

LEADERSHIP AND CULTURAL FRAMES IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *THE STRONG BREED*

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ABSTRACT. *Based on insights from sociology and critical discourse analysis, this study examines how religion enables persons and institutions to legitimise power and social control in a traditional African society. It shows that religion, besides being an instrument of social cohesion and harmony, can also serve the interest of the dominant group in the curtailment of the rights of the weak and the minority. This is built on the framework that the authorisation exercised by religious institutions and their agents is essentially derived from custom, tradition and conformity. The authorities of tradition and conformity ensure that agents sustain the cultural pattern irrespective of its consequences on human rights. This paper therefore examines how religious agents in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* (1973) use the authorities of tradition and conformity to entrench tyranny. Analyses indicate that the social contradictions and conflicts that are immanent in the society of the play are functions of distinct ideological categories/cultural frames in dramatic conflicts which make social change inevitable.*

Keywords: Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, leadership, authorisation, legitimisation, religion and tradition.

LIDERAZGO Y MARCOS CULTURALES EN *THE STRONG BREED*, DE WOLE SOYINKA

RESUMEN. *Partiendo de la sociología y del análisis crítico del discurso, en el presente artículo se analiza cómo permite la religión que personas e instituciones legitimicen su control social y del poder en una sociedad africana tradicional. Se muestra que la religión, además de constituirse en instrumento de armonía y cohesión social, también puede servir al interés del grupo dominante en la restricción de los derechos de las minorías y de los débiles. Esto se construye sobre la base de que la autoridad ejercida por las instituciones religiosas y sus agentes procede principalmente de la conformidad, la tradición y la costumbre. Las autoridades que se sujetan en la tradición y la conformidad garantizan que los agentes mantengan el patrón cultural independientemente de las consecuencias que puedan tener en los derechos humanos. Este artículo analiza, por tanto, cómo son utilizadas, por parte de los agentes religiosos, las autoridades de la tradición y la conformidad para atrincherarse en la tiranía en la obra *The Strong Breed* (1973), de Wole Soyinka. Los análisis realizados indican que los conflictos y contradicciones inherentes a la sociedad de la obra son funciones de diversos patrones culturales/categorías ideológicas que se localizan en conflictos dramáticos y que hacen que el cambio social sea inevitable.*

Palabras clave: *The Strong Breed*, Wole Soyinka, liderazgo, autorización, legitimización, religión y tradición.

Received 3 March 2017

Revised version accepted 18 July 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

Semiotic modes or regimes such as literature (oral and written), painting, sculpture, filmic and photographic representations and others like music, sound and gestures can and have been used by artists to express human conditions, experiences, interpersonal and intergroup relations. They have also been used to encode, express or expose political and religious ideologies. The Nigerian writer, like his/her contemporaries in other parts of Africa, has used the resources of literature to engage the various social and economic challenges facing the Nigerian nation. The African literary space has also witnessed some radical departures from the pioneering efforts of the likes of Soyinka, Achebe, Ngugi, Dadie, Sofola, Okigbo, Sutherland, and Osofisan just to mention a few. Issues such as colonialism and social justice, post-independence despondency occasioned by corruption and leadership failure at every level of governance, gender, identity, religion, human trafficking, prostitution, etc have received the attention of the Nigerian writer.

Oladele Taiwo observes that one outstanding characteristic of West African literature is “a return to the past—a past which was almost wiped out by two important historical events, the slave trade and colonialism” (Taiwo 2007, 29). Thus writers like Chinua Achebe (in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*) try to recreate the traditional way of life which was disrupted by colonialism. Oladele Taiwo also notes that there are others “like Wole Soyinka who are critical of the past and believe that the present is more important” (Taiwo 2007, 30). Bestriding these two broad perspectives are writers like Ben Okri and Amos Tutuola who are ambivalent about the past. Okri, for example, draws from the resources of oral tradition and history to enrich his creative canvas, and at the same time criticises the past as being responsible for the dilemmas of the present. Thus, we have the group of writers who romanticise the past; those who criticise it; and those who are ambivalent about it.

