:51) during the war with Igbo Odo.

Owing to Motunrayo's formed identity as the daughter of the late Igbo Odo herbalist, she possesses spiritual powers inherited from her father. At this point, she has taken up the role of Isepe who is no longer alive. Balogun confirms Motunrayo's identity by mentioning her father's name. On hearing that 'Lantoro Onisegun Agbara' is Motunrayo's father, Mojagbe orders that Motunrayo should replace Isepe. In his words, 'Lantoro! I know him. he is good! But I did not know that he had a female child. Anyway, let your men hand her over to Abese. I need someone in the palace who knows about the gods, medicine and how to attend to shrines. Isepe has joined his ancestors' (Yerima, 2008:52). The stage direction also links Motunrayo to Ogun as the god's executioner of judgement. Yerima requires that:

*The Soldier brings the slave girl in. she wears a red skirt with a long black veil which she wraps round herself, her head and face. MOJAGBE goes to her, and unwraps her long veil. A beautiful young woman is revealed. MOJAGBE is pleased with what he sees. (Yerima, 2008:52)*

From the perspective of connective theory, the red here symbolises the influence of Ogun in Mojagbe's predicament, whereas the black veil signifies the death that awaits him. To Mojagbe, her dressing would have implied that she is already garbed for the task ahead which is to replace Isepe. As soon as Motunrayo does so, her first assignment is to prepare Mojagbe

for the war against Oyo Empire. Before then, Mojagbe had maltreated Gbamu and Dokun, the war generals from Oyo Empire, who had arrived to deliver a message to Mojagbe that he has been rejected by the Oyo empire as regent king, for failure to pay his dues to Oyo (Yerima, 2008:58). At this point, it is understood that Mojagbe's kingdom is under Oyo rulership; but as a stubborn and high-handed monarch, Mojagbe opts for war rather than the peace offering demanded by the emissaries (Yerima, 2008:63). While addressing Balogun and Abese, Mojagbe comments on the visits of the two war generals, saying, 'now, Balogun ... hurry to the men. Everybody home. I need to prepare myself. Abese clean yourself up and bring out our guns, we need to teach our Oyo relatives a lesson' (63). Mojagbe in this excerpt plans to misuse Ogun's instrument, the gun. He hastens to Motunrayo who is now his diviner and herbalist. While preparing Mojagbe for war against the Oyo army, Motunrayo questions him about his courage and fear of death. Yerima portrays death as an attractive young woman, whom Mojagbe will find difficult to resist<sup>93</sup>. She reminds him of the ability of death to end corruption, totalitarianism, good, evil and everything that a man may represent. In the ensuing conversation which eventually led to Mojagbe's demise, Motunrayo questions Mojagbe as to whether he is afraid of anything:

MOTUN: (*Watches him for a while.*) You pant Kabiyesi ... are you afraid?

MOJAGBE: Er, of what? Of warriors chanting? Of the charging clatter of spears and cutlasses or deep sounds of exploding dane guns? No I am not afraid.

MOTUN: Of death, Kabiyesi, of that stillness that levels man's labours, and ... I dare to ask again, Kabiyesi, are you afraid of death? (Yerima, 2008:64).

The above portrays Mojagbe who still prides himself as a warrior king and one who finds joy in the reckless killing of people. His description of war depicts that he is overconfident in his self-proclaimed support of the god of war. Motunrayo is quick to remind him of the fate that awaits him, which is death. She recounts how Mojagbe poses as having power over life and death and how it feels when he takes another person's life. In her words:

Motun: a man who sends children, men and women to their early death must know the tender touch of death. That moment when the time has come. When one's gong begins to strike faintly. Surely, we say you, Kabiyesi, have the power over death. But do you? Can't you remember the power, the surge, the feel when you take the life of another? Surely, Kabiyesi. (Yerima, 2008:65).

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<sup>93</sup> Hans Kury describes death as a sensual, handsome man or an attractive woman (Lorenz, 2011:326; Kury, 2013:35).



Motunrayo as the Ogun executioner of judgement would not wish to kill Mojagbe without causing him to acknowledge all the atrocities he had committed. It has been mentioned earlier that Mojagbe murdered numerous people in his attempt to be immortal. Thinking he would live and rule forever, Mojagbe and his former diviner, Isepe, committed many unlawful killings. It is Motunrayo who reveals that Mojagbe killed his predecessor. Similarly, using the connective theory, Motunrayo discloses Isepe's involvement in the killings and how he enjoyed these while Mojagbe murders his victims. According to her, Mojagbe should 'shii. Hold still. Haa, you see. The bloody souls whom you have helped to forcefully take away. Hear cries of women very close to you. A kind old king who trusted you. Their cries are loudest. And this dry-boned old man, giggling ... chuckling. He enjoys it all' (65). Motunrayo's words to Mojagbe are intended to remind him of his place with the gods and the living. In every respect, Mojagbe's hot temper and tyrannical behaviour result in his becoming an enemy of the god, Ogun, that he always begs to protect him. The phrase 'bloody souls' refers to the innocent blood offered as either sacrifice or illegal killings, such as his wife, mother, unborn children and even Isepe whom she refers to as a 'dry-boned old man' (65). This implies that Ogun does not support thoughtless killings. He is a god of order, social administration and justice. To reiterate, Ogun dislikes the murder of an innocent person. In such cases, he eliminates the unrepentant individual from society, for the offender not to corrupt other people in the community.

To fulfil Isepe's forewarning of what the visitor will do to Mojagbe, Motunrayo requests Mojagbe to mention the names of death. The king lists two names but suddenly becomes aware of the fact that Isepe is no longer able to give him the third name; he thus resigns himself to fate. Motunrayo emphasises that 'the third name of death is Mojagbe and death takes the shape of the man whose soul he comes for' (68). Motunrayo's words confirm that Mojagbe's judgement is complete and his soul is now demanded by the gods. Mojagbe, having realised he is no longer going to survive death, begs Motunrayo to marry him. He says to her, 'I shall marry you myself. *(Pause.)* I feel so safe in your presence' (69). Mojagbe's proposal instigates Motunrayo to carry out Ogun's assignment. Forgetting that Isepe has warned Mojagbe not to remove his 'crown or skull cap for anyone' and that 'death likes to touch one's forehead lightly before he takes a man' (45). Mojagbe succumbs to Motunrayo's request to remove his crown for her to touch his forehead, as evident in the extract below:

MOTUN: Let me, Kabiyesi. Let me, great one. Protected by the will of your people, death cannot come here tonight ... or ever! Come here. *(She moves her hands to the crown and removes it. Then she takes of [sic] the scalp cap.)* Now your head is ready. With a gentle

touch like this on the forehead. And a whisper of your name, Mojagbe ... the soul departs and follows Iku Baba Yeye o, Ekeji Orisha. (Yerima, 2008:69)

Using connective theory, a reader is able to connect Layewu's message and how Mojagbe references Layewu's visit to demanding his head, to Motunrayo removing the king's crown as a method that Ogun uses to eventually eliminate Mojagbe. From the standpoint of the connective theory, looking at the manner in which Motunrayo removes Mojagbe's crown, takes off his scalp cap and touches the king's forehead, this sequence symbolises how patient Ogun is in dealing with Mojagbe. Without forcing Mojagbe to his death, he surrenders to Ogun's judgement - death in this case. Noteworthy is also the way in which Ogun sends Yeye, Esan, Balogun and the Oyo war generals to warn Mojagbe before finally using Motunrayo as Ogun's executioner of justice to dispatch this tyrannical character<sup>94</sup>. Yerima thus reimagines Ogun as a god who patiently gives Mojagbe ample time to change from his wayward course.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, *Mojagbe* constructs Ogun as a reformer who will not desire an individual to perish but rather that he or she retraces his or her steps and becomes a changed person. Ogun will exact judgement when the participant refuses to reform or repent of all the atrocities. Mojagbe refuses to yield to several warnings issued by Ogun, and therefore proceeds to his own death. Whenever the Yoruba people need a liberator or reformer to come to their aid, Ogun is propitiated through divinations and sacrifices to avert the evil and to stop its further occurrence in the community. Ogun is not an irresponsible god that will decide an individual's destiny and pronounce death on him or her without giving the person an opportunity to change. Ogun uses everything in Mojagbe's environment to warn this high-handed king who intends to live forever and become a god. *Mojagbe* constructs Ogun as a reformer who is ready to liberate and wishes wicked people would turn for the better. With the characters of Esan and Balogun, it is evident that Ogun does not encourage violence but embodies his principles to adopt a peaceful means to achieve judgement and peace in the community. Hence, when the representative intends to use his implement for violence, as in the case of Esan, the individual loses Ogun's support. The decolonial perspective assists in comprehending that Ogun is reconstructed as a reformer and not a bloodthirsty god who has already made up his mind on how to deal with an offender. Since the play is a text that discusses Ogun in almost every

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<sup>94</sup> Yerima's portrayal of death in *Mojagbe* alludes to the death of General Sani Abacha who died because of his sex escapade with an Indian prostitute in the early hours of 8 June 1998 (see Reno 2005:147).

conversation, Famule's connective approach as a sub-theory of the decolonial perspective helps to link activities in the play. The way *Mojagbe* experiments with Ogun is appropriate for addressing corrupt leadership in the Nigerian political sphere. The discussion continues in the next chapter where Ogun is reimagined as an obstacle remover in Alex-Roy Omoni's *Morontonu*.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# 5 OGUN, THE OBSTACLE REMOVER IN ALEX ROY-OMONI'S *MORONTONU*

## 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored Ogun as a reformer and a god who does not take pleasure in wanton murders, but a deity who gives opportunities to offenders to mend their evil ways. In the chapter, Famule's connective approach again serves as a sub-theory of the decolonial perspective to determine how Ogun is reconstructed as a reformer in Yerima's *Mojagbe*. Balogun, Esan, Yeye, Motunrayo and Layewu's characters assist one in reimagining Ogun as a god of social administration, a liberator, reformer, and a deity of justice. Reconceptualising Ogun in this thesis has taken several forms; the discussion will continue in this chapter, focusing on him as a god who removes any obstacle that is countering the progress of his followers, as presented in Alex Roy-Omoni's *Morontonu*. The chapter's intention is to discuss how Ogun protects and nurtures the poor in the community, as against the notion that Ogun simply destroys all that he encounters. Aside from supporting the kings and the powerful in the community, Ogun's reconstruction as the obstacle remover relates to how he also protects the weak and frail in the community. This chapter will also explore the echoes of Ogun as a god of fertility, which contrasts with the misperception that he merely kills without giving. Ogun is also constructed in this play as a god who gives children and preserves them rather than only requesting blood sacrifices and doing nothing in return.

