

The crisis of traditional values in ola rotimi's *The gods are not to blame* (253)

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Abstract

This paper examines the impacts of the crisis in traditional African values in *The Gods are not to blame*(253), through the analysis of the causes, manifestations, and consequences of the disrespect for these values, in light of the narrative structure. This study also aims to show how actions are narrated. To do so, we will study the effects of the epidemic that weakened the kingdom through suspicions and misunderstandings, and then explore how peace can be restored through a particular and poetic language to allow King Odewale, the main character of the play, to escape his tragic doom.

Keywords: Crisis, disrespect, doom, gods, traditional African values,

Résumé

Ce document examine les impacts de la crise des valeurs africaines traditionnelles dans *The gods are not to blame*(253), à travers l'analyse des causes, des manifestations et des conséquences du non-respect de ces valeurs, à la lumière de la structure narrative. Cette étude vise également à montrer comment les actions sont racontées. Pour ce faire, nous étudierons les effets de l'épidémie qui ont affaibli le royaume à travers les suspicions et les malentendus, puis nous verrons comment rétablir la paix dans un langage particulier et poétique afin de permettre au roi Odewale, personnage principal de la pièce, d'échapper au destin funeste.

Mots-clés : Crise, destin tragique, dieux, non-respect, valeurs africaines traditionnelles,

Introduction

Nigeria, with all his assets, has many cultures and a rich variety of traditions. Then Ola Rotimi, the Nigerian playwright learned and spoke their three major languages: Ijaw, Yoruba and Igbo. These assets made him implicated in the Nigerian customs and traditions and wrote *The gods are not to blame*(253) which is a play. Regarding the origin of the play, it is clear that it the adaptation of Sophocle's story "Oedipus Rex which revolves around Oedipus' attempt to escape the prophecy given to him by the Oracle of Delphi, who said that his fate was to kill his father and marry his mother"¹, is based on the respect of traditions. Therefore, the disrespect of these traditions turns out to serious crisis. Then, the interest in African traditional values is a valuable motive to investigate on the theme: "**The crisis of Nigerian traditional values in ola rotimi's *The(253) gods are not to blame***" in the light of the narrative structure (part of narratology, a literary theory which examines the text by showing how actions are told, what is stress of the voice, the point of view, the transformation of the chronological order, the rhythm and frequency) will be the suitable theoretical framework as it may prone the narration of this play on a more systematic level. Indeed, the narrative structure is generally described as the structural framework that underlies the order and manner in which a narrative is presented to a reader, listener, or viewer. The narrative text structures are the plot and the setting.

¹ Jean,Ballack, *L'Oedipe Ro de Sophoclei*, Presse universitaire de Lille, 1990. Paris,

The narrative structure of any work (film, play, or novel) can be divided into three sections, which is referred to as the three-act structure: setup, conflict, resolution. The setup (act one) is where all of the main characters and their basic situation are introduced, and contains the primary level of characterization (exploring the character's backgrounds and personalities). A problem is also introduced, which is what drives the story forward. The second act, the conflict, is the bulk of the story and begins when the inciting incident (or catalyst) sets things into motion. This is the part of the story where the characters go through major changes in their lives as a result of what is happening; this can be referred to as the character arc, or character development. The third act, or resolution, is when the problem in the story boils over, forcing the characters to confront it, allowing all elements of the story to come together and inevitably leading to the ending. *From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (May 2009)* In addition, according to Gerard Genette, “every text discloses traces of narration which can be studied in order to understand exactly how the narrative is organised and shows relation between elements of the text, knowing that they operate within four analytical categories: the mood, the narrative instance, level and time.” (Genette, 1980. 1995)

I-Historical background of the traditional values in Kutuje

Tradition has to do with the way of doing things, thinking, behaving that has been used by the people of particular societies, communities, families or groups for a long time. Simply put, it is a cultural practice or belief passed down from one generation to another. Thus, “*The gods are not to blame*” (254) has much to do with culture and tradition. The author is drawing attention on traditional values in typical African society and therefore emphasizes the need to stick to them.