This study, therefore, evaluates the ethical ratios and motivation informing the dialectics of leadership and the negation of responsibilities in the anonymous traditional African community mirrored in Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* (1973). It also examines the human tragedies that occur as a result of abuse of institutional powers by the holders of such powers. Soyinka's observation in *African writers Talking that* “human beings are simply cannibals all over the world” (Soyinka 1972, 173), certainly undergirds the primitive issues bothering on human rights abuses, barbarism and indiscretions in traditional institutions which give rise to the tragedy in *The Strong Breed*. There is also the historical dimension in this play which seems to affirm Obaro Ikime's conviction that “the political ethos or culture of a people is a product of their history” (2006, xvii). Thus, the seed of tragedy in this play portrays a generational history foregrounded in archetypal contexts such as the role of religion in defining the hierarchies of authority, without logical recourse to individual rights and choices.

2. SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

The Strong Breed is the story of a young man, Eman, who is saddled with the ancestral and messianic responsibility of a carrier/saviour in a spiritually distressed community on the brink of change. The ritual involves the willing or forceful submission of self to a macabre of ritual sacrifice as a carrier of the evils of the community on the eve of a new year. The annual ritual is to guarantee good transition from the old year into a new one. Thus, the carrier serves as a receptacle of all the ills the community would like to do away with in the out-going year. The community, traditionally, favours the use of strangers for the ritual sacrifice. The tragedy in the play occurs as a result of Eman's refusal or unwillingness, as

a stranger, to perform the role of a carrier for his host community and the failure of the community leadership to acknowledge the growing social contradictions precipitating change in its social functions and responsibilities.

3. CULTURAL AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

The Yorubas of Western Nigeria are very religious and cultural people. Culture and religion are not treated as being mutually exclusive entities in the Yoruba understanding of life. This explains why many of their cultural festivals involve some form of religion. Oladele Taiwo says that the Yorubas, like most West African societies, have several traditional ceremonies such as those for marriages, funerals, naming children and community festivals, as well as their music, songs and dancing in which they take pride. He further contends that “Many Yoruba religious ceremonies are associated with an *orisa*, an anthropomorphic deity, such as Sango the god of lightening, Ogun the god of iron, Obatala or any of the better-known gods” (Taiwo 2007, 36). The Yorubas believe that these gods influence the role and destiny of mortals and also perform certain roles and functions that ensure social cohesion. Soyinka draws extensively from the Yoruba cultural world view as well as from other sources like the western philosophical and literary traditions.

Soyinka, like Hegel, recognises that the knowledge of true being can only be realised in self-consciousness. In the Yoruba pantheon, Ogun is a deity whose pure essence is represented in iron implements. As artificer, Ogun works at the forge and is the god of blacksmiths. His first act of defiance, according to Soyinka, is “symbolised in the myth of the deity’s descent to earth, and the battle with immense chaotic growth which had sealed off reunion with man” (Soyinka 1972, 144). Ogun, Soyinka maintains, is “grieved by a consciousness of the loss of the eternal essence of his being, and so seeks reunion with consciousness of the human essence” (Soyinka 1972, 145). Soyinka, therefore, suggests that Ogun’s initiative for reunion leads to his self-sacrifice in order to bridge the gulf between the human community and the deities. Soyinka believes that this reunion opens the channel between worlds of the dead, the living, and the unborn.

The above cultural and philosophical assumptions reflect in Soyinka’s literary style. His literary style is either mythocentric or hermetic in the main or both. The mythocentric style involves either the reconstruction of myths or the creation/invention of myths as channels of communication, while the hermetic is the obscure and esoteric style that inhibits comprehension. In the text under study, we can see how the self-sacrifice of the carrier connects intertextually with the self-sacrifice of Ogun in Yoruba mythology or with that of Jesus Christ, in the Judeo-Christian religion.

African literature perceives religion as an integral part of African culture and social formation. Oladele Taiwo argues that the reader should appreciate the religious beliefs of the West African people in order to understand their literature. The understanding of these points is basic to a full appreciation of modern West African work" (Taiwo 2007, 29). Tunji Adebayo, while examining the religious content of Camara Laye's works, maintains that "human institutions thrive best under a cohesive social system with strong mystical or religious base" (Adebayo 1978, 71). This perspective aligns with the functionalist paradigm which, according to Haralambos and Holborn, "sees religion as reinforcing social norms and values and promoting social solidarity" (Haralambos and Holborn 2000, 397). However, Soyinka's play under study appears to interrogate this assumption. It seems to present an alternative argument that supports the position that religion can also be a destructive and disruptive force.