Yoruba people appeal to Ogun to remove any obstacle on their way to freedom, which may include both spiritual and physical hindrances. Ogun's acting as an obstacle remover might cause modernist thinkers to regard him negatively, misunderstanding his actions. For instance, some supplicants fail to realise that the obstacle they are asking him to eliminate might be a family member, so that when such a request is granted, they develop the impression that Ogun is wicked. In principle, anyone who wants to invoke him should do so with much control over his or her emotional, psychological and spiritual being. He or she must be disciplined, should have the ability to discern between good and evil and behave accordingly. Ogun does not strike unjustly; he is a just god that gives humans an equal chance. The consequences of Ogun's anger should not be misjudged where he is invoked to fight for an unjust cause in the community, as evident in the reconstruction of Ogun in *Morontonu*. Therefore, a follower of Ogun is expected

to know the latter's principles as a misuse of his power could boomerang and bring destructive fire down on such a person. In a situation where a community or individual offends Ogun, such a party is required to placate the god to avert the ensuing wrath. Yoruba people respect all these principles associated with Ogun worship, which explains why his followers strive to avoid committing evil deeds against one another. The reason for choosing *Morontonu* is the manner in which the play experiments with Orisa-nla as Eledumare. Ogun, being one of the sixteen elders of Eledumare, may be inferred from the text. The following synopsis of the text will offer an insight into why Ogun becomes the relevant god from the Yoruba pantheon in the play.

## **5.2 Synopsis of *Morontonu***

The play commences with dancing and drumming in honour of a mighty warlord, King Isorowolu of the Yoruba community of Ala town (Roy-Omoni, 2012:20). It is evident from the opening scene that the king has just returned from a war and the townspeople are singing his praises. The opening act presents the praise singer who portrays how strong and powerful Isorowolu is. Suddenly, the monarch's mood alters as he retires into his inner chamber. Here, he considers how powerful he is; yet he has no male son to ascend the throne after his demise. During his pensive mood, Balogun, Ala community's chief warlord, enters the king's inner chamber and asks about the reason for this change in mood. Isorowolu voices his dilemma and informs Balogun of the birth of his twenty-third princess. The monarch mentions how every woman who becomes pregnant by him gives birth to female children only.

Balogun and Isorowolu decide to call a meeting with other chiefs to deliberate on how the obstacle might be removed. During the meeting, Balogun opines that the king should take another bride 'with a strong blood' (Roy-Omoni, 2012:28). The search commences; Morontonu becomes the chosen one. With the assistance of the village Ifa priest, Morontonu is confirmed as a suitable bride for the king. As might be expected, jealousy arises in the palace since Awelewa, the king's first wife, requests other three wives to collaborate with her to harm Morontonu. They reject Awelewa's request, in order to show their support for the king. Morontonu succeeds in giving birth to a male child which causes Awelewa to dislike her even more.

Awelewa distracts everyone in the palace while she abducts the newborn prince and takes him to an evil forest where Esu resides. Note at this stage that Esu is not presented as the Yoruba

trickster god in this play but is given the name of a mystical character<sup>95</sup>. This might be due to the knowledge that Esu is misunderstood as the devil in Yorubaland. Awelewa requests Esu to kill the baby. On her arrival in the palace, Awelewa accuses Morontonnu of kidnapping her own infant in order to punish the king. Believing Awelewa's account of the ordeal, Isorowolu orders Morontonnu to be beheaded in the Ogun shrine and her blood to be used to decorate the throne. Isorowolu now assigns Akoni and three other mystic warriors to retrieve the baby from the evil forest and promises to give the hand of his first daughter in marriage to any man who succeeds in the quest.

The scene shifts to the evil forest where Akoni and his men combat Esu and his demons to recover the baby. Unfortunately, Esu kills all the warriors except Akoni who is victorious and successfully retrieves the baby. The action of the play again switches to the palace where Morontonnu is about to be beheaded. Baba Ifa, the village Ifa priest, interrupts the scene and declares Morontonnu innocent. He points instead to Awelewa as the guilty party. Awelewa confesses to the crime; the judgement is passed that she should replace Morontonnu as the object of sacrifice. The play ends with Isorowolu fulfilling his promise to Akoni by giving his first daughter in marriage.

### **5.3 Critical works on *Morontonnu***

As at the time of this research, there has not been any published material on *Morontonnu*. Despite persistent searches on all databases and e-resources, the only critical commentary on the play is that of Sunny Awhefeada, which also appears as a foreword to the printed play. Awhefeada (2012) gives a general appraisal of the text by referencing most of the themes explored in the play, namely, blackmail, jealousy, retributive justice, as well as a dichotomization between good and evil (Roy-Omoni, 2012:9). In his appraisal of *Morontonnu*, Awhefeada relates how the themes and adaptation of fictional enactment in Yorubaland feature in the play, with specific reference to playwrights such as Soyinka, Rotimi, JP Clark, Sofola, Sowande, Osofisan who at one time or other adopt the rich traditional aspects of Nigerian festivals in their writings. In further appraisal of *Morontonnu*, Awhefeada suggests a feminist and postcolonial reading of the play. Giving examples from the text, he outlines that 'the relegation of the twenty-three princesses as the king bemoans his lack of a son, and the envy that characterises the king's harem' becomes plausible for a feminist reading (Roy-Omoni, 2012:9). He also mentions how King Isorowolu's imperial attitude towards the entities under his dominion and how he

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<sup>95</sup> A character who has magical or supernatural power.

subjugates and demands heavy royalties from his vassals in the play fits a postcolonial study (9). However, in keeping with the focus of the thesis, this chapter will begin a decolonial dialogue with certain issues suggested by Awhefeada, for example, ‘blackmail, jealousy, retributive justice, as well as a dichotomization between good and evil’, to examine how Ogun is being implied in the play text. This is a gap that this chapter aims to fill by means of the said decolonial reading of how Ogun is being reconstructed by the characters of Balogun, Akoni and Morontonnu.

#### **5.4 Reimagination of Ogun in *Morontonnu***

Unlike *Mojagbe*, Ogun is not mentioned in *Morontonnu* but the persistent references to Orisa-nla (which signifies the biggest deity or great deity) as the god of Ala community are prominent in the play. I begin with the views of scholars such as Tidjani-Serpos (1996), Ademiluka (2007), Shokpeka (2009), Taye (2013) and Ugwu (2014) who have all argued that Orisa-nla is another name for Obatala, the Yoruba arch-divinity. According to them, Orisa-nla is one of the sixteen divinities who were assigned by Eledumare to create the earth. Although there are several Yoruba traditions concerning Orisa-nla or Obatala, this chapter will concentrate on the one that considers Orisa-nla as the supreme being. Soyinka’s observations about Orisa-nla in *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1999) will assist in comprehending the different functions of the Yoruba pantheon. He summarises that in the beginning, there was only one solitary being who was the progenitor of god and humankind, attended only by his slave known as Atunda. The latter rebelled against the supreme being, rolling an enormous boulder down the hill, smashing him into a thousand and one fragments. These fragments became the Yoruba gods and goddesses known as ‘*Orisas*’ or the sixteen ministers of Eledumare: Sango (god of lightning); Ogun (god of iron and war); Olokun (god of the sea); Oya (goddess of the river Niger); Osun (goddess of the river Oshun); Oba (goddess of the river Oba); Oke (god of mountains); Aje Shaluga (god of wealth); Osanyin (god of medicine); Olokun (god of the sea); Orun (the sun); Oshu (the moon); Ibeji (god of twins); Aganju; Odudua; and Shopona (Soyinka, 1999:27, see Peel, 1968: 33). Soyinka further indicates that the fragmentation develops into transfer of social functions, division of labour and of professions among the Yoruba gods who chose their function from the day the fragments were created (Soyinka, 1999:28)<sup>96</sup>. With regard to Soyinka’s account, Orisa-nla is taken in this chapter to denote Eledumare, since Balogun also interprets him to be the ‘creator of heaven and earth’ in the play (Roy-Omoni, 2012:26).

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<sup>96</sup> Also see McKenzie (1976:200-206).

Ogun, another of the sixteen divinities, is implied, for example, in the characters of Akoni and Balogun in this drama. Both characters are warriors who make constant reference to Orisa-nla in the play. Owing to the allusions to strength, protection, procreation, guidance, bravery and support from Orisa-nla in the play, Ogun comes to mind when analysing these two characters. The next section will examine the reconceptualisation of Ogun as an obstacle remover in the Ala community.

#### **5.4.1 Ogun, the guardian and obstacle remover**

As explained in the previous section, it is Orisa-nla that is being mentioned in the text. Ogun is merely implied: in the conversations and the characters' exhibitions of bravery, strength, courage and determination. These features become relevant when discussing Balogun's contribution to the peace and progress of the said community. Isorowolu, the king, encounters the obstacle of producing a male heir to his throne, without which his lineage will cease to rule the Ala kingdom. Isorowolu perceives this as a hurdle which affects his happiness and the progress of the community. Regardless of the imperious attitude displayed by Isorowolu towards neighbouring communities by referring to how 'Kingdoms and kings beg for his mercy' (26), he still silently bemoans the sudden end of his dynasty. He does not consider his twenty-three princesses as capable of succeeding him, according to the Yoruba tradition that monarchy is linked to masculinity.

Ogun as an obstacle remover signifies how the god helps his followers to overcome their challenges and solutions to them. He is a hard worker, according to Yoruba traditions, and he protects against any negative energy which might stem from different sources; this could be spiritual or emotional. Ogun is often called upon to remove such deleterious energy which might serve as an obstacle to an individual's happiness. For instance, the opening sequence in the play presents a king who is a warrior and has conquered the enemies of his people; yet deep within him is a negative force that makes him unhappy. Since he displays Ogun characteristics his people assume he has all he needs, but to the king, there is only one hindrance: this could end his lineage. Consider the following words by the village's praise singer when emphasising the achievement of this warrior king influenced by Ogun:

PRAISE SINGER: Long live the king, long live the king. The king reigns in his majesty, strong and powerful. You whose ancestors have their habitations among the stars that shine bright and clear. At your rage the mountains quake and hills skip. The king that passes excreta once and the toilet is full. The mighty one, your steps are accomplished victories;



victories that kept kingdoms under your powerful arms. The land lies bare before you. Men become like grass as your name runs fear through their veins. The coconut that attempts to stop the thunder's burning axe remains a dried stake with no story to tell. Oh, mighty one, your greatness is an umbrella of safety for all far and near. Your smiles are as the glowing lights in the dark and which become humid in the desert from which men wet their thirst. Oh king, long may you reign. (Roy-Omoni, 2012:20)

Words such as 'powerful, strength, victories' imply that Isorowolu displays characteristics of the Yoruba god of war who is powerful and strong in defending his followers in battle. Isorowolu represents Ogun among his people as a warrior king. He also refers to himself as a 'lion' (26) which displays a similarity to how Ogun is accorded the attributes of a lion in Yoruba mythology (see Barnes, 1999:15). Noteworthy here is the reference to domination and victory which might be misleading to a modernist thinker who may regard Ogun principles as ruthless. Ogun does not take pleasure in unjust domination and subjection of the underprivileged but deals with the adversaries of his people. He punishes offenders who oppress his people and brings victory to his followers. Although the relatives of the enemy that is conquered might regard Ogun as a wicked god, this is an advantage to those who worship Ogun faithfully. The praise singer in the above extract sings the praises of a king who had conquered many communities and created fear in the minds of the members of neighbouring peoples. This is not to say that Isorowolu is a wicked king but that he is one who makes use of Ogun implements to deal with the enemies of his people. Ogun is constructed in the above extract as a god who does not appreciate his people being bullied but instead as one who removes obstacles from their path.

