



Tropes of Sacrifice in Nigerian Drama

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Abstract

Sacrifice as an integral part of the traditional people of Nigeria has been represented in Nigerian drama by different playwrights who have displayed diverse approaches, ideological stance and attitudes to the practice in their plays. The essay, through a study of selected Nigerian plays discovers that varied use of the term abound in Nigerian plays and that the obsolescent culture of ritual sacrifice of human beings has given way to self-sacrifice which may not necessarily include the termination of life. Self-sacrifice involves the giving up of one's right, possession, benefit or even life and this is the trope that pervades the majority of modern Nigerian plays and may eventually replace human sacrifice which has gone out of public practice in real life. The treatment of these two modes of sacrifice is done in tandem with another two; the Christ sacrifice and animal sacrifice. The paper observes the issue of unwillingness on the part of the carriers as a major factor in the obliteration of human sacrifice and concludes that there is already a shift in the focus of Nigerian writers on the issue of human sacrifice.

Key words: Sacrifice; Drama; Culture; Tradition; Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Nigerian drama, just like the drama of other countries on the continent of Africa and the rest of the world, derives a substantive amount of its content from the oral and mythico-religious heritage of a people who for centuries followed their ways of life without complete exposure to Western education. The influences of the advent of western education has a multiplier effect on the social, political, religious and cultural aspects of the lives of Nigerians and the arts are not left behind. In all these facets of life, the effect of the importation of Western values and lifestyle is manifested in an almost indissoluble admixture of traditional ways of life with western culture and this is most pronounced in literature, especially drama. Ato Quason (1997, p.2) observes too that the "configuration of orality and literacy in African contexts lends a special quality to African literature"

The cultural and literary orientations of most Nigerian playwrights are heavily reflected in the plays which are replete with evidences of their cultural background and exposure to other literatures of the world. Cultural background is revealed in the representation of myths, legends, rituals festivals, folklore and oral practices generally. This fact is recognised more by Abiola Irele (2009, p.78). when he states succinctly that: "The best among our modern African writers have had to undertake a resourcing of their material.in the traditional culture".

Though the traditional culture and oral heritage have always been conflated with literary forms through devices provided by literacy, they nonetheless form a major basis for the interpretation of African literature and writers' attitude towards them quickly betray their ideological leanings.

Cultural practices such as rituals, festivals, rites and ceremonies are presented and represented in the plays depending on the agenda and creative acumen of the playwright. In most traditional African settings crucial part of annual rituals and festivals are sacrifices and appeasements which are carried out in the belief that they offer propitiations for the sins of the people and foster better relationships with the ancestral and ethical world believed to control the physical. Since the sacrifices often involved human beings, they had issues such as the morality of the process, volunteerism and willingness on the part of the scapegoats/carriers which offer a huge fascination for creative writers especially in Nigeria which is our interest here. The exploitation of the theme of sacrifice in Nigerian drama vis-à-vis the extension of its meaning implication form the preoccupation of this paper and this we shall critically evaluate in the rest of the work.

1. SACRIFICE AS CULTURAL CONCEPT

Culture has been defined generally as a people's way of life as evident in their beliefs, values and behaviours. Every society of human beings is guided by certain rules, mostly unwritten especially in primordial times. There are notions that guided peoples' attitude to matters such as crime, revenge, seasonal changes, religion and puberty. Such notions affect every aspect of human life and vary from one society to another. Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (1995, p.164) are very succinct about the issue when they say "the idea of culture is a general reaction to a major change in the conditions of our common life". Cultural studies as a field of study is now generating a lot of interest among literary theorists as among literary artists in contemporary times. However, as Munns and Rajan submit, cultural studies is "a movement or a network", a field of study encompassing the innumerable phases of people's lives and development. Kathleen Kerr (2006, p.364) states it more clearly that "the perceived 'wholeness' of a community derived from the totality of its expressions – language, customs, dress, architecture, religion". The aspect of religion as an expression of culture is our border in this paper and our study will be limited to that cultural aspect of the people of Africa that deals with sacrifice.