1.1.Kutuje: a true Yoruba traditional society

In this play, Ola Rotimi presents Kutuje as a society in which people are supposed to respect the tradition. This society is governed by the traditional laws and signs of the tradition are visible from reverent greetings to the respect of oracles and kings. As far as greetings are concerned, we can notice that Queen Ojuola prostrates many times before Odewale as a sign of salutation; the same thing for Aderopo and the royal children. As for the traditional law, it is noted through Baba Fakunle, the custodian of tradition.

Indeed, when Baba Fakunle delivers the message of the oracles, he is intransigent and unbribable. In this society there is no frontier between the natural and the supernatural, the visible world and the invisible world, the world of the humans and the world of the gods. This universe, controlled by Olodumare, the supreme god as well as the others, influences the life of people and decide about their fate. The gods are then in direct contact with Ogun priests, represented by a seer like Baba Fakunle, who acts as their spokesman. They stand between the Almighty God and human beings as intermediaries. These ones are in charge of transmitting the message of the gods faithfully and no one has the right to question their decision or even reject them. They are to be fully obeyed. Clearly put, we are in a universe where the word is sacred. As a consequence, gods are feared, respected and worshipped. Among these gods, we can quote Ogoun, the Yoruba god of iron and war, Obatala, the god of creation, Soponna, the god of poxes, Ela, the god of deliverance, Sango, the god of thunder and rainfall. They also intervene at different levels of society in the play to satisfy human needs as follows:

[BABA FAKUNLE, rises and moves aside. KING ADETUSA and QUEEN OJUOLA advance towards him, followed by the OGUN PRIEST, who carries the baby.]

Now Baba Fakunle
tells Mother, tells Father,
tells the Priest of Ogun and aged keeper
Of the king's household and the land;
He tells them
what it is that the boy has brought
as mission from the gods
to carry out on earth.
BABA FAKUNLE. This boy, he will kill his own father
and then marry his mother!
(Prologue: 3)

In this extract, Baba Fakunle, the seer delivers the message got from the gods and shared it with the king and the queen in these words: "the baby has a bad fate". As a result, the bad future must not happen. The baby has to be killed:

Mother weeps, Father weeps
The future is not happy,
but to resign oneself to
is to be crippled fast.
Man must struggle.
The bad future must not happen.
The only way to stop it
is to kill,
kill the unlucky messenger
of the gods
(Prologue: 3)

Actually, here in this society, the significance of the divination is to reveal the future. When the future of a child is told and the sentence is passed by the oracle, there is nothing else to do; it has to be applied.

Moreover, in this environment which is heavily impacted by the oracles, the pillars of society, lies on the tradition. As a consequence, every act should comply with the customs. In this perspective, in case of birth, it is extremely important to forecast the future of the new born. This practice which is characteristic of the Yoruba traditional society, helps village chiefs –through the practice of some rituals where the gods are invoked – ward off, avoid disaster or even bring fortune to the population. In the same logic customs allow people to find out the circumstances in which a king dies. It is important to know whether the death of a king is natural or unnatural. As we can see, in the play, these traditional practices have been respected. Indeed, Baba Fakunle has been summoned two times to shed light on the birth of King Adetusa and Queen's Ojuola first son, and later he has been questioned about the murder of King Adetusa. Moreover, the theme of divination is highlighted when Aderopo was sent by the king Odewale to see the oracle of Ifa at the shrine Orunmila:

ODEWALE. The news from Orunmima, is it good or bad?
The news of Ile-Ife, son.

ADEROPO. It is good, your highness.
 PRIEST .. The gods be praised.
 ADEROPO. the oracle of Ifa at the shrine Orunmila has
 Found the cause of the sickness and the deaths now in our
 midst, and it has told me what the people can do
 so that there may be peace of mind again in every home.
 PRIEST. Thus far, your words sound like fresh wine, son-
 Full of sweetness but lacking substance.
 ODEWALE. Details, son, give us the details. [...]
 (ACT ONE Scene2: 18-19)

Beside divination, proverbs, riddles and tales are also parts of the characteristic traits of the traditional society of Kutuje. For example, proverbs highlight the Yoruba wisdom. They are also a sign of good education and eloquence. In the play, characters do not hesitate to use them not only to show their attachment to their mother tongue but also to show their oratorical skills because we are in the civilisation of orality. Thus, proverbs help to answer without frustrating and tell the truth without offending. Examples used to illustrate this idea are abundant in the play, but the one in which the second citizen is mourning King Adetusa has retained our attention. This one is as follows: "When the head of a household dies, the house becomes an empty shell" (ACT 1 Scene 1: 9). This phrase conveys the idea that the head of the household is the heart of the family. When this central figure dies, the house, which once had warmth, and life, is reduced to just a structure, a place that lacks the vitality and presence that the person once brought to it. It reflects the emotional and symbolic importance of the head of the household, suggesting that their death leaves a void that transforms the home into a mere shell, devoid of the essence that made it feel like a true home.