Isorowolu's mood shifts during the celebration and he '*retires to the inner chamber while the townspeople dance out of the palace to the town to continue the celebration*' as the stage direction portrays (22). Balogun approaches the king in his inner chamber, as the latter bemoans his predicament in silence. He courageously requests his monarch to speak about what might have caused his happiness and assures him of how the gods of the land could help him to solve his quandaries. Isorowolu discloses to Balogun that his inability to produce a male heir has become an obstacle to his happiness which is also affecting the progress of the community. According to him, he is considered a powerful king and 'power and dominion are his watchwords... but the mighty one (himself) dreads the inevitable old age' since he has no male child to succeed him (Roy-Omoni, 2012:22). It is relatively easy for Isorowolu to disclose this to Balogun owing to the kind of relationship they share. To understand Balogun's role in

*Morontonu*, one should take note of the following exchange between him and Isorowolu which underscores the extent of the relationship between the two warriors:

KING: The air is filled with praises. In my name have many songs been written. They pierce the walls of the valiant hearts. They splash in the mouth of babies like China in the sun. Power and dominion are my watchwords. Kingdoms and kings beg for my mercy: these are the witnesses of my power. The leopard's spots are beyond obscurity. The lion roars and in its claws lies its power. Hmn-mn, the mighty ones dread the inevitable old age, days that cloud their lives with folktales. Tales! Tales! Tales without end; tales to keep the children from weeping, tales for the young men to bathe in the warmth of their maids. Maids! Women whose teeth flash as the morning sun. Women that would quicken your grey hair to the grave. No! It must not be, it never would, I ...

BALOGUN: I hope all is well, Kabiyesi.

KING: All is well but one.

BALOGUN: What does that mean, Kabiyesi? You are the king and the territorial integrity of our kingdom is unmolested. From the east to the west, north to south, come royalties and homage.

KING: Balogun, there is no peace for the body when the head is sick.

BALOGUN: That is true but ...

KING: But or no but, I am sad to inform you that my fourth wife has given birth to the twenty-third princess.

BALOGUN: Oh-oh! I am beginning to understand the cause of the unrest. (Roy-Omoni, 2012:26)

From the above, Isorowolu is troubled because of an obstacle that Balogun does not seem to be aware of before the former reveals the problem. The King mentions how powerful he is, according himself characteristics as a great warrior that portray Ogun's features. Most of the attributes he confers on himself are qualities of Ogun that have been explored in previous chapters. For example, 'power, mercy, leopard, lion, mighty' are words that were cited to clarify how Ogun is being misinterpreted by scholars influenced by the Euro-North academy. To understand such words, one needs to delink oneself from the notion that Ogun is easily angered and disrupts the community. References to lion and leopard in Isorowolu's words do not mean that he is a terrifying figure who chases people away. As mentioned, he possesses those qualities owing to his association with being a warrior who protects his people from external attacks. Isorowolu mistakenly thinks that his association with Ogun would have

simply given him all he wishes for. He also realises that he is aging and needs someone who will ascend his throne after his demise.

Balogun realises that the king is encountering an obstacle which at this stage he had known nothing about. Similarly, from the previous chapter it will be recalled that ‘Balogun’ is the king’s second in command, the chief warrior and generalissimo of their village. Hence he refers to how the warriors have successfully defended the community from external attacks and is requested to summon the council of chiefs in order to discuss how the obstacle can be removed (Roy-Omoni, 2012:24). On arrival, the chiefs submit that Isorowolu must carry out numerous actions before the obstacle may be removed. It is necessary here to quote in full what transpires during the council meeting to understand the different assertions among the chiefs:

OSIBA: Kabiyesi, I suggest that we take a journey to the village of horror, up in the mountains, there the mystic fortune-teller dwells. He is a man of great sight.

KING: Remember it takes seven days to climb the mountains. Moreover, what good can there be in the evil land, the land of blood, the land that drains the blood of its inhabitant? No, no, think of better options.

OTUNBA: Then let Kabiyesi eat from cookings [sic] prepared by the gorilla.

KING: What if my children look like gorilla? What will people say? Tell me, where lies my pride?

OSIBA: Kabiyesi, the puff adder is the mother of all snakes. Alligator pepper causes it to sneeze, therefore, rising to great height and vigour. Let Kabiyesi go to the forest of death and appeal to Orisa-nla to give him a male child.

KING: Enough of that. How many times have I gone there in the middle of the night and still no solution to the problem?

BALOGUN: *Clears his throat.*) Kabiyesi, honourable chiefs, there is a rat in the precious pot; it demands wisdom and patience not to destroy the pot in an attempt to kill the rat. More so, the old man’s reasoning faculty is like that of a child; his poor visions are never restored by tobacco smoking. It only sends him to sleep. Let us think of a lasting solution and to kill two birds with a stone.

OSIBA: Balogun, what are you insinuating? Do paint your pictures clearly.

BALOGUN: What I mean is, let us get a young lady, *Orekelewa*, a beautiful and attractive young lady with strong blood to ease the weariness of my lord’s heart. Who can tell, it might turn out to be the return of the unexpected. (Roy-Omoni, 2012:26-27)

It is evident that most of the suggestions are opposed to what Ogun stands for in the community. The king rejects the suggestion to travel to the land of blood, suggesting that he is repelled by

needless killings, which is an aspect reflective of Ogun. As an Ogun representative, Isorowolu will be cautious of doing anything that will jeopardise his relationship with Ogun. Osiba advises compromise on the part of a king who devotes his time to worshipping Ogun, to seek other means of consulting the enemy to come to their assistance. The king thus refutes the notion of visiting the mystic mountain owing to the fact that the inhabitants of the mountain are their enemies. Isorowolu describes the 'village of horror' (27) as a community that no longer receives the support of Ogun, because of the evil in the village. Ogun is thus implied in Isorowolu's response as a god who encourages peaceful co-existence rather than a deity who supports uncontrolled killing. Osiba also proposes visiting the 'forest of death' to appeal to Orisa-nla to bless the king with a male child. His advice here is a misrepresentation of what Ogun stands for: Osiba accords Ogun the attribute of death, which contradicts his claim that the deity is a fertility god. In contrast to Osiba and Otunba's propositions, Balogun offers a brave option of finding a new wife. According to Balogun, the new wife has to be of a 'strong blood' (28). The use of the word 'strong' relates to how Ogun gives strength and will also prepare the new bride before she enters the palace. The word also portrays how strong Ogun is in helping the people to remove their obstacle.

Otunba's reaction to Balogun's opinion reinforces Ogun's influence in granting wisdom to his representatives in the community as to how obstacles can be removed. Otunba reacts thus, 'Balogun, the able genius, the undisputed epitome of wisdom. You are the true son of your great father who led our warriors through the river creeks to safety when our enemies were ambushed' (29). Balogun's bravery is likened to the manner in which Ogun guided the Yoruba *orisas* during the creation of Yorubaland. According to the Yoruba tradition, Ogun developed an iron tool and wielded it to hack a path for other gods to follow. His bravery earned him a place as one of the seven principal deities of the Yoruba pantheon (see Soyinka, 2008:43). Similar to the way in which Balogun intervenes in Isorowolu's matter, it is evident that his closeness to Isorowolu stems from his role as embodying an Ogun principle in the Ala community. Owing to Balogun's display of wisdom, the Ala chiefs are able to reach an agreement to depend on the intervention of their god rather than adopting other means that will not yield results.

Furthermore, Ogun's nature as an obstacle remover manifests during Isorowolu's marriage to Morontonun. After Balogun confirms the new bride to the townspeople, Awelewa antagonises him, intending to disrupt what the gods of the village are doing through Balogun. She counters

Balogun's actions by accusing him of negatively influencing the king. In her words, 'Balogun, shut up your dirty mouth. (*Everybody, including the KING is taken by surprise. There is perfect silence.*) For the fact that your actions in this palace go unchecked does not in any way make you the best of the chiefs' (46). The queen makes this utterance during Morontonu's presentation as Isorowolu's new wife. Awelewa's action will accord her the status of Ogun's enemy by opposing his principles. She perceives Balogun's influence in the palace as a threat, thereby becoming an adversary of any intervention Ogun might want to make in order to eliminate any obstacle in the palace. She fails to respect Balogun. This might be because she perceives Ogun's representatives as a danger to her activities in the palace. Ogun dislikes disrespectful people. His anger could be the result of people disrespecting the codes he gives to them. Awelewa's discourteous attitude towards Balogun might therefore have angered Ogun. She becomes his foe due to her actions in the palace.

Omojuwa argues that 'what constitutes offences to Ogun include the breaking of covenant, lying, falsehood, wickedness and stealing; whoever is guilty of any of the moral offence would incur the wrath of Ogun' (Omojuwa, 2014:88). Apart from disrespecting Balogun, Awelewa maltreats the other wives, lies, steals and is also wicked: antitheses of the principles Ogun represents in Yorubaland. Yoruba people understand such codes and pay obeisance to any Ogun representative in the community. Offenders might either bring wrath on themselves or on the community depending on their actions. In Awelewa's case, it is implied that since she is the queen of the Ala kingdom Ogun would have expected that she would be conversant with the principles of the community. Her actions cause other wives in the palace to call her a 'witch' (42). According to Isorowolu's other wives, Awelewa's actions in the palace might have caused the bad luck of not giving birth to a male son for the king (61). In order to remedy the situation, Ogun is to be approached to remove the obstacle. Isorowolu is the first to appeal to the gods of the land to come to the community's rescue. As noted, since Ogun is one of the sixteen ministers of Orisa-nla, he is implied in Isorowolu's appeal to the gods. In his words, 'oh Orisa-nla! What is this about? In spite of my large kingdom, popularity and influence, minor situations keep me restless. My troubles are more than I can bear. What am I to do next and where do I go from here? After all these years of trying with four wives there is no male child. Who will succeed me? (58), Isorowolu reinforces how the inability to produce an heir to the throne becomes a hindrance for his family and how it affects the continuity of his lineage. He consequently prays to Ogun to come to his rescue, as inferred from the extract.