Similarly, scholars in critical discourse perceive religion as an instrument of mind control. To them, it encourages group dominance and manipulation. Van Theo Leeuwen reveals how "powerful social actors not only control communicative actions, but indirectly also the minds of the recipients" (Leeuwen 2008, 2). He argues that discursive practices and constructions like religious sermons somehow influence the minds of the reader and hearer because they convey knowledge, affect opinions or change attitudes. Religious leaders, as institutional voices, possess and exercise enormous social influence and control over their subjects. This control is perceived as a form of dominance in critical discourse. According to Terry Locke "the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality, inducing political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality constitutes a form of dominance" (Lock 2004, 38). In the same vein, Leeuwen, in his analysis of authorisation as a category of legitimation, identifies custom, which is expressed in conformity and tradition as forms of legitimation. Authorisation, according to him, is "legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law, and/or persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested" (Leeuwen 2008, 105).

In the text under consideration, Wole Soyinka presents cultural frames that show how power is legitimated in some traditional societies. The text shows that religion and custom facilitate the curtailment and abuse of the rights of the weak, particularly the minority, referred to as "strangers" in the text.

4. CULTURAL ARCHETYPES AND LINGUISTIC "OTHERING"

Archetype refers to recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character types, themes, and images which can be found in a wide range of literary works,

myths, dreams and even social rituals. Nwahunanya contends that archetypal ideas are persistently recurrent themes in human thoughts and have furnished story elements to the literature of widely different cultures. He identifies the “outsider” as one of the main archetypes that adorns West African literature. According to him:

One such archetype that can be isolated in West African fiction is the *Outsider*. The outsider appears in various literatures in a variety of forms: the outcast, the alien, the rebel, the madman, the revolutionary radical, the unaccepted messiah, the quester, the cynic, and even the misanthrope (Nwahunanya 2007, 242).

The concept of the messiah as an archetypal idea can be found in Ogun as the tragic messianic archetype of the Yoruba world. This is beautifully elucidated in Soyinka’s *Myth Literature and the African World* (1976). In the context of the text under analysis, the carrier also plays a messianic role as the sacrificial lamb that takes away the ills of the community on the eve of the outgoing year. Old Man (Eman’s father) sees the messianic role of carrying the boat as a supreme religious obligation which he calls his “last journey...my last journey. But I am not afraid” (134). It is a call that must be answered by every generation of the strong breed to ensure social cohesion and solidarity. Unfortunately, Eman who is supposed to succeed his father, describes himself as being “totally unfitted for your call” (134). Ironically, Eman who escapes from his village to avoid being a boat carrier ends up as a carrier in a strange land thereby fulfilling his father’s prophesy that “You only go to give to others what rightly belongs to us. You will use your strength among thieves” (134).

Another archetypal element in *The Strong Breed* is that of the “outsider” or outcast. The text frames how the minority and the weak of the society are presented in Yoruba traditional society. Eman, a stranger in the community, is chosen by the leadership of the community, against his will, to be their carrier. The tradition prescribes that only strangers in their midst can be used as carrier. When Eman interrogates the order that “A village which cannot produce its own carrier contains no men” (129) Oroge offers an explanation “But you ought to know that no carrier may return to the village. If he does, the people will stone him to death. It has happened before. Surely it is too much to ask a man to give up his own soil” (129). Jaguna’s assertion that “we only use strangers” (130) validates Oroge’s explanation. The ideology that underlies the rhetoric reveals that some societies institute obnoxious traditions that offer privileges to indigenes over none indigenes. They use religion and culture as excuse to justify acts of violence and barbarism against others, particularly those they regard as outsiders.

The presentation of in-group and out-group identity and ideology in the text is linguistically expressed. Linguistic “Othering” is used to express the social and

ideological divisions in a society. Pronominal referencing is strongly used in the text to index group alignment or alienation and identity. Paul Simpson and Andrea Mayr contend that “the use of pronouns is an effective means of interpersonally representing in-and out-group status” (2009, 23). They also observe that pronouns are used to “construct identities, draw or erase boundaries between groups, and stress social distance or resentment against the other group” (23). *The Strong Breed* is replete with pronominal references that indicate individual and group attitude, social space and beliefs, but only two examples will be discussed due to limits of space.