The concept of sacrifice is an integral part of the lives of preliterate African peoples though the practice is not restricted to the people of the continent alone. Sacrifice, described as the offering of food, objects, or the lives of animals or people to the gods, is often carried out to worship or propitiate the gods (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/sacrifice>). Sacrifice frequently incorporates such acts as ritual killing, pouring libation and ancestor worship. In many ancient cultures of the world, sacrifice is seen and practised as a means of mediating between the living and the dead, the ancestors and the gods: The Greek, Chinese and African peoples offer sacrifice at different religious occasions.

Sacrifices are in various types: there is human ritual sacrifice believed in some societies to placate the occupiers of the ethereal world who govern the physical realm, animal sacrifice serves the same purpose but in most cases it is for curing the sick. The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary and His resurrection is also regarded, especially in Christian settings, as a type of sacrifice. In fact it has been classified by believers as the ultimate in human sacrifice. Whereas human sacrifice is the only acceptable sacrifice to some gods and spirits, animal sacrifice is offered for purposes that are less in intensity such as childlessness, sickness or general lack of success.

In Nigeria and Yorubaland specifically, sacrifices are offered on matters involving the dead and the living. It is believed that the attitude of the dead towards the living ultimately affect the living. Fadipe reveals that the Yoruba offer sacrifices annually to dead ancestors and to a dead twin so that the descendants and the surviving twin, as the case may be, would live on in peace. He states categorically that: "Among the Yoruba, the death of one twin child, followed by the illness or fretfulness or peevishness of the other, demands the making of an image to represent the departed one and the offering of sacrifices to it" (1970, p.266).

While giving a list of situations demanding sacrifice in Yorubaland, Fadipe is quick to mention that the culture is changing fast, with the advent of Christianity and Islam claiming that "sophistication has made inroads into the religious life of the people..." (1970, p.289). Fadipe's findings are thus an attestation to the fact that the customary totemic worship of ancestral figures and offer of sacrifices at every juncture of life is waning in African societies and the tempo seems to have become a diminuendo in more modern periods.

2. HUMAN SACRIFICE IN A CHANGING TRADITION

The issue of sacrifice, being an integral part of the Nigerian cultural past, offers a fascination for creative writers who have exploited the various tropes of the term in their works and it has been the basis of an ideological choice and disagreement among prominent Nigerian playwrights. Among them, Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, Ola Rotimi and J. P Clark have been at the forefront of the artistic controversy on the practice of sacrifice, especially human sacrifice. The theme and contents of some works in the early periods of Nigerian drama clearly evince the bias of the authors where the issue of ritual sacrifice is concerned. Wole Soyinka seems the loudest among the voices on the side of tradition, followed closely by Rotimi's subtle but predictive stance on the issue. The radical approach of the likes of Osofisan, Eghagha and Obafemi leaves a clear conviction of their perspective and

perception of what sacrifice should mean and should not entail in modern times.

Wole Soyinka's engagement with myth, rituals and sacrifice in his plays is derived from the traditional Yoruba culture against which most of the plays are set. Olakunle George (2009, p.521) reads the background influences of Soyinka's work and says: "Soyinka's theory shows his debt to two cultures traditional Yoruba and Western European".

The same impression as above characterises Worthen's (2009, p.1359) opinion of the dramaturgy of Wole Soyinka which he expresses thus: "Wole Soyinka's plays often stage a rich dialogue between colonial and indigenous culture, drawing on the ritual and religious belief of the Yoruba".

These go a long way to confirm our initial position that the traditional and the western have come to mix and the blend is what is now regarded as Nigerian literature. Our interest here, however, is in that portion of the indigenous that Soyinka has extracted for his artistic and thematic use in the plays the study of which will always revert to the matter of ritual and sacrifice in his Yoruba origin. Biodun Jeyifo (2004, p.123) affirms the significant place of rituals Soyinka's plays and comments that: "Ritual undoubtedly plays a central role in Soyinka's major plays, and it is also a central element in his theory of drama and theatre".