From a decolonial perspective, this section highlights a unique function of Ogun within the Yoruba pantheon, which is to remove all that stands in the way of the spiritual progress of his followers. The inability to produce an heir becomes an obstacle that only Ogun the god of fertility in Yorubaland, as discussed in chapter two of this thesis, is able to remove. In order to do this, Ogun must eliminate all that stands in the way of his follower's spiritual evolution. Ogun becomes the guardian of truth in *Morontonu* because of this sacred responsibility. Ogun does not strike an offender immediately he or she commits a crime. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ogun gives the individual time to change. He conveys several warnings; only failure to heed these attracts Ogun's judgement. He does not guard the truth as an individual would want him to do, by accepting sacrifices, as culprits would make further offerings to the god to cover their crimes. He safeguards the truth in order to express warnings and allow time for the offender to change. This aspect of Ogun is often a mystery to the modernists, as previously intimated: they would most likely argue, whenever there is an accident associated with iron implements, that Ogun is a belligerent god who kills at will.

Ogun does indeed remove the obstacle hindering the progress of the Ala community. His actions commence when Awelewa decides to take the newborn baby to the evil forest. This is an act of wickedness to which Ogun is opposed, as discussed earlier. Awelewa confirms her role as the said obstacle when she claims to be behind the Ala community's predicament. Let us examine her words in the evil forest that clarify her role in attracting Ogun's wrath to this community:

AWELEWA: A child sees herbs and calls them vegetables. These people don't know what they are playing with. Fire! Yes, they are playing with fire. (*She paces up and down for a few moment and continues.*) This is me, Awelewa, who laboured day and night with the help of the ancestors to establish the king on the throne. With my bare hands I took the firebrand sacrificial pot to the evil forest. Tossed and battered by the wind of hatred from the evil ones, yet full of vigour and determination to save my fatherland in the face of defeat. Oh, who can tell if my fate has not been locked up in that singular act? Where do I go from here? (*She becomes more vigorous.*) This is not the end; it is rather the very beginning of the king's troubles, troubles, troubles. Yes! Yes! The lion's boldness is in its heart, the spider's web is within it and the snake's power lies in its venom; it lies sleeping within its vertebrae, awaiting a simultaneous response when triggered. I paid the first price and the last must be paid. *She carries the child now and raises him up, still shaking the gourd.*) No, nobody can take the king's attention from me. Nobody. How can I, Awelewa, after failing to get the king a male child, be relegated to the background by a little thing,

who calls herself Morontonu? Well, this child shall die! He shall die! (*Calling.*) Esu! Esu o!! Esu oooo!!!

From this extract, it is clear that Awelewa becomes Ogun's opponent and a hindrance to the progress of the community she claimed to have assisted in the past. She recounts how she 'singlehandedly established the king on the throne' with the assistance of the community's ancestors (63). Awelewa's actions here are reminiscent of Queen Amaka's plight in *Hard Choice* who claimed to be the one who had aided Eze Okiakoh to ascend the throne of Emepiri. Rather like the situation of Queen Amaka, what Awelewa promised the gods before the request was granted remains unknown. She mentions 'paying the first price' (63) and that the second needs to be paid. Although Roy-Omoni did not allude to any promise made by Awelewa, one may deduce from the above extract the reason for her inability to produce a male child due to her recourse to the word 'fate' (Roy-Omoni, 2012:63). She should have asked the ancestors the price she would pay for her request and not assume that her 'fate has been locked up by the gods' (63). Awelewa becomes violent, which is contrary to the principles of Ogun, and makes the decision to kill Morontonu's son, which causes her to stand in the way of the progress of Ala community. For peace to reign in Ala Kingdom, the cause of Ogun's wrath had to be removed. The king ordered Awelewa to be executed and sacrificed to Ogun in order for the god to continue supporting the people. He says, 'and for you Awelewa, my judgement on you is that you should be killed for your evil doings... (*Turning to the CHIEF GUARD.*) Take her away and send her to the land of no return' (85). Eliminating Awelewa is not an act of wickedness but a means of cleansing the village from evil activities. Ogun is thus reimagined as an obstacle remover who would not allow anyone to oppose the progress of his followers.

#### **5.4.2 Ogun as the helper of the poor**

Ogun's attribute as a protector of his followers had been examined in the previous chapter. This section will reconstruct Ogun as a god who protects, not only his followers, but also the poor in the society. He nurtures the oppressed who are considered to be nonentities in the community. According to Yoruba mythology, Ogun became poor by leaving his throne as the king of Ire after he accidentally killed both friend and foe during a battle for the Ire people; from these confines, he starts to protect and help the people whenever he is called upon. However, whenever the people invoke him, it must be for good cause; if he is called upon when there is no reason to do so, the invocation may produce an adverse effect (also see Tidjani-Serpos, 1996:12-13). Ogun protects the poor in the society because he experiences what they encountered or might be encountering. He is thus reconstructed as a protector who will

promptly respond to the appeals of the oppressed in their encounter with an unjust fate. Ogun is looked to for justice within society, and protection from internal and external enemies. However, this might make him the subject of a negative interpretation by the modernist who may well argue that Ogun's temper makes him a dreaded figure. Rather, Ogun is not a wicked god; although he protects the innocent, the poor and victims of abuse, he inflicts pain and eliminates the oppressor.

Considering Moronton's role in the play, Ogun is reimagined as the helper of the poor. Her family is not among the recognised and well known households in the Ala community. Her father according to the play's stage directions is a 'poor farmer' (31) who is barely able to relate to the chiefs when they visit. Her mother is also a petty trader who perceives that Moronton is a means of improving their standard of living if she marries the king. Iya Moro encourages Moronton to leave her suitor and consider doing so:

MORONTONU: But, mama, what shall we do to Dauda who has been pestering me to marry him?

IYA MORO: Are you still talking about him now that a bigger offer has come? Which one do you think is better; to suffer in the house of Dauda or to enjoy the rest of your life in the house of a king as one of his wives? Tell me, which is better? (MORONTONU *does not answer.*) Answer now. You know we are poor and an opportunity for us to be rich has come and you are still talking of Dauda. Please, don't annoy me this morning.

The above does not accord the status of being outcasts to Moronton's family; however, the stigma attached to being poor is considered to do so. Their condition relates to coloniality of being: to recall a discussion from chapter one with reference to Maldonado-Torres and Escobar, while the coloniality of power concerns itself with the interrelation between modern forms of exploitation and domination and the coloniality of knowledge has to do with the impact of the different areas of knowledge production, the coloniality of being is primarily concerned with the ontological dimension of coloniality that emphasises ontological difference (Maldonado – Torres, 2007:242). Although this relates to the issue of race and racism, the discussion here associates this question with the oppressed in a society. The distinction here is not that of the ontological difference of the skin colour but that between the rich and the poor. While the rich belong to the 'zone of being', the poor are relegated to the 'zone of non-being'. There is a massive gap between the two classes of people, so that to cross over to the zone of being requires the amount of wealth the people in that zone possess. Such is the case of Iya Moro



who requests her daughter to abandon Dauda and marry the king instead. Morontonnu's family may thus be located in the zone of non-being since those in this zone rely on the gods to rescue them from poverty. In the extract below, it is implied that before asking for protection from the gods, Iya Moro gives praises and thanks to Orisa-nla. According to the different portfolios of the sixteen ministers of Orisa-nla, Ogun is tasked with protection; he is the god that Iya Moro has in mind when thanking Orisa-nla, as evident here:

IYA MORO: I am the happiest woman on earth. This beautiful daughter Orisa-nla gave us is now a blessing to us. Who would have thought that we would one day dine with the king? Who would have thought that my daughter would be an Olori, the king's wife? My enemies are now put to shame. Orisa-nla, I thank you. Morontonnu, may your ancestors protect you. Remember, you have to mind your business. Remember, as I said, the daughter of whom you are. (Roy-Omoni, 2012:39)

In the above extract, Iya Moro seems to see the handiwork of the gods in the king choosing her daughter for a bride. Morontonnu is selected after a process of divination, which means the gods are directly involved. Balogun's presence during the divination also symbolises Ogun's influence in the process. Balogun and Otunba have just finished approaching Morontonnu who meets the requirement of being a 'strong blood' (28) to become the king's new wife. It can be inferred from the above that Iya Moro is thanking Ogun for giving them a daughter who is now a blessing, and is also praying that he will guide her during her sojourn in the palace.

There is a possibility of the denial of rights and privileges to Morontonnu and also of deliberate actions by her senior wives who dislike her, based on their perceptions of her as a less privileged person, an individual who emanates from the zone of non-being. In the light of this, Baba Ifa fortifies Morontonnu with an Ogun implement in order to deal with the segregation or victimisation that might occur in the palace. Consider Baba Ifa's words after confirming Morontonnu as the new bride of the king:

*(BABA IFA settles on the ground, brings out his divination board and galvanizes into action. As BABA IFA starts to divine, BALOGUN raises a song which BABA IFA sang while entering and the rest chorus. BABA IFA finishes, gives a deep sigh and looks straight at MORONTONU whose heart skips a bit. The rest stop singing.)*

BALOGUN: I hope all is well, Baba Ifa.

BABA IFA: It is well. Morontonnu has been destined to marry a king. *(They all look at one another with surprise.)* But I see enemies hovering around her like scavengers scrambling

for a dead carcass. Her enemies can only bark, but they cannot bite her, if only she applies caution to all she does. I will give her a necklace, which she must put on every time till she shall deliver a baby and three months after the baby has been delivered. This is to prevent the enemies from having power over her. Morontonu, come nearer. (*Morontonu does that quickly while BABA IFA takes out the necklace.*) When a basket takes in water, all the water immediately goes out of it. When your enemies see you, all their anger shall immediately go out of them. (*The rest chorus "Ase!" at intervals.*) Agbabiaka, it shall not spoil in your time. If fire sees water, it forgets the burning house. If your enemies see you, they shall forget the evil they plan against you. Your enemies shall tread under your feet. No evil planned against you in the king's palace shall materialize. Anybody that troubles you, trouble shall trouble such a person. Orunmila shall protect you. Our ancestors shall protect you. (*He shakes the necklace and hangs it on MORONTONU's neck.*) Go in peace. (MORONTONU stands up. BABA IFA packs his paraphernalia and stands.)