Going along with proverbs, images which emerge from riddles are also a good means to call to people's mind about some specific aspects. This formidable tool which is often used to educate children in a context of orality is also used by characters. Thus, when the third citizen wants to entail King Odewale to take his responsibilities and find solutions to the plagues affecting the kingdom he says: "When the chameleon brings forth a child, is not that child expected to dance?" (Act1 scene1: 9). This proverb suggests that offspring are expected to follow in the footsteps of their parents or inherit their traits. Then chameleon is known for its ability to adapt and change colors, and its child is naturally expected to exhibit the same behavior. In other words, metaphorically, the king means children often take after their parents in terms of behavior, abilities, or destiny.

In the same logic, tales that are also characteristic of traditional societies are found in Kutuje. They are used to teach the traditional values and worldview. The morality which emerges from them contributes not only to educate children but also to forge their personalities. Thus, it is with full knowledge of the facts that in the evening Queen Ojuola tells stories to the royal children.

Among the prevailing values that are taught to children, it includes the respect of tradition and elders, gerontocracy, humility, discretion, patience. Thus, despite the fact that King Odewale is ill-tempered, Aderopo has never responded to him. Moreover, people from Kutuje, like people of all the traditional societies, strongly believe in fetish, charms, magic and amulets. Indeed, Odewale resorted to it to kill King Adetusa and fight his men. (Act3 scene1: 49). Finally, another typical aspect of traditional society that is found in Kutuje is the dialogue which lead to reconciliation. This is then seen from the beginning (people summon before the palace to talk to the king because of the plague) to the end of the play where Aderopo forgives King Odewale.

In a word, Ola Rotimi presents Kutuje as a typical traditional society where customs serve as the barometer and at the same time it is a factor of balance. They rule the people and the society. But no society is spared from any disobedience.

1.2. Traditional values breaking and social consequences

Problems in Kutuje arise when the traditional values were broken. Basically, this lies on the non-application of the oracle's order derived from the tradition which led to a series of actions that resulted from it. First of all, we have the refusal of Gbonka to sacrifice the baby. This disobedience is even considered as an offence to the gods because, as it is said, we are in an environment where it is forbidden to question the decision of the gods. Secondly, the fact of choosing a king who is not from Kutuje is another transgression of the traditional values. Indeed, the guarantors of tradition should have impeded this decision but they did not do anything:

In their joy,
The people made me
KING,
Me, of Ijekun tribe,
They broke tradition and made me,
Unasked,
King of Kutuje.

(PROLOGUE: 7)

And then, the incestuous relationship between King Odewale and his Queen Ojuola (his mother) is a serious transgression (incest) even if the two of them did not know each other before.

Socially, these transgressions resulted in the death of King Adetusa, the decline of the kingdom of Kutuje, the arrival of an intruder at the head of the kingdom, and the incestuous relationship between Odewale and Queen Ojuola (258) and the curse of the people of Kutuje at the backdrop of plagues, illnesses, famine, thirst, death. But how is this crisis of values manifested in the play?

1.3. Manifestations of the crisis of traditional values

This crisis of traditional values is manifested at various level in the play. Tradition is no more respected. As a consequence, the decisions of the oracles are not executed or followed to the letter. In the same perspective, the representatives of the oracles are not taken seriously. This is what partly justifies the act of Gbonka, this messenger of King Adetusa who did not accomplish the prophecy of the gods:

GBONKA [*subdued*]. Pray, have mercy, I mean you no
Wrong. I only tried to spare your life, my lord, I meant
no harm. They ordered me to kill you in the bush,
but I took pity and gave –
ADEWALE. Who ordered you to kill me?
GBONKA. The man behind you, my lord, the Priest of Ogun.
OGUN PRIEST [*gravely*]. It is the custom: when the gods
commands, we must obey!