Soyinka (2009, p.366) himself states his convictions unambiguously that,

... the Yoruba does not far that reason fail to distinguish between himself and the deities, between himself and the ancestors, between the unborn and his reality, or discard his awareness of the essential gulf that lies between one areas of existence and another. This gulf is what must constantly be diminished by the sacrifices, the rituals, the ceremonies of appeasement to those cosmic powers which lies guardian to the gulf.

The need to constantly diminish 'the gulf' between the Yoruba and his ancestors, in the playwright's view, is what calls for the sacrifices, human and annual that characterise the rituals of the pre-literate African world. The representation of this issue in plays such as *The Strong Breed* and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) and others raises arguments which both justify and contradict the playwright's position at the same time.

The anonymous societies of the *The Strong Breed* (2004) both require human beings annually to serve as the scapegoat who will be the sacrifice for the sins of the people to be offered as propitiation to the ancestors. Sacrifice for the 'first society' involves a lineage of carriers, members of "the strong breed" of whom Eman is one. Eman's main pretext for absconding from his village the first time is his tutor's untoward behaviour toward his fiancé. Omae's death during childbirth makes Eman leave home a second time but this time he finds himself in another village where only idiots and strangers are acceptable as scapegoats. Eman advocates Ifada's unwillingness and accepts the challenge to be the

scapegoat only for him to attempt an escape at the last and most crucial moment. He is eventually trapped and killed like an animal.

Eman's attitude depicted above is different from Elesin's, another of Soyinka's scapegoats who initially appears perfectly prepared for the journey to the great beyond through death as implied in his voluble performance of the song of the Not-I bird where Elesin sings of his brave readiness for death only to go into a marriage like one who has many more years on earth. The renewal of ties engendered by Elesin's marriage and its consummation weaken his resolve when the time comes. To salvage the situation and save posterity and the face of a people Olunde, Elesin's son commits suicide in place of his father.

The duo of Eman and Elesin display bravery in their statements of readiness and volunteerism. While Eman bolts off at the crucial moment, Elesin's declaration of his intrepid nature and willingness to take his life is only manifested in the bold step of Olunde who eventually dies in place of his father whose actions at the time preceding his death is akin to recalcitrance. While Elesin might have been affected by an epicurean lifestyle arising from his prestigious position as horseman to the king culminating in his effortlessly securing a bride on his way to the grave, Eman's is certainly a disciplined, though not ascetic life. That both of them attempt to evade death at the most decisive moment raises a lot of issues which we will examine closely.

A critical dissection of the contextual environment of the above situations in two of Soyinka's plays would reveal that ritual sacrifice is a patented part of Soyinka's drama, the ubiquity of which places a kind of identification with the practice on his works. In what seems to be a type of authorial comment in *Death and the King's Horseman* Olunde takes on Jane on the issue of human sacrifice:

JANE: . . . mind you there is the occasional bit of excitement like that ship that was blown up in the harbour.

OLUNDE: Here? Do you mean through enemy action?

JANE: Oh no, the war hasn't come that close. The Captain did it himself. . . .The ship had to be blown up because it had become dangerous to the other ships, even to the city itself. Hundreds of the coastal population would have died.

OLUNDE: May be it was loaded with ammunition that caught fire. Or some of those lethal gases they've been experimenting on.

JANE: Something like that. The captain blew himself up with it. Deliberately. Simon said someone had to remain on board to light the fuse.

. . .

OLUNDE: I don't find it morbid at all. I find it rather inspiring. It is an affirmative commentary on life.

JANE: What is?

OLUNDE: That captain's self-sacrifice.

JANE: Nonsense. Life should never be thrown deliberately away.

OLUNDE: And the innocent people around the harbor?

JANE: How does one know? The whole thing was probably exaggerated anyway.

OLUNDE: That was a risk the captain couldn't take. (1975, p.51)

In the scenario above, the ship captain would rather sacrifice his own life than risk the lives of over two hundred people aboard. Though Olunde seizes the opportunity of the event to advocate that human sacrifice will always be needed, here we find that there is a broad line of difference between the sacrificial death of the ship Captain and what would have been the ritual sacrifice of Elesin. The sacrifice required from Elesin is atavistic, hereditary and surreptitiously repugnant to the carrier himself while that of the ship captain simply results from occasional exigency. Besides, the decision is the Captain's thus making his act a self-sacrifice. The required and compulsory ritual sacrifice of the king's horseman after the king's death as in the case of Elesin and that of Eman form the first trope of sacrifice in Nigerian drama and is a major one at that. Self-sacrifice, typified in the Captain's action is the second.