OTUNBA: We thank you, Baba Ifa. May Orunmila continue to give you wisdom. (*The rest give a terrific shout of "Ase! as BABA IFA goes out.*) (Roy-Omoni, 2012:37-38)

Ogun's characteristic as a protector is being signified in this excerpt when Baba Ifa supports Morontonu. Noteworthy from Baba Ifa's words is the fact that the prayers are offered to Orunmila, who is also part of the sixteen ministers and the one overseeing divination in Yorubaland. Baba Ifa also makes reference to the gods who will also protect Morontonu. It is accordingly implied that Orunmila, the Yoruba god of divination and wisdom, will provide her with wisdom and Ogun, whose duty in the Yoruba pantheon is to protect, will keep her from evil. The enemies that Baba Ifa refers to are those within the confines of the palace, who might arise as a result of jealousy due to her sudden elevation from poverty to affluence. This is a practice that is also common in polygamy where the last wife to be married becomes the groom's favourite and the other wives lose their husband's attention (see Agadjanian 2000:434). Morontonu is instructed to wear the necklace, a symbol of Ogun's protection, continually till she is delivered of her baby. A noteworthy point is that protection necklaces are typically made from cowries. These shells are significant costumes during the Ogun festival in Yorubaland as masquerades and worshippers wear them for several purposes. Campbell notes that, 'As the masker (egungun) moves, the cowrie shells sway along with him from side to side in a rhythmic flow, echoing the dance of the otherworldly performer [emphasis added]' (Campbell, 2015:7). The cowries adorn the person as not only a musical kind of costume but also for protection during the performance. The necklace in this case also signifies Ogun's presence and influence during Morontonu's confirmation as the new bride. It also demonstrates

that Morontonnu is supported by the gods to marry the king and produce an heir for him. Baba Ifa's gift of a necklace to Morontonnu indicates he wants Ogun to be her protector. Its presence on her neck symbolises that Ogun will ward off any evil targeted at her. The priest's intention is reinforced when he declares, 'anybody that troubles you, trouble shall trouble such a person' (38). This signifies a reprisal against anyone who dares question the protection of Ogun over Morontonnu.

Roy-Omoni adopts this aspect of Yoruba history in reconstructing the protective nature of Ogun. The latter's portfolio as the god overseeing protection among the Yoruba pantheon is further emphasised in Morontonnu's reliance on his protection, as she also reinforces her need to be invisible to any attack. She uses words that relate to benefitting from Ogun-related implements in this excerpt:

AWELEWA: Have you not gone to your parents' house or you want to put to bed in the king's palace?

MORONTONU: I will soon be going.

AWELEWA: All right. Is there anybody at home?

MORONTONU: Eru is in the inner chamber with the king. Abeni and Yetunde have gone to the farm. (*As AWELEWA goes into the room, she looks at MORONTONU spitefully and hisses. MORONTONU returns her spiteful look. She looks at AWELEWA from head to toe and hisses back.*) Foolish woman, you can't do anything to me. There is nothing people like you can do to me. (*She continues with her sewing then after some minutes, she soliloquizes.*) Morontonnu, this is me. Me who had her habitation in the countryside, down the steepy and rugged path that leads to the mighty ocean. There my thatched roof, often pierced by the intensity of the sun, kept me panting and at night, the dew bathes my body with cold breeze. Nine months have passed me by in this place with its wonderful glories, leaving me an expectant mother with a child to care for, a child to call my own. Orisa-nla, let it be a male child. Like a dream come true, new wife shall become a woman tomorrow and a mother at last. But ... there is fear in my heart. Oh, Orisa-nla, come and be with me and keep this child for me. Our great ancestors whose powerful arms made ... (Roy-Omoni, 2015:50)

Morontonnu's reference to the word 'thatched roof' as her protection from the 'sun' (50) alludes to her former life of poverty. Bearing in mind Ogun's role as the helper and protector of the poor, she calls on Orisa-nla to help her preserve her new life of wealth and her soon-to-be-born baby. Ogun is implied in this extract as Orisa-nla's minister who is tasked with protection and

aiding the poor to overcome their challenges. The stage direction depicts Awelewa's hatred and her position as a threat to Moronton's wellbeing in the palace. Moronton in response to Awelewa's gesture reinforces her position as an Ogun believer by her conviction that she is untouchable. Ogun is not only the god of iron but he is also iron itself. Every one of his followers believes that Ogun is present everywhere since most items of daily equipment are made of iron. Thus, bearing in mind the presence of the necklace and her supposed invincibility, Moronton's reference to Orisa-nla and the ancestors signifies that she is assured of the god's support.

Ogun's nature as the helper of the poor in the play does not cease in his protecting Moronton's unborn child, but also extends to the mother. This becomes evident when Awelewa lies that Moronton is responsible for kidnapping the newborn. Although he is an individual who represents Ogun in the community, Isorowolu orders Moronton to be beheaded; however, Ogun as the custodian of truth in the play protects her. Since Ogun detests unjust use of his implements, when this occurs he intervenes in the situation. Ogun protects Moronton due to the fact that the weapon Werepe is going to use to kill Moronton is an Ogun instrument (a cutlass or sword); hence Ogun intervenes to make sure Werepe does not use his weapon to cause harm to an innocent woman. There is no way Ogun would not interfere in this case since the weapon of destruction is metal. Ogun punishes the offender and takes vengeance against the erring one.

Due to Ogun's protection, it was impossible for the execution to take place, as Awelewa confesses later in the play. Isorowolu is angered due to the newborn baby being taken to the evil forest as a sacrifice to Esu. Owing to Isorowolu's belief that the baby is a gift from Ogun and anyone who initiates evil towards the baby will be sacrificed to Ogun (59), he orders Moronton, who was accused by Awelewa, to be executed. Ogun as the protector delays the process because the king himself instructs Werepe, the palace's chief guard, 'to wait for his last command' (68). The following excerpt illustrates this point:

KING: Not this time at all. All your tricks have been discovered. Balogun, call me the chief guard.

BALOGUN: (*Calling.*) Werepe! Werepe!!

WEREPE: Yes, my lord. (*He enters holding a cutlass and prostrates to the KING.*)

Kabiyesi o. May you live long, Kabiyesi.

KING: Take her and prepare her as food for the task ahead.

WEREPE: (*Shocked.*) You mean who, my lord?

KING: (*Pointing to MORONTONU.*) I say take her along. When a thief joins in the search of a missing item, such will never be found. Prepare her for burial, but wait for my last command.

MORONTONU: *Yee pa, mo gbe.* I am finished. My lord, I do not understand what is going on here. Where is my child? (Roy-Omoni, 2012:67-68)

The above makes clear that it would have been possible for the king to issue an immediate order for Morontonnu's execution but he expresses a condition for it to be stayed. It is thus implied that Ogun might have delayed the process in order not to allow the blood of an innocent to be shed. If Morontonnu was truly guilty of kidnapping the child, the execution would have been a straightforward task for the palace guard to perform as the king would have pronounced his verdict, which would have been acceptable to Ogun. However, it will be recalled that Ogun is not a god that takes pleasure in the death of an innocent; he therefore protects Morontonnu from being sacrificed unjustly. Likewise, in the course of the play, whenever Isorowolu declares that Morontonnu must be executed something will distract him because Ogun intervenes each time. Bearing in mind Mojagbe's case, this god is disgusted by unjust treatment of the innocent; in a case where such a person is executed, there will be calamity in the community. Examples of occasions when Ogun hinders Morontonnu's execution follow: during the commissioning of Akoni and his fellow hunters to find the missing baby (69), the parent's arrival after two days of Morontonnu's supposed execution (77), and Baba Ifa's intervention (80).

Ogun shields the victims of injustice, some of whom might have been cast out of the community or unjustly thrown into prison. Morontonnu becomes confined there and, according to Isorowolu, Werepe should 'keep her in solitary confinement with no food until the time she will be sent to the land of no return' (69). Isorowolu commands that she is to be imprisoned and banned from having contact with people. For Morontonnu to be acquitted, the offender needs to be exposed. Baba Ifa must interrupt the execution process after every plea to Isorowolu to acquit Morontonnu becomes unsuccessful. The former emphasises that killing an innocent soul in an Ogun shrine will only attract the wrath of the god. As Morontonnu is being taken to be beheaded, the stage direction draws attention to the nature of sacrifice and to the god in the Yoruba pantheon for which the sacrifice is intended:

*(As WEREPE leads MORONTONU in for slaughter, she burst into the dirge again. As the song is going on, BABA IFA enters, to the surprise of everybody.)*

BABA IFA: Hold it. Confound it. The wind has blown and we have seen the buttocks of the fowl. *(Turning to the CHIEF GUARD.)* You must not kill an innocent soul. *(Turning to the KING.)* Kabiyesi, may you live long. Our elders say that every day for the thief but one day is for the owner. They also say that if a lie has been going for twenty years, one day, truth shall catch up with it. (Roy Omoni, 2012:80)

Morontonu's intended execution and Baba Ifa's view regarding the act reveal some noteworthy aspects of Ogun's intervention as the helper of the poor within the play itself. Morontonu's dirge links her execution to Ogun when she says she will be dying 'a shameful death, death that beheads one' (Roy-Omoni, 2012:78, written in Yoruba and translated on page 88). This symbolises that she is going to be decapitated and that the sacrifice is going to be offered to Ogun since blood related sacrifices in Yorubaland<sup>97</sup> are made only to him among the Yoruba pantheon. Isorowolu emphasises that Werepe should 'take her out for slaughter' (69) and that her blood will be used to wet the throne (79). Ogun thus becomes central in this excerpt with reference to the word 'slaughter' which might mislead a modernist thinker to interpret the god as a bloodthirsty one. It has been explained previously that Ogun does not take pleasure in reckless killing unless such an individual is a persistent offender who refuses to change. Ogun as the guardian of truth decides to expose Awelewa as the culprit, rather than Morontonu who had been wrongly accused. Awelewa's exposure takes effect after the priest threatens that the gods will strike the culprit dead if she refuses to confess, as highlighted in the following conversation when he is addressing Isorowolu's wives:

BABA IFA: Who among you is ready to confess? *(A moment of silence prevails.)*

Let me tell you, Orisa-nla is ready to strike the enemy dead any moment from now if she is not ready to talk.

*(Nobody seems ready to talk. There is perfect silence now as AWELEWA steps forward, shaking. She goes to the KING and kneels.)*

AWELEWA: No, my lord, I had rather die in place of this woman, she is innocent.