The use of pronominal referencing to show outgroup identity and social space can be found in Eman’s argument with Sunma over Ifada. Eman tells Sunma, “It was cruel of you”. And to Ifada who is so helpless and alone. “We are the only friends he has.” To this, Sunma retorts “No, just you. I have told you, with me it has always been only an act of kindness. And now I haven’t any pity left for him” (117). While Eman uses the inclusive pronoun “we” to show that he and Sunma are the only friends of the idiot, Ifada, Sunma uses pronouns of exclusion, “you”, “me”, and “him” to alienate herself from the perceived group of Ifada’s friends. Also significant to the ideology that underlie the text is the use of the words “helpless” and “alone.” The items create the picture of a society where the weak and the minority suffer a great deal of social distancing from other privileged groups.

In the excerpt below, pronominal referencing is used to draw social boundaries and show resentment against the other group. In one of the arguments between Eman and Sunma the following interchange occur:

SUNMA: You think they love you? Do you think they care at all for what you –or I –do for them?

EMAN: *Them?* These are your own people. Sometimes you talk as if you were a stranger too.

SUNMA: I wonder if I really sprang from here. I know they are evil and I am not. From the oldest to the smallest child, they are nourished in evil and unwholesomeness in which I have no part (121).

The interchange above reveals how individuals deny membership of a group for certain ideological reasons. Sunma uses pronouns of exclusion “they and “them” to show her non-alignment with her people and her resentment towards them. Her people are the carriers of the negative attributes “evil” and “unwholesomeness.” The attributives are used by the speaker to justify her non-alignment with the

carriers of the attributes. The comparative use of “they” versus “I” shows she wants to extract or withdraw herself from her people. Again, her use of “you” versus “they/them” shows that the referential “you” (Eman) is not part of “them.” Ironically, Sunma switches membership in the heat of the argument when she tells Eman: You are a stranger here Eman. Just leave us alone and go your own way. There is nothing you can do” (126). The dichotomy here is between “you” and “us”. Sunma’s use of “us” aligns her with her people and their culture but excludes Eman. Here, Eman becomes an outgroup member while Sunma enjoys an “ingroup membership, thereby erasing the boundaries she earlier created between her and her people. Also significant is the word “stranger” which suggests a sense of “otherness.” The excerpts therefore show that pronominal referencing is an effective way of creating linguistic “Othering.”

5. NAME AND THE RHETORIC OF INTERTEXTUALITY

In Africa, names embody and express the identity and cultural experiences of the people. In this play, Soyinka demonstrates an astute understanding of the cultural significations of names. Previous studies on African literature have shown interest in the significance of names in the construction of character and characterisation. Isaiah Bariki observes that personal names in most African languages “have a strong historical, socio-cultural and ethnopragmatic bearing that go beyond mere referentiality... names are neither arbitrary nor asemantic... What is obvious is that names have strikingly semantic and semiotic load” (46). Names, in Africa, are contextually determined. This means that the social, historical or spiritual situations of one’s birth determine the names one bears. To this Dan Izevbaye argues that “names in reality exist in context that gives them form and meaning. Taken out of this context of social reality names remain in atomistic state” (164). Odebole Idowu’s pragmasociolinguistic study of names and nicknames in Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* reveals the importance Soyinka attaches to names. He observes that “names in African Yoruba worldview are meaningful...Names are indexes to characters and naming is part and parcel of African heritage which reflects social background, religious affiliation, occupation, gender and politics” (211). We shall discuss just the characters whose names and roles bear strong cultural and ideological signification. These are Jaguna, Ifada and Eman.

Jaguna is a Yoruba name that designates a warrior of the stature of a generalissimo in the Yoruba army. As a soldier, he is expected to enforce internal and external security, particularly the enforcement of rules and rites that ensure social cohesion in the community. This explains his apprehension when Eman escapes from their grip. “We must find him. It is a poor beginning for a year when

our own curses remain hovering over our homes because the carrier refused to take them" (132). To demonstrate his military skills, he sets up traps that eventually hang Eman up on the sacred tree as a purification sacrifice to the gods of the land. The name also suggests that the bearer is a devotee of Ogun – the Yoruba god of iron, creativity and destruction. Jaguna's use of weapons of iron connects him intertextually with Ogun. It is also important to mention that much of the destruction or tragedy in the play occurred as a result of Jaguna's excesses.