The situations in two of Soyinka's plays described above contrast sharply with the circumstance in Rotimi's *Kurunmi* where ritual sacrifice forms the propelling force of the main dramatic conflict. Alafin Atiba's move to end ritual sacrifice in his time leads him to make other kings swear that his son, Adelu would be crowned and not sacrificed after his demise. While other kings receive this as a welcome and progressive development and change, Kurunmi reacts with consternation and insists that the tradition of sacrifice must be upheld, no matter whose horse is gored. The attendant war and Kurunmi's defeats go to affirm that the bias in the play is for progressive change rather than the maintenance of an erstwhile unprofitable tradition. However, it may be presumptuous to hinge this on the author's ideological stance since he draws largely from historical facts though thematic preference may still hold the author to the side of change.

Yet two tropes of sacrifice exist in the play where we find that in embarking on such resource-consuming war, Kurunmi is sacrificing the peace, tranquillity and even the lives of his men in his bid to sustain the culture of human sacrifice in his society. He does not go into the war blindfolded rather his moves reveal him as a war strategist who can weigh the cost of war before going on. Hence he addresses Ogunkoroju, his chief warrior in preparation for the war thus:

To crush Adelu is our desire. Good. But that desire awaits our reach, what do we do meanwhile? Get the warriors ready. Everyone weapon: bows and arrows, guns, stones, sticks – anything guess brother. War has come Every man in Ijaiye-old young, every man must practise shooting. The land is full of plantain trees. Each person will have five plantain trees to himself for target shooting... (1971, p.30)

Kurunmi is willing to sacrifice the food sources in his domain for the war to be fought and won.

It is equally intriguing to note that the willingness of Kurunmi to make human and natural resources sacrifice as seen above is hinged on his unwillingness to sacrifice his ego and pride and allow Adelu to reign in place of his father. Some of Kurunmi's utterances in the play reveal that his grouse goes beyond the borders of tradition and its maintenance to personal considerations. He states categorically that: Kurunmi will never prostrate himself to shoot a deer with a father one morning, and then squat with the son in the evening to shoot a goose Never... never... I say n-e-v-e-r!" (1971, p.21).

This is made much clearer in a later situation where Kurunmi states without prevarication that: "Adelu now expects our old selves to go before him and play loyal bush-pigs, grovelling in the dust at his royal feet. Brother, after a time a man gets too old for self-disgrace. We are too old to 'bush-pig'" (1971, p.31).

Kurunmi, in the war that ensues, sacrifices, albeit inadvertently, the lives of many Ijaiye soldiers and his five sons in order to ensure that Adelu is sacrificed after the death of Alafin Atiba.

Sacrifice of human beings, for Atiba, is an unprofitable and desultory venture and a retrogressive practice that has to be annihilated. Even though this is Elesin's motive in *Death and the King's Horsemen*, he is not bold enough to face it or declare it. This nonetheless makes Elesin a type of Atiba and Olunde an equivalent of Kurunmi for supporters of the human sacrifice traditions often commit suicide to drive home their point. Both Olunde and Kurunmi kill themselves in their radical attempts to state that some other persons should have done so. The import and achievement of both deaths, however, remain to be seen.

3. THE CHRIST SACRIFICE

In what seems a re-interpretation of Elesin's mind and actions, Karia, created by Hope Eghagha in his *Death, Not a Redeemer* – an ideological adaptation of *Death and the King's Horseman*, comes out boldly to renounce his ancestral duty of killing himself to accompany his late master to the other world. Karia is unwilling to die and he says so openly. In the world of *Death, Not a Redeemer*, modernity has overtaken such time-worn practice as human sacrifice. Owoeye (2008, pp.263-264) observes Elesin and Karia and concludes that

A comparative study of Elesin and Karia will show that both of them really do not like the idea of committing suicide and escorting their bosses to the other world. The great difference lies in the way they both tackle their unwillingness. Elesin is insincere and unwilling to attract public criticism so he talks as if he likes to die and acts the opposite. Karia is a plain and down – to – earth individual who boldly states his intentions the moment the king "passes on".