ADEWALE. Whose child was I?
OGUN PRIEST. It is too late now, you must know the last
Even if ---

(ACT THREE Scene4: 18-19)

Actually, Gbonka did not respect the prescription of the oracle because he felt pity for Odelwale, the baby boy. This misbehaviour will cost them too much: the boy killed his own father and married his own mother (Queen Ojuola) and even beared four children with her. In addition to the theme of the non-respect of the tradition, the elders are not considered or do not deserve respect due to age. We can even note open conflict between the youth and the old. In the play Baba Fakunle and Alaka are the perfect victims of this. They have been brutalized, shouted at, ridiculed and insulted by King Odewale, his chiefs and his guards. Even Queen Ojuola also disrespected Baba Fakunle. Clearly, gerontocracy is a clear sign of the manifestation of this crisis of values. Then, what are the drawbacks of such behaviours?

II. The aftermaths of the crisis

In african societies, the westernization has brought about uprooted communities. But particularly in Kutuje, the non-respect of the tradition resulted from many drawbacks. That's to say that the crisis has taken many shapes. Among them, we can shed light on the following:

2.1. The epidemic

Eleven years after the death king Adetusa, the people of Kutuje who have lived harmoniously, saw the emergence of a strange and awful disease in their midst. Then came the trouble time:

There is trouble
now in the land.
Joy has broken
and scattered.
Peace, too, is no more
(Prologue: 8)

During this troublesome period, people's complaint and lamentation also started before the royal palace:

Before the palace. TOWNSPEOPLE – old, and young, men,
women, some with babies strapped to their back –all
sprawling or crouching on the bare ground in varying
forms of agonized semi-consciousness; moaning, keening,
voices become more inarticulate, more impatient; then
give way to moaning and keening again
(Act 1 scene 1: 9).

The disease, as the township people called it, was not one, but a curse as reported by Aderopo (Act 1 scene 2: 19). According to Aderopo, the priest said that “the curse is on a man” (Act 1 scene 2: 20). And as soon as the truth is not made around this person, the plague will continue, killing and

ailing people. Then psychologically tormented, they broke tradition again and set misunderstanding and suspicion.

2.2. Suspicion and misunderstanding in the kingdom of Kutuje

As we can imagine, the disobedience of tradition and the epidemic establish the atmosphere for us to know more about the character traits of the people in the people and paved the way to expose the murderer. In this quest, a heavy atmosphere of mistrust arouses first between Aderopo and king Odewale (Act 2 scene 2: 32-33) when Baba Fakunle was brought to reveal the truth. Odewale, furious, was wondering if “Aderopo is jealous that I am sharing a bed with his mother” (Act 2 scene 2: 31) and he accused him to plot to take over the throne (Act 1 scene 2: 20). Suspicion became more evident when hearing that the murderer of king Adetusa is still alive in their midst, Odewale quotes: “my people, I fear and I tremble. Suspicions, heavy suspicions fill my heart [...] in their midst” (Act 1 scene 2: 23). Another aspect of suspicions and misunderstanding is mentioned in the following extract: “Odewale. I have sworn by Ogun to expose the murderer before the eyes of all [...] The murderers have sealed his lips with money [...] (Act 2 scene 1: 27). The above demonstration leads us to say that the two states could have avoided Odewale’s downfall if he had saved himself from problems.

2.3. The downfall of Odewale

Factors that contributed to the tragedy of Odewale, the main character in the play, are numerous. First, he escaped death by compassion by Gbonka, king Adetusa’s messenger (prologue: 3-4) who did not obey the Gods. Yet, when trying to run away from his fate, Odewale’s hot temper is the second aspect that contributed to the end of his reign, when at Ede, the provocation on the farm by an old man (his own father) led to the murder. So, to confirm this negative trait, Baba Fakunle states: “your hot temper like a disease from the birth is the curse that brought you trouble.” (Act 2 scene1: 29).

