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The African Woman as a Symbol of her Continent in Wole Soyinka's The Lion and the Jewel

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Abstract: *This paper is intended to offer a feminist reading of Wole Soyinka's play The Lion and the Jewel by showing that its main women figures are constructed as tropes of Africa rather than being depicted as full-fledged individuals. Besides being deprived of self-determining agency, these women act as symbols who represent the traditional cultural values of Africa, and hence they never attempt to subvert the system of patriarchy which is rationalised by these values. Even more so, they are "idealised" by the dramatist so that they can convey his social vision of the African continent during its historical transition from tradition to modernity. More precisely, through their stories the playwright stresses the need of Africans to resist cultural changes that undermine their sense of black identity. Thus, Soyinka's play confirms the view held by many Postcolonial Feminist critics such as Florence Stratton and Elleke Boehmer who argue that the importance of the African woman in many of the African male-authored texts lies mainly in her ability to represent what her continent represents. In conclusion, the female figures in Soyinka's play are primarily given a voice as Africans who indict modernity rather than as women subjects who deplore their subordinate position in society.*

Keywords: *African woman, Symbolism, African Feminism, Tradition versus Modernity, Patriarchy.*

الملخص: يهدف هذا المقال إلى دراسة مدى رمزية الشخصيات النسوية في مسرحية الكاتب النيجيري "وولي شوينكا" المعنونة ب "الأسد والجوهرة" وهذا من خلال تمثيلهم للقارة الإفريقية حيث أن مصير تلك الشخصيات في نهاية المسرحية وخاصة زواج جميلة القرية برئيس القبيلة الهرم بدلا من المعلم الشاب والمتشبع بالثقافة الغربية يرمزان أساسا الى رؤية الكاتب في مستقبل قارته ثقافيا. وقد حذر الكثير من النقاد النسويين من أمثال ا"اليكي بوهمر" و "فلورنس ستراتون" من جعل المرأة السوداء رمزا للأرض والقيم الثقافية الإفريقية غير أن الدراسات السا بقة لمسرحية "شووينكا" لم تشر إلى الدور الرمزي للمرأة بل صبت جل اهتماماتها إلى التركيز على عدم انتقاد الكاتب في هذه المسرحية لمشكلة النظام الأبوي في بلده وإفريقيا بصفة عامة. وخلص هذا المقال إلى تبيان دور النساء الرمزي في مسرحية "شوينكا" من خلال تمثيلهن لقارة بأكملها تشهد تغيرات ثقافية جذرية قد تمس بهويتها وكيانها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المرأة الإفريقية، الرمزية، المنهاج الإفريقي النسوي، التقاليد والحداثة، النظام الأبوي.

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This paper is chiefly intended to examine the ways in which the women figures in Wole Soyinka 's play *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963) are constructed as symbols of Africa. This play is reputed for addressing the question of the clash between tradition and modernity[1] in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular and hence the role of women in this play is often seen to be overshadowed by such a question. Considering gender to be a secondary issue in Soyinka's play can be further explained by the fact that the playwright is male and that the African writers' concern for culture was fundamental during the time of the work's publication. As we shall see later, Soyinka's position towards the question of cultural conflict is mainly revealed by the closure of the story in this play, which is further characterised by his occasional reference to the oral aspects of the Yoruba community (a community in Nigeria to which he belongs). But can his narration of women's experiences in *The Lion and the Jewel* reflect his social vision of Africa? If so, the women in this play will be considered to function as an allegory of Africa. What follows is an attempt to answer this question.

The use of the African woman as a trope that represents her continent has been recurrent in male-authored African literature. However, little, if not almost nothing, has been said about the allegorical function of the female characters in *The Lion and the Jewel*. Most studies of this work have already focused on the theme of cultural hybridity, the question of African identity, and the dramatist's use of satire and myth. And if the issue of his representation of the African woman was raised, it tended to be discussed in relation to the problem of patriarchy and hence the question of what his main female figures allegorise has not so far attracted the critical attention that they actually deserve. But what is surprising is that Soyinka himself admits that "the primary function of woman in his work is that of symbol and essence" (Bryan, 1987: 119). Hence, if the African woman in *The Lion and the Jewel* is constructed by its playwright as a symbol, the question that poses itself is the following: which essence does the African woman symbolise?