Karia takes refuge in the Christian religion and keeps on making such utterances as the: "The blood of Jesus has

sanctified me unto life... It is a sin for a man to take his life... I have been purified by the Lord's blood" (p.7).

Thus the major idea of sacrifice in the play is seen in the Christian view that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who has died and risen for the human race to live is enough for mankind. Karia is convinced that any other human sacrifice after Christ is sheer waste of human life and resources and Sankaria's excoriating and caustic remarks are premised on this Christian view. It is another matter though that Karia's Christian conviction is declared and stronger when it gets to his turn to be sacrificed.

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We find instances throughout the play of the claim that Jesus has died once and for all for humanity and that any other death for humanity is a waste. This is Karia's strong conviction and he concludes that "Redemption does not come from the dead" (1998, p.13).

The Christ sacrifice forms a major trope in Nigerian drama since it is an issue in a sacrifice based play such as *Death, Not a Redeemer*. We find it having a significant impact in Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* where the carrier is named Eman, a short form of Emmanuel and also the other name of Jesus Christ. Though Eman is to be sacrificed for the community, giving him a name of that type betrays the playwright's admittance of the sacrificial nature of Christ's death though that does not translate to his agreement that the Christ sacrifice is sufficient for the entire human race. In typical Nigerian communities against which the play is set, only converts to Christianity answer the name Eman. Even when the play is silent about that part of Eman's life, the fact that he is exposed to Western education might presuppose he has had a thing to do with Christianity as well though his fickleness might not be attributable to that. The essence of the Christ sacrifice is that, though it did not take place in Africa, it has affected Africans so much that it impacts on their traditional beliefs and attitudes to ritual sacrifice as in the case of Karia here. Christianity has, indubitably, affected the cultural lives and attitudes of Nigerians and the shift from traditional worship to Christianity is reflected, either directly or inadvertently, by many notable Nigerian playwrights.

Sankaria is the exact opposite of Olunde as his conviction about human sacrifice seems stronger than his father's. He states pointedly that: "...all tactics must be adopted to stop this obnoxious, feudalistic, bourgeois concept of sacrifice" (1998, p.38).

To him and his father therefore, it is not merely difficult for an able bodied man to "take a plunge", it is equally wasteful, unproductive and retrogressive hence Karia's continued insistence that "... in life one is more relevant than in death" (1998, p.59). This is the basic ideology that underpins Eghagha's writing of the

adaptation. The dogma that in life one is more relevant than in death seems to have been taken from Osofisan as seen in the following quotation at the beginning of *Death, not a Redeemer*:

And it is not only that the machinery provided by the old society for dealing with chaos has lost its capacity for total effects, it is also that the very metaphysical *raison d'être* of that machinery has been eroded with the advent of a new socio-political philosophy.

With this, Eghagha pitches his tent on the side of Osofisan against the promoters of what he considers a "bourgeois concept of sacrifice." *Death, Not A Redeemer* is a play hinged on the Christian concept sacrifice and is rather silent on the purpose of ritual sacrifice except to portray it with negative words. The title of the play itself reveals the bias of the playwright viz-a viz the issue of sacrifice: that the redemptive work of Christ is complete and sufficient and does not need to be complemented by periodic sacrifice of human beings.

4. THE ISSUE OF SELF-SACRIFICE

In the works of Femi Osofisan however, sacrifice assumes a new meaning and goes beyond the confines of the traditional ritual killing of predestined members of society to placate some unseen capricious gods. The challenge of traditional practices and myths as presented by older playwrights form the thrust of Osofisan's drama this includes human sacrifice. Ritual sacrifice of human beings is a paradigm of the old order and is denounced in Osofisan's plays but human beings sacrifice certain aspects of their lives, when necessary, to better the lot of the populace. This is seen in Titubi who in *Morountodun* allows herself to be arrested in order to infiltrate the camp of the rebelling farmers thereby ending the war that threatens the peace and continued existence of the then society. Titubi's volunteering of herself is thus a self-sacrifice that involves the risk of her life in the process. The attendant result of this move is designed to show that it is much more profitable than the death of say Eman which leaves the people sad and without any particular record of practical progress.