Ifada is a typical Yoruba name that means that Ifa (the oracle) has divined and it must come to pass. The name, as used in the text, predisposes its bearer as a gift from the gods. It turns out that Ifada, like Eman, is one of the "strangers" in the land and a potential carrier. Eman's description of Ifada as "the unfortunate one" and as being "more unlucky than other children" (116) is a prophetic declaration that the gods have a hand in his condition. Jaguna's argument that "Ifada is a godsend" (128) is a validation of Eman's insinuation that the gods created him for a particular role. Again, Oroge posits that "We don't know where he came from. One morning, he is simply there, just like that. From nowhere at all. You see, there is a purpose in that" (128). All these show that Ifa has divined his fate as carrier, from his creation, and it must come to pass. This reveals the cultural beliefs of this traditional society.

The name Eman is a morphological variant of Emma, the shortened form of Emmanuel, one of the names of Jesus Christ, which means God be with us. The name signposts the messianic role of Christ as God's incarnate. Since Eman is not a Yoruba name, it can be inferred that Soyinka deliberately created it as an intertextual parody of Emmanuel, to buttress the dramatic focus on the carrier as a messianic character. Eman is supposed to willingly present himself as a purification/sacrificial lamb of his community. However, his declaration of being "totally unfitted for your call" (134) is in contrast with Christ's willing submission to death for the redemption of the human race. The implication is that Eman does not fit into the frame of the Christian messiah. However, he suffers similar fate as Jesus Christ—publicly humiliated as carrier and killed by hanging. Another token from the Christian text is the reconstruction of the passion of Jesus Christ. Eman as carrier was thirsty and requested a cup of water (143) just as Christ did in the garden of Gethsemane. Again, Eman's display of human frailty as carrier connects ideationally and textually with the passion of Jesus Christ in Matthew 40:39. The only difference is that while Christ was able to overcome his fears and anxieties, Eman does not. Eman's suffering and death by hanging connect with the suffering and crucifixion of Christ. Soyinka appears to demonstrate that some traditional African societies have different ways of producing their own carriers but what he interrogates is the forceful use of the minority and the unwilling for the ritual exercise.

6. RELIGION, LEADERSHIP AND LEGITIMISATION

A major issue in the play concerns the onset of the annual end of year purification festival which Ogunba holds:

The most important feature of the festival is the ritual act of a character called the carrier, a man who is made the purification sacrificial lamb (103).

It turns out that the misfortune of being the carrier falls on Eman, a stranger in the community who is also a teacher. The carrier as we pointed out earlier is expected to submit willingly as the sacrificial lamb for the purification of land. It is expected that the community will resist every force of rebellion and deviation from the custom.

At this point, we need to examine the structures of leadership in the community of the play and their roles in managing social conflicts. As should be expected, the pillars of leadership in the community of the text derive from religion. The religious structure empowers its leadership to enforce actions that will enhance the collective spiritual and social interests of the community. The custodians of the religion and culture of the society include Old Man, Jaguna, Oroge, Tutor and the Carrier.

Old Man is more of an ancestral archetypal idea of redemption. He warns Eman (his son) against trying to abdicate his role as a strong breed so as not to disrupt the social cohesion in the community. According to him "It is only time you need son. Stay longer and you will answer the urge of your blood" (134). But Eman who has been away from his roots for twelve years declares himself as being "totally unfitted" for the messianic call. Eman and his father view the role of the carrier from different lenses. To Old Man, the carrier is a privileged and noble leader who makes annual sacrifices to ensure the well-being of the community. It is the sacrifice which ennobles and heightens the value of leadership in the religion of this community. He summarizes it thus:

Other men would rot and die doing this task year after year. It is strong medicine which only we can take. Our blood is strong like no other. Anything you do in life must be less than this, son (134).

Unfortunately, Eman's twelve years in self-exile has changed his orientation and attitude to the cultural beliefs of his people. Eman, having acquired Western education, now lacks the spiritual stamina to reconcile the contradictions posed by his society so he escapes again, against the better judgment of his father, to another community where he lives as a reclusive teacher in a Western educational setting. Being a teacher positions him as an institutional authority, which stands

antithetical to the traditional religious one he tries to avoid. The puzzle here is how one man can be so inexorably submerged in tragic conflicts by destiny, without being aware of them. Again, another irony in his characterisation is that until destiny closes in on him, he does not realize the implications of bestriding two worlds (traditional and western) whose ideological contentions will eventually consume him. The ideology that underlies the text indicates that Soyinka wants to demonstrate the strains of leadership and how the traditional institution has always come to terms with it. Again, it shows that traditional institution has its own concept of the messiah which is encapsulated in the carrier as a redeemer of his people. However, Eman's refusal to succeed his father reveals how external influences—Western cultural orientations have permeated and disrupted the social and religious fabric of traditional institutions. Thus when he says: "Twelve years I was a pilgrim, seeking the vain shrine of secret strength" (143) he admits the futility of abandoning his culture and tradition for a foreign one.