This paper, thus, attempts to offer a feminist reading of *The Lion and the Jewel*, and this can be done by bringing to the fore issues like women's victimhood, agency (if any) and how they can relate to their symbolic function. Many African Feminist critics have tried to link women's personal histories to their collective allegories in the sense that the story of the African woman in fiction could be understood as a representation of the story of her nation or the story of Africa at large (Nnaemeka, 1997: 2). However, a close reading of the development of modern African literature suggests that the social construct of gender and its allegorical function have changed over time.

To begin with, gender was not the major issue in the male literary tradition in Africa during the fifties and sixties. Male writers such as Chinua Achebe, James Ngugi and Ayi Kwei Armah were mainly preoccupied with such issues as the tension between tradition and modernity, independence, nation-building and so on. While responding to the colonial discourse about Africa, their writings during this period cannot be read as a deconstruction of the patriarchal culture behind which, as the African Feminists such as Buchi Emecheta

[1] The terms "tradition" and "modernity" are used in this paper to mean the pre-colonial African culture and the European culture that the coloniser brought to Africa respectively. While tradition is a set of beliefs, customs and values that characterised the lives of the African communities before colonialism, modernity is a mode of life that has been imposed by the European coloniser on these communities (Morrison, 2018: 15).

and Ama Ata Aidoo repeatedly claim, the African woman's subordinate position in her society was naturalised. Wole Soyinka's play *The Lion and the Jewel* is no exception because its women characters are not primarily presented as representatives of the oppressed African womenfolk in the male-dominated social order; rather, as will be discussed subsequently, their role in the play as individuals with their own needs and desires is subsumed by their role as defenders of the traditional culture which runs the risk of being superseded by modernity. Thus, they can be said here to have an allegorical function in the play because, through them, the playwright conveys his social vision of the African continent. In other words, they are present in the story to underscore the playwright's call for cultural self-assertion. After all, they are the only characters in the play who honour the African cultural tradition for its own sake.

This being so, it is important to examine the literary value with which Soyinka invests his female figures in his *The Lion and the Jewel*, which does not belong to the literary tradition of projecting a semi-idealised image of black Africa. Nor can it be qualified as a feminist work where its author advocates the cause of female autonomy. Yet there must be some literary tradition which has, partly at least, shaped Soyinka's own creation of the female figures in the play. It is obvious that Soyinka's women figures in *The Lion and the Jewel* are not largely different from the female characters in the early works of many other male writers such as Chinua Achebe, James Ngugi and Ayi Kwei Armah, who "are said to have been either unable to, or unwilling to, present female characters with a destiny of their own" (Breitinger, 1996: 174). And this explains in part the reason for which women's destinies in Soyinka's play are portrayed as being primarily determined by the cultural situation of their community rather than by their own personal choices.

More importantly, this article is based on the premise that Soyinka's women in the play under consideration represent what Africa represents to him. We do not simply mean by Africa the geographical space but also the culture, values and the traditional mores that distinguish it from other continents. This is indeed reminiscent of Chinua Achebe's definition of his continent when he said that "Africa is not only a geographical expression, it is also a metaphysical landscape- it is in fact a view of the world and the whole cosmos perceived from a particular position" (Achebe, 1975). Indeed, the Western authors who wrote about Africa have sometimes been taken to task for representing Africa as a beautiful landscape without at the same time talking about the culture of its natives, and Ernest Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa* is a case in point (see Mandel, 2011).

It must be further emphasised that the women characters in *The Lion and the Jewel* should not solely be viewed as tropes through whom Soyinka has re-invented Africa. In this vein, Andrew Walser is against reading *The Lion and The Jewel* as an allegory where the principal characters are merely seen as symbols. He argues that this reading is reductionist because, as he further puts it, these "characters have authentic and meaningful life beyond what they symbolize" (Walser, 1999: 284). It is obvious that the characters, whether male or female, are presented as individuals who have their own desires, though it has to be stated that the subjectivity of the male characters is more deeply explored than that of the female figures. But given the playwright's major thematic concern of affirming African selfhood amidst cultural changes, it will be apposite to read each of the main

characters in relation to his role in the delineation of the dramatist's position towards the question of culture in modern Africa in general and modern Nigeria in particular.