Togun's fearless declaration of the truth in *No More the Wasted Breed* encourages Biokun to question the establishment and refuse to be used for ritual sacrifice. Togun can be said to have sacrificed his life in the process since he almost loses the same but the reward of his singular action of standing up against what he perceives to be gross injustice is reaped by the entire populace. What the Yungba execute also equates laying down their lives in the process of fighting for freedom and restoration of the old order. Ayoka, the leader of the Yungba Yungba group almost loses her life while engaged in a tussle with Iyeneri over the need to restore the democratic order but that would have only paved way for the continuation of tyranny and oppression. These plays by Osofisan are

designed to advance the argument that “in life one is more relevant than in death” (Eghagha, 1998, p.59) considering the fact that Togun’s rebellion and self-sacrifice turns out to be more profitable to the people than the sacrifice of Biokun would have been. Osofisan’s drama is thus full of the denunciation of the first trope while aggressively advocating for the second. Yet this, if necessary, may involve the termination of human life as in the case of Akanji in *Red is the Freedom Road* whose mother dies as a result of his unrevealed strategy of bringing about revolution and change. Akanji thus sacrifices his mother because it becomes imperative for him to do so for the entire people to be free but this, having no mystical implications, is reasonably different from the statutory and mandatory sacrifice of designated persons at stipulated periods. This is the type of interpretation Olunde reads to Jane’s reference to the ship captain who blows himself up in his attempt to save the rest of the people on board. Olunde’s conclusion from the action is that human sacrifice cannot be completely avoided if society must run smoothly. Yet the situations with both Akanji’s mother and the ship Captain even in *Death and the King’s Horseman* imply that human life should be terminated for others to live only when necessary and not a stereotypical occurrence that is synonymous with wastage of human life and must take place at specified times/events no matter what.

Osofisan’s denunciation of ritual sacrifice goes beyond the compulsive and wasteful nature of the deaths to a Marxist approach to the choice of the scapegoats who are often from a lineage of plebeian citizens assigned the duty of serving the bourgeoisie even in death as in the case of Elesin. Though Elesin’s status seems raised a stake higher because of the privileges accorded him as the king’s horseman, his office statutorily is like that of modern day head driver who has the privilege of driving the king to all engagements and enjoys many perks of office in the process. Saluga observes the class of people generally used as carriers and rigorously questions the custom that designates a set of people to rule and the other to be offered as sacrifice. He engages Togun in a disquisition:

SALUGA: ... Tell me, why is it always the poor who are called to sacrifice? Why is it always the wretched, never a wealthy man, never the son of a king, who is suddenly discovered to bear the mark of destiny at difficult moments, and pushed on to fulfil himself in suicidal tasks?

TOGUN: You must ask the gods who decide such things. Carriers are born—

SALUGA: Yes. Born poor—

TOGUN: With the mark of the chosen. Look at the mole on his chest.

SALUGA: And who decided that chest moles are the mark of identity for carriers? Why not fat cheeks like yours for instance? Or a rotund overgrown belly? I would have thought that a more juicy meal for your cannibal gods.

TOGUN: Take your time young man. The gods may strike you for blasphemy.

SALUGA: I won’t be surprised. Aren’t they always on the side of the oppressors?(1982, pp.105-106)

From this altercation between Saluga and Togun, we find that the feudalistic and hegemonic nature of the choice of carriers is Osofisan’s contention in voting against human sacrifice and opting for self-sacrifice and he addresses the issues in his choice of self-sacrificing characters; Titubi the spoilt child of a wealthy woman and Tegonni the princess typify this.