Next, Odewale’s rash decision and vengeance pushed him to pass judgment on the unknown murderer. He is too eager to revenge:

ODEWALE. Before Ogun the God of iron, I stand on oath.
Witness now all you present that before the feast of
Ogun, which at sunrise. I, Odewale, the son of
Ogundele, shall search and fully lay open before
Your very eyes the murderer of King Adetusa. And
Having seized that murderer, I swear by this sacred arm
of Ogun, that I straightway bring him to the
agony of slow death. First he shall be exposed the
eyes of the world and put to shame-the beginning
of living death. Next, he shall be put into lasting
darkness, his eyes tortured in their living sockets until
their blood and rheum swell forth to feel hollow.
of crushed eyeballs. And then, the final agony: we
shall cut him from his roots. Expelled from this
land of his birth. He shall roam in the darkness in the land
of nowhere. and then die unmourned by men who
know him. and buried by vultures who kow him not.

(Act 1 scene 2: 24)

In this extract, we can visibly see that Odewale's impatience and rash actions are some of the negative character traits that govern him, so that he even refuses to eat before he finds the murderer:

OJUOLA. Won't my lord eat even a little before he goes?
ODEWALE. No, no food yet. I must carry on my search for the murderer of King Adetusa. If we fail to catch the murderer in the town, we shall move on to the villages around us. If we found no murderer there either, we will go to the farms.

(Act 3 scene 2: 50).

In this extract, king Odewale uses (shall) the meta operational of the future to show that there is no way. Whatever happens, he is surely going to find the culprit of this plague. Another point is his disregard or stubbornness towards the oracle's warnings, not to run away from the place where he was in order to avoid the fate to fulfill. But unfortunately, he could not follow this instruction. He moved to accomplish the prophecy: "kill his father and marry his own mother". The gods have used the epidemic to vindicate themselves and prove that they can decide for human beings. Their will is an absolute must. No one can defeat them.

III. Crisis management

3.1. Psychological and medical aid

In crisis management, the psychological support is the most important part because a community devastated by an epidemic, needs both psychological support and medical care. The people of kutuje lived in an undetermined period of a Yoruba kingdom and were decimated by their own fault. To overcome and put an end to these troubles, which killed all ages of their community, they turned to traditional medicines. Odewale, the king called the townspeople for patience:

ODEWALE. Our talk is of illness, sister, to get fully cured one needs patience. The moon moves slowly but by daybreak it crosses the sky. Keep on drinking the medicine; one day you will see change. Patience. [...]

ODEWALE. By trying often, the monkey learns to jump from tree to tree without falling. Keep on trying. Now, everybody go home... try. Get together, form Groups of threes

(Act1 scene1: 14)

This extract shows that the king played an important role for psychologically calming the people of Kutuje from the fear of the disease and the epidemic, by reminding(262) them his eleven peaceful past reign, where they lived harmoniously in the kingdom. But the current situations will be overcome by being patient and following his advice. Even now all the people of Kutuje are suffering from the infection. People were called to give sacrifice in order to receive salvation from some Yoruba gods'. These sacrifices give way to 'wake-up' call' king Odewale to mobilize them better with herbal treatment. He had showed much compassion and assistance to Iya Abusa, and others who have sick men in their respective families. Thus, to soften the psychological hurt and sufferings of townspeople, the king sent Aderopo to Ile Ife, to the all- seeing god, Orunmila to

proffer the necessary remedy to their problems. At the end, Baba Fakunle, the trusted seer, told the name of the murder of king Adetusa, because the sickness was due to his presence among kutuje people.

As medical solution is concerned, when the people were suffering, the king encouraged to boil herbal medicine and drink it in the following lines:

ODEWALE. [...] now everybody, go home ...try. Get together, form groups of threes, Ajamu, [...]
ODEWALE. so many it be. Up, all of you-into the bush! Go and get calabash. Go on and pick herbs from the bush, boil them, drink them.

(Act1 scene1: 14).

These lines tell us how the king and his people were guided to use herbal medicine in order to overcome the challenge of the epidemic curse imposed on them by their Gods for their non respect of traditional tribal rules. King Odewale is greatly touched and becomes worried but he decides to take up the challenge and do his best for the freedom of his people. He first draws attention on the fact that he and his family are not exempted from the sufferings, implying that they also have a fair share in their plight.