Nevertheless, advancing the argument that women in Soyinka's play act as symbols of Africa does not mean that Africa is not symbolised by something else in this work. The village Ilujinle where the events of the story take place can be a perfect symbol of Africa given the fact this setting is usually read as a microcosm of Nigeria and Africa at large. But the main aim of this paper is to elucidate that the way the woman is represented in the play offers deep insights about the image of Africa as projected by the dramatist. So it can be tentatively assumed that their actions and their fate at the end of the play tend to reflect the playwright's vision of Africa.

There are two main male characters and two main female characters in the play. Baroka, the village chief and Lakunle, the young schoolteacher, who are the principal male figures of the play, are believed to stand for tradition and modernity respectively. However, little has so far been said about the allegorical function of the main women characters, namely, the beautiful young girl Sidi and the senior wife of the village chief Sadiku. But it has to be stressed here that Sidi and Sadiku assume a great importance in the play since the latter treats the subject of marriage. But is it the only reason for which Sidi and Sadiku play an important role in the development of Soyinka's story? Remarkably, these two principal women figures in the play show how tradition can be defended regardless of whether the individuals' needs are satisfied or not. In short, unlike Baroka and Lakunle, they use neither tradition nor modernity to their own advantage.

In general, Baroka, Sidi and Sadiku are all critical of modernity, though each one of them criticises modernity in his or her own way. This allows us to consider them to be symbols of their continent. But it must be noted that being a symbol of Africa is not a matter of all or nothing; some characters tend to be more symbolic of Africa than others. Seen in this way, it could be argued that Baroka is the least symbolic of Africa among the characters who display some anti-modernity stand because self-aggrandisement is his primary concern. On the other hand, Sidi and Sadiku act sometimes in a traditional way even if the outcome of these actions appear to be at the expense of their own needs as individuals. Conversely, by being presented as a self-seeking village chief, Baroka can hardly embody a continent whose culture is mainly characterised by communalism, which is often pitted against individualism that is characteristic of the Western culture. All too simply, communalism is favouring the well-being of the community over one's personal desires and individualism is fairly its opposite.

Before examining the symbolic function of the female character's in Soyinka's comedy, it is important to shed light, however briefly, on the role that the male characters play in the story. This story is often summarised as the reversal of the classical love triangle since at its end the old man rather than a young man wins the heart of the young girl. Symbolically speaking, though he is against the traditional epistemology, Lakunle cannot be identified with European modernity at its core. By being in favour of the wholesale adoption of the gaudy trimmings of Western material culture, he just represents the superficial aspects of Western modernity. On the other hand, Baroka combines wisely between tradition and modernity: in order to convince Sidi to be his youngest wife; he gives her the bride price and promises to purchase a printing machine so that her beautiful picture will be posted everywhere.

As mentioned previously, Baroka, who is nicknamed the lion in the play, is the representative of tradition because of his firm opposition to modernity. Being a representative of tradition may enable him to be a symbol of Africa too. However, our contention in this article is that the main female characters, namely his head wife Sadiku and the village beauty Sidi, are more representative of the African continent than him. Suffice it to say at this moment that he is more portrayed as a wily chief rather than as an advocate of the traditional culture. By contrast, women are used by Soyinka in this play as an image to prop up the African values that are threatened by modernity. But while they manage to defend the African values against the modernising rhetoric of the educated young man Lakunle, as will be discussed subsequently, they fail to achieve any victory over manhood which is represented by Baroka.

In fact, the symbolic importance of the African woman as an allegory of continent is not only to be traced in the postcolonial African literary production for it can be found in some canonical colonial texts. In general, the African woman stands for what her continent stands for. According to Abena Busia, the African woman reinforces the colonial writer's representation of Africa and, worse still, she sometimes appears to be more alienated and othered than the male African. In her analysis of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, she argues that Kurtz's fiancée is "the very symbol of frenzied passion: uncontrollable, powerless, inaudible, and certainly functionally inarticulate" (Busia, 2005: 247). If Africa is associated with sensuality in colonial writings, so is the African woman. This point has been stressed by Delia Jarrett-Macauley when she says that the black women are constructed as hypersexual in the European narratives that justify both colonialism and slavery (Jarrett-Macauley 1996: 5). The colonisers do not only focus on what they see as the uncontrollable sexual drives of the African natives to support their racist view of the blacks as being beastly but also use social constructs of masculinity and femininity as metaphors to justify their imperial enterprise. They indeed "figured Africa as a woman and thought of Africa as the other, the female, the deceptive, fertile, to be owned and taken" (Wisker 2013: 137). This shows that the representation of the black female figure by colonial writers can sometimes be read in relation to the writer's view of Africa. In other words, in many works of fiction, the way the writer views Africa shapes in part his representation of the African woman.