Jaguna occupies an important leadership position in his society. His military expertise ensures the carrier submits to the ritual of purification as sacrificial lamb. Traditional institutions have mechanisms that enforce rules for the general well-being of the community. Thus, the traditional system creates personalities like Jaguna, a military professional, to ensure that internal rebellion and external aggression do not disrupt its social cohesion. This role and responsibility, which he perceives as an obligation to his community, is pursued with zeal throughout the duration of events in the text. Here, we can see that Jaguna's roles as citizen, soldier and community leader are interwoven.

Oroge is a spiritual leader who prepares the carrier for his assignment. He too occupies an important social and religious position in his society because without his purification rites the carrier cannot perform the sacred role. He told Eman: "I am the one who prepares them all, and I have seen worse" (129). The statement shows that Oroge, like Old Man, has been performing this role year after year to ensure the social and spiritual well-being of his community. The institution empowers him, and not anyone else, to perform the noble role of preparing the carrier for sacrifice. This explains why he tells Eman: "Mr Eman, I don't think you quite understand" (128), when the addressee tries to interrogate his wisdom in choosing an unwilling stranger as carrier.

Jaguna and Oroge are accessories to the realisation of the critical and enabling function of the carrier. The carrier owes the community a responsibility and it is the sacred duty of Jaguna and Oroge to ensure he performs it.

The text under study shows how power is legitimated in the traditional society of Soyinka's creation. The type of legitimation that is discursively constructed and

enacted in the text derives from tradition. Theo van Leeuwen argues that in the authority of tradition, the implicit or explicit answer to the “why” question is not “because it is compulsory”, but “because this is what we always do” or “because this is what we have always done” (108). As we can see from the text, most of the actions are to maintain the status quo. The practices are generational. However, van Leeuwen’s observation that the rules of tradition are enforced by everyone rather than by specific agents and that each agent has the means of acting as a judge of others and himself (Leeuwen 2008,109) does not completely fit into the world of Soyinka’s text. In Soyinka’s society as in van Leeuwen’s, everyone enforces the tradition but again, in Soyinka’s, the society designates some key offices to oversee the collective enforcement of the tradition. Thus the authority of tradition empowers some individuals to carry out some actions in the perceived collective interest of the community. Such roles are enforced in Soyinka’s society by people like Old Man, Tutor, Priest, Jaguna and Oroge.

7. SOCIAL CONTRADICTIONS AND DICHOTOMOUS FRAMES

The social structures of the text present the existence of incompatible forces that gnaw at the heart of the community’s existence. Social contradictions may be defined as those inherent tensions deriving from incompatible realities threatening the norms and harmony of the society. However, in some cases, these contradictions and tensions lead to inevitable social change. Haralambos and Holborn argue that:

The history of human society is a process of tension and conflict. Social change is not a smooth orderly progression which gradually unfolds in harmonious evolution. Instead, it proceeds from contradictions built into society, which are a source of tensions and ultimately the source of open conflict and radical change (2000, 945).

Eman’s dilemma sprouts from the social values presented by his society. His reactions to them emanate from the fact that, from age fourteen, he begins to recognise some of the contradictions in his immediate community. Thus, he grows up in that cultural environment trying to endure some incompatibilities he could not explain.

The first major contradiction that Eman notices in his society is the hypocrisy of their Tutor, who oversees the circumcision of fourteen year old males as requirement for initiation into adult life (137). Eman is shocked to see and hear that this same tutor who confines fourteen year old boys to their huts in the outskirts of the village, where they are forbidden to have contacts with the opposite sex, has been busy wooing his lover and other girls. According to Omae, the old tutor is busy “by the stream, pinching the girls’ bottoms” (138). It is therefore

hypocritical for the depraved tutor to turn round and accuse Eman of breaking a strong taboo (139) for receiving Omae, his lover, during a period of isolation and purification. Eman is disenchanted when he discovers the insincerity and double standards of the traditional religious tutor. The institutions of the community could not have feigned ignorant of the old man's depravity. Consequently, Eman quits the traditional monastery in search of a new and different form of knowledge that will eventually bring him into conflict with his traditional calling.