3.2. Spiritual management of crisis

The super natural forces in the play are the gods, (262) oracles and priests, or spiritual forces that are invoked through incantations. It is obvious that they contribute significantly to the development of the play. Generally, in Africa, when people cannot handle a problem that they are faced with, they abandon themselves to God or divinities. This is the case in Kutuje where, after many attempts to send away the plague, people turned to spirituality. First of all, things started with their traditional belief, and a society dominated by animist, all activities were relying on the order of gods. Any misbehavior or any fault committed by a single person was paid by the whole society. That's why the numerous truth seers were honored as living gods, for instance the leasing of the newborn son of Adetusa was ordered by the God through the prediction of Old Baba Bafunle. But Gbonba had defied the priest's prophecy and spared his life and left him in the bush, he had done wrong according to their tribal law and transgressed the gods too. According king Odewale, the trouble which his society faced was not due to any sickness but to a plague in their heart, that's why he called his people:

Bring tools here. "My people, we have been walking on a wrong road. Our biggest trouble today is not sickness in our land; it is the plague in our Hearts. Our hearts and heads are sick with too much leaning on the powers.

(Act3 scene3: 59)

These lines reveal that (263) king Odewale and his people were overwhelmingly engaged in spiritual fight against the epidemic and the sickness which were destroying their clansmen. The people also accepted a stranger an unknown young or an "alien people" as king which the gods never accepted, at last Odewale himself his impatience and hot temper led him to kill his father. When Alaka and Gbonba met to confess the truth by vindicating Baba Fakunle, it has been realized

that Odewale has killed his own father and got married to his own mother. The gods have used the epidemic to vindicate themselves and prove that they do what they say.

3.3. Proverbs in crisis management

In the Yoruba oral tradition, communities have several modes of expression for communicating, exchanging, solving problems and making themselves understood. They have specific features that fall within the domain of artistic, poetic and linguistic aesthetics. These include proverbs, songs, myths and tales. The proverb is a formula with stable formal characteristics, often metaphorical or figurative, expressing a truth of experience or a piece of practical and popular wisdom, common to an entire social group. (*Le Grand Robert*, Dictionnaire en ligne)

For Odebunmi (2008:2) proverbs deal with issues that border on the values, norms, institutions and artifacts of a society across the whole gamut of the people's experiences. Also, the Holy Bible in the book of proverbs chapter 1 verse 2 to 4, notes that proverbs are used :

Pour connaître la sagesse et l'instruction, pour comprendre les paroles de l'intelligence, pour recevoir des leçons de bon sens, de justice, d'équité et de droiture, pour donner aux simples du discernement, au jeune homme de la connaissance et de la réflexion. (2009: 636)

In Africa, proverbs are of paramount importance because they are used to educate and teach people. That's why Achebe concludes: "Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten." (1958:5) But this quotation just shows how important proverbs are in everyday communication in the lives of Africans. Here, proverbs are compared to "palm oil", which is used in practically every dish in Africa and elsewhere. They are also used by people to address others in subtle ways. This leads us to deduce that proverbs represent one of the pillars of the transmission belt of knowledge of African peoples. To back this assertion up, Okebaram, J.C. states that :

The wisdom contained in proverbs has guided and shaped people's social interactions since ancient times all over the world. Among the Igbos, the peoples of eastern Nigeria, proverbs are mainly used to transmit the oral traditions of the peoples expressing the Igbo weltanschauung and to promote community values such as the sanctity of life. The intellectual art of proverbs is exploited to justify actions and rhetorically enrich conversations. (2018 :56)

For Okebaram (2018: 57), the art of using proverbs is exemplified in the literary works of Chinua Achebe whose equivalents are found in Yoruba, Hausa, Benin and Efik to name but a few groups in Nigeria. He goes on to say that proverbs permit not only all areas of moral, social, religious and economic life, but also the foundations of the aesthetic use of language in communication among the Igbos.

Unanimous on the functions of proverbs in traditional society, another study led by (264) Nigeria Magazine (1989: 32) maintains that proverbs contain the wisdom of traditional peoples. They are philosophical and moral statements reduced to a few words, and they form a mnemonic device in societies where everything is worth knowing and relevant on a daily basis. Going along with what

is said above, Yusuf and Methangwane (2003: 408) define proverbs as "relatively short expressions, which are usually associated with wisdom and are used to perform a variety of social functions".

Although it is true that the use of proverbs is beneficial and there is no doubt about their usefulness, they are also of poetic utility. Proverbs are maybe(264) difficult to translate or even to interpret, because it is a question of culture. Culture is born within a community that develops its own ideologies to facilitate transactions of all kinds. In this regard, Mieder defines the term proverb as follows: "proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation. (1993: 24) In other words, a proverb is a short sentence generally known to the people which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation. Proverbs are a window on the values of a culture. They reflect and reinforce what everyone knows.