This brings us to discuss the symbolic function of the African woman in the literature that aims at positivising the image of Africa. In fact, Florence Stratton was the first major critic of African literature to observe that the nubile girl functions sometimes as a trope of the beautiful landscape of Africa in many African male-authored works (Stratton 1994: 41), and this remark applies perfectly to Sidi who is depicted by the playwright as a true village belle. In addition, the creation of a beautiful woman character is always understood as a postcolonial strategy of deconstructing the colonial myth of equating whiteness with beauty and blackness with ugliness.

Furthermore, a link between Africanity and femininity, while having been established in many colonial texts, continues, perhaps surprisingly, to define the literary discourse of a good number of male African writers. For instance, Stephanie Newell points out that in the poetry of Leopold Sédar Senghor, "one often finds a romanticised, static vision of pre-colonial Africa, frequently incarnated in a feminine form" (Newell, 2006: 30). The view that the Africa embodies what is feminine is also found in the opening

scene of Soyinka's play where a conversation between Lakunle and Sidi takes place. In this conversation, Lakunle assumes the role of the male European coloniser who uses the rhetoric of modernity in the hope of easily dominating Sidi who stands for the African other in this scene. Therefore, the first scene provides a good argument which supports the statement that Sidi's story is reminiscent of the story of Africa, which was "the object of desire and derision" in many works by colonial writers. Sidi, too, is the object of desire and derision in the eyes of Lakunle. He indeed tries to deride her in the hope of convincing her to become his "modern" wife. Just as the European coloniser tried to modernise the land of Africa, so does Lakunle who wants to turn Sidi, who is a rural woman, into a sophisticated city girl. He does not only deride her by saying that she is a "bush girl" and "illiterate goat" but also by arguing that women are "the weaker sex." But his major argument is that modernity has to supersede the traditional customs in the whole village of Ilujinle. It must be further noted that Lakunle uses gender rather than culture as the basic argument to justify his marriage proposal. He shows that every man needs a woman "to stand by him" (Soyinka, 1963: 6) in the various struggles that he has to fight in his life. Once he comes to the conclusion that his way of courting her as a woman fails to achieve anything, he shifts to thwart her by indicting the traditional values that she embraces.

However, by arguing against the modernising rhetoric that is preached by Lakunle, Sidi identifies herself right from the outset as a defender of the African tradition and this further supports the view that she is constructed by the dramatist as the trope of Africa. That is to say, through her, the playwright projects an image of Africa which is torn between the cultural forces of tradition and those of modernity. More significantly, it is Sidi's beauty that provokes the competition between Baroka and Lakunle over seeking her hand in marriage. In other words, the cultural clash between tradition and Westernisation in modern Africa is allegorised by the rivalry between Baroka and Lakunle. Thus, similar to the fact that Africa which has been the site of the tension between the European civilisation and the African traditional civilisations, Sidi's body is the object of competition between a man who advocates tradition and another one who adopts modernity.