The option of self-sacrifice in Osofisan comes as no surprise considering the fact that he has been consistently critical of the gods and their seeming insatiable appetite for rituals and sacrifice without corresponding improvement in the lives of their devotees. In *Morountodun*, Moremi, the playwright’s radical recreation of the legendary Moremi decides to take the destiny of the Ife people in her hands and fight because: “...the Igbos can arrive suddenly, locusts in the air, and eat everything up? That is the life our gods have provided for us after all our rituals and sacrifices ... it is time for use to stand and square up our own courage, and stop leaning on the gods” (1982, p.33).

From the foregoing, self-sacrifice is preferred not only because it preserves life and genders toward change but also because putting a stop to human sacrifice may not be accompanied by grievous consequences after all as displayed by the rather positive development arising from Biokun’s rebellion. Lemuel Johnson (2004) also observes this and says: “Eman will be compelled by his own bloodline and terrorised by the village’s bloodthirsty need to be well into becoming the substitute but pre-figured saviour that cannot save.(<http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/wgrick/DEBCLASS/soyev.htm>)”.

Osofisan would have us believe that even the gods will entertain a shift in position if they are certain of the futility of human sacrifice, a position reiterated by Chinyere Okafor (1996, p.52) when she says: “Saluga’s life is restored when Olokun sees that his death does not restore the confidence of the believers like his friend, Biokun but in fact incurs their contempt”.

The huge gap between self-sacrifice – the deliberate sacrifice of oneself and human ritual sacrifice –the offering of a most probably unwilling victim for the benefit of the cosmos is the question of willingness. This forms the parallel line between the sacrifice of Olunde and that of his father: Olunde is willing, Elesin is not. Willingness becomes a pertinent issue for it does not only form the dividing line between the two major tropes of sacrifice under consideration in the preceding discussions; it equally forms the basis of acceptance of the sacrifice by the gods. Thus the perpetrators of human sacrifice induce willingness in the scapegoats through metaphysical means. This is implied in the exchange between Eman and Jagunna when the former takes on the issue of Ifada’s unwillingness:

EMAN: Yes. But why did you pick on a helpless boy.
Obviously he is not willing.

JAGUNA: what is the man talking about? Ifada is a godsend.
Does he have to be willing?

EMAN: In my home, we believe a man should be willing.

OROGE: Mister Eman. I don't think you quite understand.
This is not a simple matter at all. I don't know what
you do, but here, it is not a cheap task for anybody. No
one in his right senses would do such a job ... (1982,
p.19)

Perhaps the responses from both Oroge and Jaguna are intended to conceal the truth from Eman but when he persists on the issue of Ifada's unwillingness Oroge tells him the secret:

EMAN: You can see him with your own eyes. Does it really
have meaning to use one as unwilling as that.

OROGE: (smiling) He shall be willing. Not willing but actually
joyous. I am the one who prepares them all and I
have seen worse. This one escaped before I began to
prepare him for the event. But you will see him later
tonight, the most joyous creature in the festival. Then
perhaps you will understand (1982, p.20)

The same preparation must have been performed on Biokun whose initial claims of willingness fade away when he sees the fate befalling Saluga who is only defending him as a friend.. After fruitless efforts by Saluga to persuade Biokun not to proceed on the journey to the river, He challenges Togun: "Yes, except you have mesmerised him with your fiery tale" (1982, p.105)

The carrier's willingness is induced anyhow; either through metaphysical means or cajoling.

Willingness is so crucial an issue that it has to be forced on the scapegoats. Eman's question on how suitable the gods will find such a presentation is another matter though. The ship captain decides to die because he finds it will save many lives, Elesin is to die because men in his lineage and profession must, as a traditional obligation, die immediately their after master's death in order to attend to him in the other world. Apart from natural unwillingness on the side of the carriers, the profitability of such venture may also induce reluctance. Perhaps if lives of men were really seen to be the line, the approach of the likes of Elesin would have been different. The importance of willingness is seen in the fact that it appears to be the last straw that broke the camel's back on the issue of sacrifice. After the unwillingness of Alafin Atiba and the hesitant attitude of Elesin Oba, the pace of human sacrifice continued to decline especially in Western Nigeria.