In terms of function, proverbs in Africa have been observed to "occur on all occasions when language is used for communication either as art or as tool [...] Proverbs are used in oratory, counselling, judging, embellishing speeches and enriching conversations" (Finnegan 1994: 36).

In Yoruba oral culture, where people rely on the spoken word rather than written communication, proverbs play an important role, sometimes alongside other forms of oral communication such as stories, songs and poetry, as they are highly valued for their aesthetic expression. Apart from their literary aspects, they have always been a source of teaching and education, and more generally, a means of expression and common wisdom. They are an integral part of people's cultural heritage, tradition, history, wisdom and ethics. This can be seen in the whole play.

In addition, it shows that in the African perception, proverbs play an important role in conversations, education and social issues because the characters did so later when he was experiencing things himself. In other words, proverbs are used as a way of saying things differently, in a veiled way, in order to carry more weight in a discussion. Okpewho defines the proverb as follows:

Put simply, a proverb may be defined as a piece of folk wisdom expressed with terseness and charm. The 'terseness' implies a certain economy in the choice of words and a sharpness of focus, while the 'charm' conveys the touch of poetic beauty in the expression. (Okpewho, 1992 : 226)

Okpewho succinctly reveals that the proverb is like a word of popular wisdom expressed with concision and charm, implying a certain economy in the choice of words while conveying a touch of poetic beauty in the expression. As with stories and legends, Ola Rotimi also draws literary inspiration from proverbs to enrich the content of his works, as he has a good knowledge of Yoruba proverbs.

Seen as a rhetorical aid and a stylistic verbal form, the proverb conveys a highly concealed thought in a language that is truly not accessible to all. The excerpt below is a fine illustration of these assertions. "Kolanut lasts long in the mouths of them who value it !" (prologue: 7) This proverb

expresses the wisdom, the traditional morality and the experience that Rotimi wants to inculcate in the reader. He preserves this wisdom in compact and metaphorical forms that instruct us and explain the world to us through the past, present and future.

In fact, the language of the play is spiced with proverbs to impart traditional wisdom in the quest for solving the problem in Kutuje in: “when the rain falls on the leopard does it wash off its spots?” (Act1 scene1: 10) From the second citizen questioning Odewale if he has changed on becoming a king.” Another one is: “when the wood insect gathers sticks on its own head it carries them” from Odewale implying he should be allowed to bear his own burden.

Some proverbs are used to create humour. Typical cases of proverbs that create fun or laughter abound in the play with few examples like: “when the chameleon brings forth a child, is not that child expected to dance?” (Act1 scene1: 9) From the third citizen urging Odewale to act as a king and save them from the plague. “all lizard lie prostrate, how can a man which lizard suffers from bellyach?” (Act1 scene2: 23) From Odewale implying how difficult it is to identify the murderer among them.

Some proverbs are used to create an economy of words or to make the speaker more tactful, concise and colour adding. The following examples are meant to justify this point: “Two rams cannot drink from the same bucket at the same time. They will lock horns. (Act2 scene2: 34) From Odewale implying that he and Aderopo cannot stay peaceful in one place. “Can the cockroach be innocent in the gathering of fowls.” (Act3 scene3: 59) From Odewale asserting how insecure he is as a stranger in Kutuje.

Some proverbs are sometimes used to create suspense in the story of Ola Rotimi. They create anxiety or uncertainty to know or find out and outcome of something. “The secret of the owl must not be known in the daylight.” (Act3 scene3: 59) From Aderopo when he is hesitating to divulge the message from Ile Ife openly. “Until the rotten tooth is pulled out, the mouth must chew with caution.” (Act1 scene2: 21) from Aderopo implying that until the murderer of king Adetusa is found, one must be careful in talking as the murderer is alleged to be in their midst.