Surely, Soyinka has been influenced by the literary tradition of linking the experiences of women to the predicament of the African continent. Even though Soyinka famously rejected the tenets of the Negritude poets like Leopold Sédar Senghor, he appears in *The Lion and the Jewel* to have inherited the tradition of marginalising the voice of the African woman by taking her personal identity to be part parcel of the concept of Africanness. At the surface level, equating black womanhood with the African continent seems to be a form of idealising the African woman. Simply put, the woman often appears as an "ideal" rather than "real" figure in postcolonial fiction by male authors. However, this literary choice denies the particularities of women's experiences in their communities. Elleke Boehmer sharply criticises the tendency of some male writers to idealise the African woman as the symbol of the land or the cultural values of her nation. She writes that "the woman figure stands for national territory and for certain national values: symbolically she is ranked above the men; in reality she is kept below them (Boehmer, 2005: 29). It seems as though the African woman is deprived of her "woman-ness" once she is idealised as a trope of her continent. In a similar vein, Stratton makes a distinction

between the woman character who has her voice heard as a woman subject and a woman character who is used a symbol to reinforce the male writer's vision of his community. Consider the quote below

> Metaphorically, she [the African woman] is of highest importance, practically she is nothing. She has no autonomy, no status as a character, for her person and her story are shaped to meet the requirements of his [the male writer's] vision. One of these requirements is that she provides attractive packaging. She is thus constructed as beauty, eroticism, fecundity- the qualities that the male Self values inside the female Other. (Stratton 1994: 123)

In other words, a difference is to be made between a character who is presented as a full-fledged individual and a character who represents a certain ideal, norm or value. True, Sidi and Sadiku do not clearly represent ideals since their female subjectively has been explored in a few instances. But these instances are overshadowed by their general role of representing a traditional world that runs the risk of eroding as a result of modernity.

Nowhere in Soyinka's play is there any mention of Sidi as an individual who makes personal choices that are against the expectations of her community. True, she sometimes acts out of her free will by virtue of being an individual, but most often her actions are determined by the values of her community. Thus, in spite of her importance in Soyinka's play, Sidi can hardly be seen as a heroic character or a self-determining subject with agency. This being so, Soyinka can be taken to task for not offering a dynamic representation of the African woman in *The Lion and the Jewel*. This play could be summarised as follows: it begins with Sidi being courted by Lakunle and ends with the marriage of Sidi to Baroka. Therefore, the women figures in Soyinka's play are more likely to be regarded as symbols or "types" rather than agents for social change. Sidi is indeed portrayed as an object of admiration and thus she is "indispensable in a male-dominated world" (Kolawole, 1997: 96). Sidi is never shown to voice her autonomous, self-governing destiny. Even though she finally gets married to Baroka, as we shall see later, this is not really her own choice.

Also, the African woman need not be a mother or grandmother in order to symbolise Africa; a young African woman can be a trope of her continent in African literature. It is true that the mother as a trope of Africa is recurrent in modern male-authored African literature, but the use of a young woman as a representative of Africa has also become noticeable in literary works by both African male and female writers. The reason for which the mother seems to best represent Africa is its association with fecundity, procreation, nurture and security (Stratton, 1994: 41). As a matter of fact, the mother as a trope of Africa is not dominant in *The Lion and the Jewel*. Because of his famous opposition to the Negritude movement whose major tenet is the romanticisation of pre-colonial Africa, Soyinka does not create a woman character who represents an idealistic view of Africa. Thus, the trope of Mother Africa which was mainly propagated by Leopold Sédar Senghor in his poetry has undergone some transformation depending by and large on the type of the culturalist discourse that the writer evinces. In this vein, Florence Stratton argues that one of the founders of the Negritude Movement employs the trope of "the embodiment of Africa as the figure of a woman" that "can occur in a different guise in contemporary

male-authored writing [in contemporary Africa]" (Stratton, 1994: 39). Stratton further argues that the form that this trope takes depends on the ideological pronouncements of the author (ibid: 39). For instance, the woman can symbolise Africa by assuming the role of the oppressed working class if the discourse of the writer is Marxist. One might think of Wariinga in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* as an example (see Evans, 2002). The eldest woman figure in *The Lion and the Jewel* is introduced to us as the head wife of the village chief rather than as a mother. The concept of the mother is one of the idealised women figures in the African culture. Accordingly, if we take the view that Sadiku is a symbol of Africa, because she is not presented first and foremost as a mother, she does not symbolise the idealised image of Africa as found in the poems of Leopold Sédar Senghor.