Virtually all the persons and values in the society of the text are presented in dialectically oppositional frames. This can be found in the following Manichean dichotomies:

Old Year	versus	New Year
Carrier	versus	Community
Eman	versus	Sunma
Old man	versus	Eman
Eman	versus	Tutor
Jaguna	versus	Sunma
Tradition	versus	Modernity
Willingness	versus	Unwillingness
Strength	versus	Weakness

It is the conflict between these dichotomous categories that generate the tension that drives the plot of the story. The constraints of space will not permit us to discuss each of these in detail. The anonymous community in *The Strong Breed* is in the grip of a peculiar end of year festival characterized by spiritual oppositions between the out-going (old) year and the in-coming (new) year which warrants religious rites of purification and exorcism. There are curses and malevolent spirits associated with the old year. The new year on the other hand is expected to hold promises of benediction and good will for the community. It is therefore the actions in pursuit of the requirements for a happy new year that triggers off the conflict between Eman and his host community; the conflict between Eman and Sunma; the conflict between Sunma and her father, Jaguna; and the eventual death of Eman.

Another level of opposition in the community of this play is that between the traditional system and the modern/western epistemologies. The opposition is occasioned by what Kwasi Wiredu has identified as the "authoritarian" inclination of traditional cultures which sometimes impose very unpleasant conditions on adherents/devotees. The challenge to the authorities of the traditional system begins when Eman rebels against the religion of his culture and goes in search of Western education. He becomes a teacher in a western educational system. He occupies a position of institutional authority in his school and in his host

community. The western education he acquires places him in good stead to function as a well-informed intellectual critic of his erstwhile traditional religion. Thus, Eman's exposure to western education affects his respect for traditional authorities. Wiredu also confirms that traditional authorities and influences have "waned markedly, particularly in our urban areas" (Wiredu 1980, 4).

Eman's respect for and submission to traditional religion begins to wane with Eman's discovery of the double standards of the Tutor. Again, as noted above, Eman's exposure to western education and urban life further reduced his commitment to traditional religious practices. This explains the opposition between Old man and Eman, and the one between him and his host community.

Further, it appears that Sunma's exposure to western way of life makes her distance herself from her people. She denounces her roots: "I wonder if I really sprang from here" (121) and renounces her identity: "I am Jaguna's eldest daughter only in name" (123) to which Eman reminds her that "Renouncing one's self is not so easy..." (123). She demonizes her people as "evil" and "unwholesome" (121), her father as "murderer" (135). Her aversion for the cultural practices of her people, particularly, her father, brings her into conflict with him. Her father calls her a "harlot" (36) and a "viper" (146) for aligning with a stranger (Eman) to undermine their culture. According to him: "I cannot restrain myself in this creature's presence. My own daughter... and for a stranger" (136). Sunma is an in-group member who is fiercely opposed to the ideology of the group to which she belongs.

8. CONCLUSION

The text reveals that the social contradictions in *The Strong Breed* produce tensions and conflicts which precipitate social change. The tragic death of Eman in the hands of his host community becomes a moral burden on the conscience of the villagers. After sacrificing Eman as "carrier", the entire community withdraws, each to his/her home, in collective realisation of a great sense of guilt. We are informed that "almost at once, the villagers begin to return, subdued and guilty" (145). The scenario is that of a community in judgment against itself for wasting the life of a fellow human being, a stranger and a minority in their midst. It is the same pervading sense of self-judgment that makes Sunma receive and reconcile with Ifada, whom she previously labeled a "monster" and a "stranger", with kindred warmth and intimacy. It is, therefore, this final discovery of the monstrous extremes of religion and tradition that paves way for change in the community. *The Strong Breed* is a peculiar tragedy because of its drive for the common good and commitment to social change. The ideology of collective good will inspire modern societies in their quest for equal social relations between groups.

It is important to mention that Soyinka does not campaign against the past, particularly the African traditional religious practices, but as Emmanuel Obiechina (2008) would argue, the African writer does not have to celebrate those “aspects of the past that damaged the people and the continent” (59). Soyinka’s reinscription of spirituality into the discourse of Nigeria’s nationhood is a confirmation of the crucial importance of literary imagination and its linguistic analysis in the project of creating deeper understanding about identity, inter-group relationship and humanistic pursuit of the common good.

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