In short, proverbs affect the mood and the atmosphere prevailing because the image created by some proverbs affect our emotions or feelings and it seeks to arouse our interest in the play and offer better understanding of the events. Moreover, Ogunjimi and Rasheed Na'allah claim that :

Proverbs are oral compositions and their various thematic and stylistic constituents are derived from all the layers that we describe as the pinnacle of African values. They embrace the philosophical and socio-cultural value systems of the people whose principles are based on oral tradition. They also point to the individual, domestic and collective lifestyles of the society from which they derive. (2005 : 85)

In other words, proverbs adopt/use elements from people's cosmological and social environment. However, it is difficult to understand the complex metaphors and symbols of proverbs, which are frequently used in his oral poems. The essential thing about a proverb is its meaning [...]. The meaning of a proverb is made clear only when side by side with the translation is given a full

account of the accompanying social situation – the reason for its use, its effects, and its significance in speech. (Firth, 1926: 134):

Conclusion

In African perception, the supernatural forces are aware of one's end or future from the beginning. At every turn and twist in the play there are efforts and desires to meet divine expectations sometimes in the name of custom to satisfy human needs. Considering the above demonstration and event through the play, Ola Rotimi draws people's attention on the need to stick to traditions and customs in order to avoid punitive events and tragedies. Here in the play, the doom has finally caught up with our hero. Refusing to accept his fate, he triggered the crisis. To say that all tragedy in a sense, stems from man's attitude, the simple fact of the insecurity and the uncertainty of life; and moreover, that man is not in control of his situation but is merely a plaything to superior, malefic and inscrutable forces. In the quest for the solution to the plague which resulted from the disrespect and the disobedience of the tradition the African wisdom and language (the use of proverbs, metaphors, rhetoric) was of paramount importance. Language, therefore, expresses the patterns and structures of culture, and consequently influences human thinking, manners and judgement. Akin. (2008: 74) It will be important to be able to embrace hybridity because the rejection of tradition means the failure of African societies. But tradition also has a hand in the blame as the people of Kutuje were compelled by tradition to force a widow (queen Ojuola, older than Odewale) to marry a new king whether or not he has a wife already.

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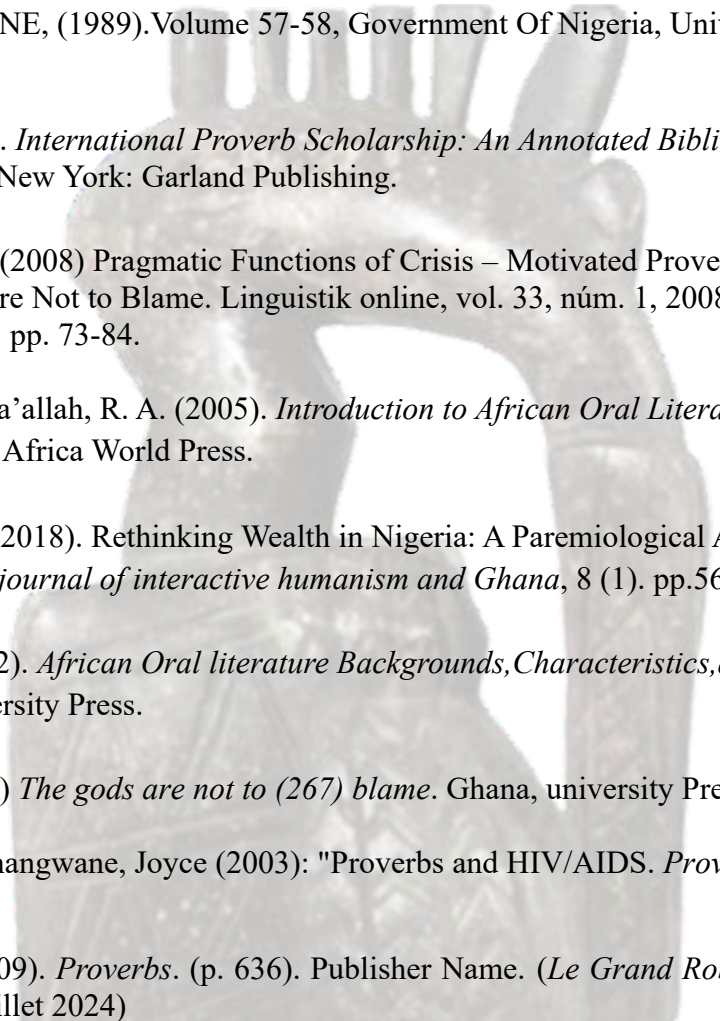
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