The subject of decline in the tempo of human sacrifice in Nigerian societies is a controversial one and Booth (1988) gives enough instances to show that human sacrifice is extant in Nigeria. While it may be conceded that ritual killings are still heard of in Nigeria, the statutory, cultural and open sacrifice of human beings for communal welfare is no longer in practice especially in Yorubaland and unwillingness on the part of the carriers,

in tandem with the ideals of Westernisation, is one of the factors responsible for the development.

The importance attached to willingness does not translate to the fact that willingness alone will suffice in the act of ritual sacrifice. Olunde's extreme willingness and overzealous death might still not be acceptable if he has not fulfilled some other conditions. We cannot see from the play for instance that the necessary rituals and preparations are performed on him. Booth (1988, p.548) fears that Olunde's death may just be an empty display of bravado:

In this case, it is to be feared, the playwright's search for a vivid and dramatic metaphor for the "universe of Yoruba mind" has led him to confuse an irreducibly primitive human sacrifice with an authentically African sacrifice of self.

Olunde's willingness is actually induced by a number of forces which may not all be positive. First is the desire in him to prove to the meddling Europeans that Africans have enough integrity not to discard their cultural heritage at the first exposure to a foreign culture. He also might be protecting the family name as Iyaloja says he would not let honour fly outside. The exigent point that all is silent about is whether Olunde's death will be satisfactory to the characters in the other world who are expecting his prepared father to whom the king is accustomed too.

5. ANIMAL SACRIFICE

The sacrifice of animals to appease the gods forms the fourth trope and this is projected mainly in Clark's *Song of A Goat* where the Masseur says that the sacrifice of a goat is all that will be required to placate the gods if Ebiere conceives a pregnancy from another man since her husband is unable to fulfil his conjugal role in that respect. Like we have already found out, animal sacrifice is the prescription for lesser issues such as sickness or childlessness. In this case an abomination must be committed if Ebiere is ever going to be a mother and the remedy will be animal sacrifice. The abomination is eventually committed between Ebiere and Tonye therefore requiring the sacrifice of a goat. The action in the play is sustained by the continual reference to the coming sacrifice and the play comes to an end as soon as the sacrifice is performed. The sacrifice however does not stop the gathering storm of tragedy and a harvest of human deaths is what follows. Apparently this is a misuse of sacrifice because the sacrifice that should have been directed at curing Zifa's impotence is targeted at cleansing the abomination of an adulterous affair. The question of effectiveness that arises with human sacrifice also rears its head under the topic of animal sacrifice especially in this misappropriated one.

CONCLUSION

The second trope of sacrifice now bestrides Nigerian drama and can be seen in most of the plays. Even Soyinka in a later work, *The Beatification of Area Boy*, replaces the first trope with the second as Miseyi sacrifices her opulent life and marriage to join Sanda in fighting the cause of the oppressed. Sanda has earlier given up his education for the same purpose. It is noteworthy that neither Sanda nor Miseyi has to sacrifice his/her life for the revolution and be offered like Olunde or Eman. There is thus a shift from human sacrifice to self-sacrifice in Nigerian plays just as in real life. Unlike typical Soyinkaian scapegoats who don't challenge their fate, Sanda and Miseyi challenge the status quo and cause a revolution. The shift from ritual to self-sacrifice is traceable not only in younger playwrights like Osofisan and Eghgha therefore, but also in Soyinka, an aficionado of the African culture of human sacrifice.

This treatise on the issue of self-sacrifice points continuously to the fact that sacrifice is a human practice which cannot be avoided. While observing that the first trope has been phased out of practice in modern society, the third – the sacrifice of Christ – has been offered once and for all, the fourth is restricted from time, the paper discovers that the second will always be with human beings and goes beyond the boundaries of tradition. It is practised based on occasional exigency as in the case of the ship captain cited by Olunde and also on instinct as in the case of Titubi who in *Morountodun* decides on the spur of the moment to lay down her life in quest of the revolting farmers. Thus self-sacrifice as a ubiquitous trope in Nigerian drama may be an indicator of the society's need of the same as some of the playwrights have postulated.

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