I sent the child to the evil forest. He must be dead by now. (Roy-Omoni, 2012:82)

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<sup>97</sup> BlackHomeSchoolAcademy (2014) opines that 'however, in blood offerings it is Ogun, the only one allowed to take a life, who eats first, and it is because of him that the other Orisas can be fed blood' (2014:5). Available: <https://blackhomeschoolacademy.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/orisha-families-chemistry-black-school7.pdf> [Accessed April 12, 2018. 13h32].

Orisa-nla, the supreme being as pointed out earlier, is invoked in this conversation. Baba Ifa emphasises that the god will strike the offender who refuses to speak the truth, and expose such an individual. Ogun's influence as the god whose implement is to be used to behead such a persistent offender is implied in the conversation. The fear of what Ogun might do to her causes Awelewa to confess her crime in order for the blood of an innocent not to be shed.

All through the play, Awelewa perceives Morontonnu as someone from the zone of nonbeing, as one who does not enjoy the support of the rich and mighty in their community to plead her cause in the palace. For this reason it is relatively easy for Awelewa to implicate Morontonnu as the culprit behind the kidnap. Nonetheless, Awelewa's crime causes her to become the object of sacrifice to Ogun, since she is executed instead of Morontonnu (85). Ogun protects his followers and makes sure that they are prevented from being harmed by evil. He does not want the blood of innocents to be shed in the community and also serves as the custodian of truth. In this section, Ogun has been reconceptualised as one who aids the poor in the society. He is constantly ready to shield them from both external and internal attacks. This section has reconstructed the god as the protector from internal attacks. The next part will discuss Ogun as the champion of labourers.

#### **5.4.3 Ogun, the champion of labourers**

This section will reconceptualise Ogun as the champion of labourers as explored in the play text. Yoruba people believe it is Ogun that furthers the interest of the oppressed in society. Because Ogun despises oppression, he does not allow any of his followers to be victims. He believes all people are equal and are entitled to be treated the same. Ogun brings good fortune to his followers who are hardworking and do not, by any criminal act, prosper in their dealings. Mason asserts that 'Ogun is the champion of labourers everywhere, and his movements and whereabouts are carefully charted by all workers. His appearance signals the locating and procuring of the raw materials needed for production, which in turn leads to the employment of workers, and the prosperity that comes with the manufacturing and marketing of finished goods' (Mason, 1997:355). Mason presents Ogun as the patron god of workers, tasked with providing the raw materials used in production, which leads to improving people's standard of living. Ogun is accordingly constructed as a god who provides for the needy and empowers the less privileged in the community. To reiterate, the Yoruba people believe that all implements used in production in industries and agriculture are provided by Ogun. Therefore, during Ogun festivals in Yorubaland, motorists, farmers, and medical practitioners often pay homage to him.

This is because farmers make use of iron equipment to plant and harvest, while most forms of surgical apparatus are manufactured from iron which, as mentioned, includes the technological aspects of the world around one. Ogun's feature as the champion of labourers is explored in this play through the character of Akoni, Morontonu's parent and Balogun.

One praise name of Ogun is Ogun Onire, which translates as Ogun, the source of good fortune. 'Ire' here denotes fortune, not the name of the village Ogun ruled as a king during his sojourn on earth (see Odebode, 2015:113). Patience, as the source of good fortune, is often associated with Ogun by the Yoruba people. Usually, when a village priest speaks of patience as a solution to a problem, he or she is indirectly referring to Ogun as the source of the solution. Balogun in the play often insists on patience whenever he is speaking to Isorowolu regarding the latter's inability to produce a male child (Roy-Omoni, 2012:25, 28). He attempts to remind Isorowolu that the only solution is to have patience and hope that the gods will bless him owing to his contribution as the leader of the people. Balogun's reference to patience displays a similarity to Morontonu's parents' belief that it is their patience that has caused the gods to bless them with a beautiful daughter and make her a queen in the community (31). Their status is elevated from being poor farmers and traders to being the king's in-laws. Ogun's nature as the champion of labourers in Baba Moro's household is reinforced in Iya Moro's thanksgiving to Orisa-nla after their daughter had been confirmed as the new queen of Ala kingdom (Roy-Omoni, 2012:39). Her references to 'protection' and how soon their status could change from being poor farmers to being relatives of the king signify that they have the support of the gods. Morontonu is also being reminded of some features of a faithful Ogun worshipper: respect and reverence to higher authorities. By respecting higher authority and according respect to those to whom respect is due, Iya Moro believes Ogun, the minister of Orisa-nla who offers protection, will champion her cause in the palace and bless her with what other wives in the palace do not have: a male child. Ogun loves those who respect authorities and pay their dues, but any defaulter will face Ogun's wrath (see Okunola, 2012:1058). Morontonu is to respect her senior wives and mind her own business in the palace; in so doing, she could attract Ogun's favour.

Akoni is another character in the play who enjoys the support of Ogun, the champion of labourers. He is the hunter who was commissioned to retrieve the baby from Esu in the evil forest. A noteworthy point is that 'Esu' in this play is not portrayed as the Yoruba trickster god



but as a mystic character who controls the evil forest<sup>98</sup>. According to Osiba, Akoni is a ‘mystic hunter’ who is endowed with the knowledge of how to win spiritual battles. Balogun supports Akoni’s appointment and notes that Ogun will support him and his team on their mission (68). Balogun says, ‘Kabiyesi, do not be dismayed, the fight is not yet over for I strongly believe that Orisa-nla who gave him to us will not disappoint us neither will he forsake us at this crucial time’ (68). Balogun invokes Orisa-nla to support these hunters. Ogun, the god in the Yoruba Orisa pantheon that oversees hunters and warriors, is therefore implied in Balogun’s invocation. Owing to the nature of their work and constant use of metal objects in it, hunters in Yorubaland are in the forefront of celebration during the Ogun festivals. They are known to enjoy his backing due to their faithful referencing of him. They sacrifice to Ogun at any given opportunity and often devote a portion of the animal they have hunted and caught to him. The Yoruba people believe that any hunter that is not faithful to this practice denies himself a successful hunting spree.

To further grasp the role of hunters and how they enjoy Ogun’s support, Akoni’s contribution to the progress of Ala kingdom cannot be overemphasised. As indicated, Akoni and three hunters were commissioned by the king to retrieve the baby from the evil forest (69). With the hope that the hunters would display Ogun’s characteristics of bravery, strength, courage, and determination, as was indicated in the synopsis, Akoni, Elegbede, Oluode and Awo, were commissioned and promised the hand of the first princess as the prize of any of the hunters who succeeded in rescuing the baby from the forbidden forest. Ogun, the champion of labourers, dislikes fear and display of weakness as mentioned in chapter three, when I was exploring Oki’s role. Unlike Akoni who displays Ogun’s bravery, the other hunters who accompany him in his quest to retrieve the baby from the evil forest show signs of weakness; Esu defeats them while trying to rescue the infant. The following conversation signifies that fear might cause an individual to lose Ogun’s support.

AKONI: Great one, we have consulted our oracle. Orunmila has confirmed that the child is here lying in the forest of death. Lead us to him, great one.

ESU: But the child is dead. Roasted alive. Go home, mortal men. You are in for a dangerous mission.

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<sup>98</sup> Esu is not evil as a modernist might portray him. According to Balogun, ‘another divinity that is always being associated with evil is known as “Esu”. While it is true that “Esu” is capable of doing evil, it will be totally incorrect to perceive “Esu” as an all-evil being like ‘Satan’ of Judeo-Christian thought’ (Balogun, 2009:7). Esu is the name of another character just like Balogun, Akoni or Baba Moro in this play. He should not be mistaken for the Yoruba trickster god.

OLUODE: We will not leave except you help us.

ESU: (*He gives a terrific shout that makes the men retreat. The demons come out and dance round the hunters. They get hold of ELEGBEDE who before now has been shaken. ELEGBEDE struggles to free himself. The demons overpower, kill and carry him off.*) That is a lesson for the rest of you. You tread on a dangerous path, mortal men. I advise you go back home. (Roy-Omoni, 2012:73-74)

Cowardice and fear are features Ogun dislikes in his representatives in the community<sup>99</sup>. Such followers are expected to have the kind of strength and courage that their patron god possesses. The representatives need Ogun's strength and courage to carry out their daily assignment. Owing to the dangerous and physically demanding nature of the work ironworkers perform every day, they require courage and strength, which are attributes dominant in Ogun's imagery. Any sign of weakness or fear might cause injury or death while on duty. It is important to note is that Ogun did not determine Elegbede's fate, for him to die while retrieving the baby, but he died because of his display of fear. Elegbede becomes the first of the hunters to die. The way in which he does so is similar to that of Awo, who attempts to discourage the remaining hunters to quit the assignment they are commissioned to carry out. In his words, 'we suffer this wickedness because of a woman. Elegbede has died in active service. I suggest we go home. I am beginning to be afraid. Who knows what next?' (Roy-Omoni-2012:74). As highlighted earlier, Awo also reinforced the word 'afraid' which is antithetical to what Ogun represents in Yorubaland. The hunters' relationship with Ogun can also be inferred from their names; Akoni means 'brave warrior or hero', Awo 'warrior priest', Oluode 'chief hunter', Elegbede 'the strong one'<sup>100</sup>. One could infer that since they are Ogun principles, the hunters are expected to exhibit Ogun's characteristics of being a courageous and fearless warrior. Furthermore, it is expected that he will support their mission.

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<sup>99</sup> According to Drewal's classification of Ogun representatives, hunters are placed in the first category (Drewal, 1997:239). Drewal makes the point already mentioned, that 'the attributes of Ogun are, in many ways, mirrored by all his followers who live and work with iron' (Drewal, 1997:239). Iron workers or those who work with iron implements are classified into three categories that range from the forest to the community. In the first group are the hunters, warriors, and palm-wine tappers, whose iron implements are varied: spears, guns, arrows, swords, spiked clubs, chained club, knives, cutlasses and axes. In the second group are the farmers, whose cutlasses, axes, and hoes first clear the bush and till the earth, and the ironworkers, who mine and smelt with their picks, shovels, prongs, pokers, hooks, pricklers, and hammers. In the third group are the blacksmiths, with their hammers, anvils, pokers, tongs, and shears, who fashion all manner of utilitarian implements as well as exquisite sculpture in iron; the wood-carvers, with their axes, adzes, and knives; the barbers, with their razors; and the body artists who draw tattoos with their delicate blades (Drewal, 1997:239).

<sup>100</sup> Famoye, 2015:185.

Ogun becomes the champion of labourers who show characteristics of strength, courage, and determination through the character of Akoni, in contrast to those of his fellow hunters. Akoni retrieves the baby from Esu after he displays courage and determination while combating the latter. The stage directions that depict Akoni's victory over Esu reveal certain notable aspects of how courage and determination can allow an individual to enjoy the support of Ogun, the champion of labourers:

*(AKONI beckons on OLUODE and whispers a few words. Then as ESU turns to go with the child, the hunters rush at him and another severe fight ensues. In the process, ESU hits OLUODE on the head. Oluode collapses. Left only to contend with ESU, AKONI fearlessly challenges and in the process, gets the child. As he tries to run, ESU hits him on the head and he falls with the child. ESU carries the child and as he is about to run, AKONI struggles to his feet. After a few inaudible incantations, he confronts ESU again. The two wrestle for some time. Visibly tired, AKONI tries the last opportunity. He blows a medicinal powder on ESU who staggers for a few seconds and falls. AKONI rises up, carries the baby and runs off. ESU also rises up and pursues AKONI. Light fades out.)* (Roy-Omoni, 2012:76)

The above pictures the struggle between the two remaining hunters, Akoni and Oluode, who both struggled with Esu in order to save the child he was about to roast alive. Both men have been encouraging the other hunters to exhibit courage and determination. The play does not note the reason which led to Oluode's death but when it comes to describing what Akoni did to overcome Esu, the playwright records that Akoni fearlessly confronts Esu and becomes the only survivor in the forbidden forest. A reader could infer that Akoni employs Ogun's characteristics of fearlessness to oppose Esu, and conquered him due to his courageous display. After Oluode's death, it is possible for Akoni also to fear what he is about to encounter, lacking the help of his deceased colleague. His display of bravery when he tackles Esu sums up the fact that Ogun followers do not give up, owing to their reliance on the champion of labourers. This is evident in Akoni's testimony to Isorowolu when he arrives at the palace. He reports, 'my lord, the battle was not easy. The hunters, through the mystic powder, fought Esu, the king of the forest. He was setting the fire with which to roast your son, Kabiyesi, but through bravery and prowess we won the battle. Your son is alive, hale and hearty but the hunters are dead' (Roy-Omoni, 2012:83). Akoni's emphasis on the word 'bravery and prowess' is symbolic of

Ogun's attribute as a champion of labourers who protects and guides the footsteps of his followers. Akoni displays determination and commitment to his community, characteristics that Ogun also possesses.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Although Ogun is not mentioned in the play, the manner in which the god's characteristics are inferred from the characters' conversation and actions depicts how he performs his duties in Yorubaland. Orisa-nla is portrayed as a godhead whose fragments become the Yoruba pantheon of which Ogun is part; this chapter examined some of his functions. One may infer that Ogun in *Morontonu* is an obstacle remover, helper of the poor and the champion of labourers. This is because, in the Yoruba pantheon, all the gods have their individual roles which they perform in the society. To recapitulate, Ogun protects the victims of injustice and the poor in the community. He nurtures and protects the oppressed. To one's enemy, Ogun is a wicked god but to his followers he is their saviour. He also dislikes fear, dishonesty, lying, and wickedness, which are attributes that most of the people who turn themselves into Ogun's opponents possess. From a decolonial point of view, Ogun is reconstructed as a god who does not take pleasure in shedding innocent blood and who will also not allow an innocent person to be punished unjustly. He will invariably devise a way to vindicate his followers. The next chapter provides a conclusion to this study.

## 6 CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

This final chapter summarises the arguments advanced throughout the chapters on the reimagination of Ogun as an African subject who had been relegated to the margins by negative features accorded to him. It demonstrates that the figure of Ogun has been misinterpreted by the combination of coloniality/modernity evident in certain scholars' commentaries. Finally, the chapter advocates for the adoption of decoloniality as a plausible solution to reimagining Ogun in an allegedly modernised world.

This study explored the ways in which Ogun was reimagined by recent selected Nigerian playwrights. The first chapter of this thesis highlighted the basis for choosing Ogun among other members of the Yoruba pantheon, which elicited the purpose for discussing the means of knowledge production. My knowledge about Yoruba history, social interaction, social location, reader's response, and constant contact with my research mentor and colleagues in the field of performance and literature, are sources from which I have derived the information employed in this study on Ogun. Particularly, I mentioned participation in the Ogun festival and also growing up in a community that celebrates him annually as constituting the core of my knowledge about the god of iron. This has aided the investigation into the myths about the origin of Yorubaland and facilitated my choice of Ogun from the said mythology. With specific reference to how Ogun aids other Yoruba gods to create Yorubaland and to the presence of the god in all their primordial activities, the selected plays provide evidence of how the chosen playwrights construct the god of iron. This I have achieved by interrogating the work of four playwrights from the years 2008 to 2012, deliberately selected to represent a time when a decolonial epistemic perspective has become relevant to analyse works of literature. The chosen playwrights are Omoko, Ododo, Yerima and Roy-Omoni. Chapters two to five of this thesis emphasised how these playwrights adopt the rich tradition of Yoruba culture to reconstruct Ogun. I used the given perspective to infer Ogun from characters' actions and conversations in the chosen texts.

Locus of enunciation, a key term in decolonial thought, which denotes thinking from the position where an individual is situated, aids my adoption of a decolonial epistemic perspective for analysing the chosen texts. Chapter one, for example, drew attention to participation in the Ogun festival as a factor contributing to my locus of enunciating Ogun from the standpoint of

an African subject from Yorubaland. The Ogun festival in this chapter alludes to an annual practice by the Yoruba people. My definition of these people encompasses those in the South-Western part of Nigeria, from where I originated. Ogun is the Yoruba god of war and iron, which has been a definition that has been misinterpreted in much previous scholarly discourse. The chapter argued that the adoption of a decolonised viewpoint by scholars will assist in gaining a deeper understanding of the various notions, both positive and negative attributes, about the Yoruba god. I have been guided in my investigation by the following key research questions about Ogun: How has the Ogun myth been absorbed into modern Nigerian narratives, contrasting the efforts of scholars who are influenced by modernity shortly after Nigerian independence? What is the significance of Ogun in Yoruba mythology? How is Ogun being interpreted in different communities depending on their understanding of who Ogun is to them? Who are the Ogun worshippers or principles? In answering these central research questions, a thematic analysis of the four plays was carried out. In some of the plays, Ogun is being explicitly mentioned and emphasised, while others merely imply him in the play's themes, conversations and actions. It is also significant to note that certain of the selected playwrights construct Ogun in similar ways using specific characters playing specific roles. For example, in both *Morontonu* and *Mojagbe*, there is a character named Balogun who acts in defence of the community. Both characters are fearless, brave and ready to attend to their respective community's need, as Ogun would be.

Chapter one discussed the theoretical aspect of this study, a decolonial epistemic perspective. In the chapter, I argued the difference between postcoloniality and decoloniality as two different terms. In my analysis, I mentioned that 'postcolonialism' explores issues by looking at the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras but fails to realise that coloniality still exists in every sphere of life, including academics, economic, religion, etcetera, and also fails to acknowledge the fact that knowledge should be determined based on a locus of enunciation. Decoloniality, on the other hand, proffers the view that coloniality still exists and that it survives colonialism. I argued that postcolonialism directly queries issues such as hybridity, class, order, the other, or colour domination, while decoloniality proposes that colonialism effected much more evil than that related to class or hybridity and termed the aftermath of colonialism as coloniality. According to the view expressed in chapter one, decoloniality explores the violence that colonialism caused, rather than undertaking direct criticism of colonialism, which is the core of postcolonialism. Decoloniality is used as a term to delink from the notion that colonialism has ended. The perspective criticises the present day order

where knowledge, identity and power are still being dictated by the Euro-North academy. Chapter one thus argued that colonialism still exists, and proposed three ways in which decoloniality may be understood, namely, coloniality of power, knowledge and being, which are not explained or explored in postcolonialism. I acknowledged coloniality of power as laying bare the ways in which the ex-colonised world is still suffering from the tenets of colonialism. For example, there will always be the zone of being and the zone of non-being. The alleged zone of being refers to Euro-North America, where all that is produced is perceived as superior. On the other hand, the zone of non-being denotes the ex-colonies, where all that is produced is referred to as barbaric, outdated and primitive. The chapter discussed how the Euro-North academy determines the definition of the term 'god'. The second concept discussed in this chapter is coloniality of knowledge, which refers to how the epistemology that emerges from the West is considered superior to those epistemologies that are produced in the ex-colonies. Chapter one has demonstrated how people in the ex-colonised world have been made to abandon their indigenous beliefs and view them as outmoded, which reiterates Ndlovu-Gatsheni's perception on coloniality of knowledge as the way in which 'African subjects begin the painful path of learning to hate their progenitors as demons, they begin to be taught that all the knowledge they possessed before coming to school was nothing but folk knowledges, barbarism and superstitions that must be quickly be forgotten' (2013b:11). This thesis argued that this alleged exposure to Western culture might be the reason why most of the scholars influenced by modernity portray African gods as barbaric. The two other reasons that were mentioned in chapter one as the cause of such influence are financial gain and international accolades for the alleged scholars. Lastly, coloniality of being assists in investigating how African humanity is being questioned in an alleged modernised world. Coloniality of being speaks of how African subjects were rearticulated according to the racialised stereotypes of otherness and how they are being made to feel inferior. I have also argued that, although postcolonialism tends to oppose some tenets of colonialism, it still maintains the Eurocentric mentality. Postcolonialism does not understand modernity as the cause of violence in the ex-colonised world, whereas decoloniality condemns modernity and understands it as coloniality.

The works of Quijano (2000), Mignolo (2007), Grosfoguel (2007), Maldonado-Torres (2007), Santos (2007) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) offer insight into the three pillars of coloniality. Further engagement with these scholars reveals that there are numerous Ogun features which are being misinterpreted and misrepresented, not only Africans but to the world at large. While coloniality of knowledge helps one to delink from the notion that Ogun is a bloodthirsty,

wicked, arrogant and selfish god, coloniality of being corrects the notion that the god is inferior to the Western definition of god. As part of the sixteen elders of Eledumare, the Supreme Being, Ogun becomes an appropriate part of the structure and has his own duties that he performs in the pantheon. Ogun is not outside the alleged modernity as coloniality of power might cause one to believe. He is still relevant in academic discourse and also in society as a god of justice, peace, protection, strength, fertility and communal integration, as this thesis has contended. Decoloniality helps commentators to delink from the notion that the rites performed as regards Ogun are barbaric, outmoded, primitive, outdated and not meant for modern and civilised people. I outlined that the erroneous notion regarding Ogun is not limited to the ex-colonisers alone, but is also held by some people who were born and raised in Yorubaland. I maintained that this set of Yoruba find it difficult to participate or contribute towards the existence of indigenous worship, and as such, believe that all that is associated with African gods is evil.

As mentioned earlier, the plays chosen for this thesis are relevant for carrying out a decolonial study. I argued that the events in the plays are representations of the Yoruba people's culture. The Euro-North Academy has succeeded in causing many such people to believe that traditional beliefs are barbaric and they instead need to accept the Western version of God. For example, the first chapter of this thesis emphasises that Africans are being persuaded to forsake their indigenous ways; doing so is, to the ex-colonisers, a 'progressive way of life'. From a decolonial point of view, most Yoruba people, in particular, have little knowledge of their indigenous cultural practices due to their acceptance and embracing of Western culture against the backdrop of their indigenous beliefs. Decoloniality suggests therefore that if this romance with the Euro-North is not checked, there will be no authentic indigenous culture in Nigeria, but only a culture that has been altered to suit the selfish interest of the 'West'. I contended in chapter two that the romance might lead to what Santos refers to as 'epistemicide' (Santos, 2014:92), that is, the extermination of indigenous knowledge and culture.

Understanding the relevance of the three pillars of coloniality assists in answering the fundamental question of: Why decoloniality to study Ogun? The study exposed how the fate of the African subject 'Ogun' is determined by what the Euro-North academy sees it to be. The thesis argued that Ogun should be interpreted based on what he is doing for the community and not subjected to negative conclusion on the part of those who do not understand how he acts in the community. This discussion continued in chapter two where Ogun is being constructed as the god of peace and harvest in Peter Omoko's *Battles of Pleasure*. In this chapter, the belief



that Ogun causes commotion in the community was countered. Ogun is thus presented as a deity that creates peace among his people. The Yoruba people believe that with Ogun as the god of peace their society will be free of rancour and chaos. This is due to the principles that the people embrace. The chapter reinforced the argument that Yoruba people possess the ability to discern what Ogun wants, and also what he does not. I indicated that thorough application of this knowledge would result in peace in the community. Using Saniyo and Logbo's characters, the chapter considered how disregard and disobedience of Ogun's tenets could incur the god's wrath. From a decolonial perspective, Logbo disrespects Ogun's principles in the community and as a result attracts the wrath of Ogun. Instead of sticking to the community's code of conduct on how songs are rendered during the festival, he chooses to inflict a direct insult on Saniyo, thereby fulfilling a personal interest rather than Ogun's concerns. The chapter also constructs Ogun as the god of the harvest who aids farmers to reap a bountiful crop and bring an end to famine in the land. This elicits the reason why the Ogun festival is performed yearly. Omoko in the *Battles of Pleasure* borrows from the rich tradition of the Ogun festival and the ways in which the songs are rendered to portray how the god provides, protects and blesses the people with fertility in all aspects of their lives. In the chapter, I mentioned that one of the motives for attending a traditional festival is the desire for relaxation regardless of the participant's emotion. For instance, during the performance by the Igede troupe, the leaders' wives of the rival troupe, Sati and Hwofadon, did not know how to react to the act, whether to laugh or cry at the abusive song, with their husbands as the major target. In fact, the stage direction introducing the Igede troupe reinforces the point:

*... as they set to perform, vigorous drumming and dancing are heard afar off ... Hwofadon and Sati exchanges glances, each trying to control her emotions. Sati tries to stifle a laugh but suddenly bursts out, laughing. Hwofadon not knowing what to do tries to remain indifferent. (Omoko, 2009: 66)*

Ogun is thus reimagined from a decolonial point of view as a god who does not cause commotion in the community but encourages peaceful co-existence and love among people. The chapter also corrects the notion of the association of Ogun with the colour red, which modernists have been misrepresenting to connote his anger. The argument in this chapter was that the colour 'red' is a symbol of Ogun's presence and does not portray that the god is angry or ready to cause disorder. The red might also symbolise cleansing as it is associated with fresh blood. Ogun's association with the colour red is also explored in chapter four when the villagers protest by wearing this colour to signify his support of their actions.

The discussion of Ogun's representation continued in chapter three when the researcher was discussing how the deity is being reconceptualised in Ododo's *Hard Choice* as a god of justice. The chapter emphasised that before peace could be achieved in a community, there should be justice. Ogun as a custodian of oath and justice collaborates with Oguguru to achieve peace and tranquillity in the Emepiri Igbo community. *Hard Choice* reinforced Ogun's transcendentality and emphasised how his influence is felt beyond Yorubaland. Ogun comes to the scene as the god of the Yoruba community who intended to solidify the friendship between Igedu and Emepiri through a marital union. During the traditional wedding celebration, some village thugs seized the crown of the Yoruba king, which angered Ogun due to their disrespect for Yoruba royal authority. Ogun thus collaborates with Oguguru, the Emepiri god, to demand stringent punishment as opposed to the initial service requested from Princess Azingae. Owing to his role as the Yoruba god of justice, it was pertinent for a vow to be fulfilled which led to the death of the princess. From a decolonial perspective, her death led to the cleansing of the community and breeding of a decolonised African future. Ogun is also reimagined as a god of communal integration and peaceful co-existence when the two communities, Emepiri and Igedu, agree to make the Yoruba prince or his offspring the heir apparent to the Emepiri throne.

In chapter three, the facekuerade served as a decolonial perspective sub-theory to analyse *Hard Choice*. It acted as a parameter to understand the link between the spiritual and the physical. It also helped one to grasp the reason behind the princess' death rather than her service to Oguguru that had been demanded in the play. The sub-theory assisted one to comprehend how coloniality affects the administration in Emepiri. It revealed Chief Ubanga and Queen Amaka's collaboration to replace the request of the god with the stolen crown. Facekuerade aids the understanding that once the crown had been stolen, the king would be without his authority and would also die. Chief Ubanga and Queen Amaka had to pay dearly for their crime which affected the initial request from the god of the land. Ogun and Oguguru are reconstructed as gods that enforce honest governance, courageous leadership and truth-telling. Due to the disrespect for royal authority, the gods demand blood sacrifice. I argued in this chapter that African gods are not bloodthirsty deities and do not take pleasure in reckless killings. They only become angry when what is due to them has been intentionally denied them.

Ogun acting as a reformer underpinned the argument in chapter four, which analysed him as one who expects evildoers to change their ways by sending several warnings to them: failure

to yield to his caution leads to their ultimate downfall. This chapter discussed how Yerima in *Mojagbe* criticises Nigerian leaders for failing to learn from history and points out how their selfish interest affects not only them but also their followers. This chapter argued that Ogun as a reformer would want such leaders to turn from their ways and do what is right. Mojagbe becomes the focus of argument in the chapter; as the king of his people and a representative of the gods, he is expected to know what the gods represent in the community and act accordingly. Instead, he commits several atrocities in order to gain immortality and control over everyone in the community. He ordered people's death and sacrificed his family because he wanted to live longer on earth. Ogun warned Mojagbe to change but he obstinately refused; this led to his death. The chapter also argued that Ogun does not dictate how a human should live his/her life. He is a just god that does not pass judgement without giving the individual a chance to change. Famule's traditional connective approach was applied as a decolonial perspective sub-theory to analyse the play, in order to understand how events interconnect. The connective theory also helps to answer certain questions such as: 'Who are the Ogun worshippers or principles? If Yoruba kings are second in command to the gods as the people believe, why will Ogun consent to Mojagbe's death as requested by the people?' These questions were answered based on the understanding of how events occurred in the play. Furthermore, from answering the questions, the chapter argued that Ogun does not encourage violence but embodies his representatives to adopt peaceful means to achieve judgement and peace in the community. I made it clear that when the representative intends to use his tool for violence, as in the case of Esan in the play, the individual loses Ogun's support. Ogun does not encourage sacrificing innocent people's blood to please him; he punishes anyone found guilty of such.

Roy-Omoni's *Morontonu* was used in chapter five to reconstruct Ogun as an obstacle remover. I made it clear that Ogun removes any obstacle, both spiritual and physical, on his followers' way to freedom. He eliminates one's enemy: an act that modernists might argue to be wickedness on the part of the gods. To counter such a notion, I argued that anyone who wants to invoke Ogun should do so with much control over his or her emotional, psychological and spiritual being. He or she must be disciplined and should have the ability to discern between good and evil, and behave accordingly. Ogun does not strike unjustly; he is a just deity that gives every human being an equal chance. Although Ogun is not mentioned in the play, I have argued my point of decolonising incorrect interpretations from the view that Orisa-nla who is mentioned in the play is not Obatala but Eledumare, the Supreme Being. Consequently, Ogun, being a member of Eledumare's sixteen ministers who had been accorded individual functions,

becomes paramount in the characters' conversations and actions in the play. I have maintained in this chapter from a decolonial point of view that Ogun is reconstructed as a god who does not take pleasure in shedding innocent blood. He will also not allow an innocent person to be punished unjustly. He will always find a way to vindicate his followers.

I wish to conclude this study by highlighting possible areas of further study into the reconstruction of Ogun. First, this study has highlighted the position of four dramatists from 2008 to 2012 when the debate on decoloniality was gaining prominence through the works of Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres, Quijano, Grosfoguel and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, who are not Nigerians. It would therefore be valuable to examine how Nigerian critics have embraced decoloniality in their writing. I have also used two male critics from Nigeria, Ododo and Famule, who have formulated decolonial Nigerian/African theory. Consequently, it would also be valuable for further research to show how Nigerian female critics embrace concepts of decoloniality. Similarly, the playwrights who are used in this study are male Nigerians; it would be interesting to know how Nigerian female playwrights reconstruct Ogun in their plays. An endeavour to investigate how Ogun is being reimagined in other genres of literature such as the novel, poetry, oral literature and short stories would also fill a gap and is recommended for further study. I hope that new theses will be written to further enhance my argument and, if warranted, that my position will be challenged on how I have reimagined Ogun in this thesis. Ogun possesses many characteristics which are not limited to the ones analysed in this thesis. He is the god of iron, technology, innovations and exploration; also the god of blacksmiths, drivers, doctors, farmers, tattoo makers, barbers, hairdressers, circumcisers, sculptors and other occupations that make use of iron implements. This thesis has discussed how hunters, farmers and warriors are constructed as Ogun principles in the four chosen play texts. Researchers could explore how drivers, health workers, blacksmiths, barbers, fishermen, and other workers associated with iron are presented to represent Ogun principles in other literary genres, particularly prose. I also did not explore in detail the *oriki* of Ogun in this thesis since they are not directly quoted in the printed texts. Researchers might therefore also examine how Ogun panegyrics are directly used as resources for drama texts.

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