There is another instance in which it will be safe to claim that the female figures in *The Lion and the Jewel* represent Africa. It is usually taken for granted that when modernity is understood to be the equivalent of technology is good for the continent as a whole. The only instance in the play where modernity is shown to be greatly beneficial to Africa is when technology is presented by Lakunle to help African women in their daily household chore. He promises Sidi to buy her "the machines that will do [her] pounding, which will grind [her pepper] without it getting into [her] eyes" (Soyinka, 1963: 6). The change that technology can bring to the African woman provides evidence that modernity should not be always condemned as an alien project that rationalises Western hegemony of the African continent. Sidi does not oppose this aspect of modernity insofar as it does not run counter to the traditional system of values. In general, Sidi is the only principal woman figure who is lured by modernity in the play, and this can be taken as further evidence that she stands for Africa.

Besides arguing against Lakunle's view about the futility of paying the bride price, Sidi seems to be the representative of her gender rather than her race when she says that women are not physically weak as Lakunle might think. Consider the following dialogue:

> Lakunle: The scientists have proved it. It's in my books.
> Women have a smaller brain than men.
> That's why they are called the weaker sex.
> Sidi: [throws him off]
> The weaker sex, isn't it?
> Is it a weaker breed who pounds the yam?
> Or bends all day to plant the millet
> With a child strapped to her back? (Soyinka, 1963: 6)

More interestingly, just as Sidi is believed by Lakunle to have a smaller brain, so were the black Africans in the eyes of many European colonialists. As aptly observed elsewhere, "Lakunle's conception of womanhood (…) clearly echoes some of the scientific racism of the nineteenth century with its emphasis on the link between intelligence and the brain size" (Msiska, 2007: 47). Lakunle, though without being aware of this, uses the argument of the scientific racist discourse of the coloniser about the small size of the African people's brain to express a sexist position against women. Moreover, by describing Sidi as a "bush girl", Lakunle thinks that he can easily convince her to marry him despite his refusal and/or inability to pay the bride price. This is reminiscent of

Africa's colonial past as the colonisers thought that Africa would be easily colonised as long as they convinced the natives of the European mission of salvaging Africa.

Furthermore, and as noted early, by borrowing from the colonial discourse, Lakunle pretends to be a saviour who emancipates Sidi from the "oppressive" traditional order where she is supposed to perform various burdensome tasks such as carrying the buckets on her head and pounding the yam. Stated differently, Lakunle raises the question of gender oppression in the traditional community in order to motivate Sidi to denigrate the traditional culture in favour of modernity. Accordingly, Lakunle equates tradition with gender oppression and modernity with women's liberation. He considers the "miserable" situation of Sidi to be symptomatic of what he sees as the poor condition of Africans who still stick to the pre-colonial values. For him, then, Sidi is a symbol of "miserable" Africa that needs to be enlightened by the culture of modernity. More generally, Lakunle's words call to our mind the civilising rhetoric of the European coloniser who conquered Africa in the name of 'civilising the benighted natives.' To use Anne McClintock's words, Africa was identified by the European coloniser as ripe and virgin for penetration by European male civilisation (McClintock, 1995: 22). Thus, the conversation between Lakunle and Sidi at the opening of play establishes Lakunle as the representative of the male Western civilisation and Sidi as the symbol of traditional Africa.

However, in her reaction to Lakunle's attempt at thwarting her, Sidi identifies herself more as an African individual who has to comply with the social norms rather than as a woman who is free to do whatever she wants. More precisely, she is afraid of the way her community will look at her in case she gets married without the dowry. She tells Lakunle that

> I shall marry you today, next week
> Or any day you name.
> But my bride price must first be paid
> I shall marry you today, next week

She explains why she insists on the payment of the bride price in the following manner:

> But Sidi will not make herself
> A cheap bowl for the village pit
> They will say I was no virgin. (Soyinka, 1963: 6)

Interestingly, her rejection of Lakunle's modern monogamous marriage is not a sign of female agency for the latter is defined by Maria Del Guadalupe Davidson as "the ability to determine oneself rather than be determined by another" (2017: 12). All she wants is to abide by the social construction of normative femininity. Hence, she perfectly acts as a symbol of Africa on this occasion. Conversely, Lakunle pretends to grant Sidi freedom from the traditional system of patriarchy by attracting her to the values of modernity so that she will be involved in a "Westernised love romance". In other words, he wants her to behave as a modernised woman rather than an African individual who is attached to her community's culture.

As stated previously, right from the outset, the scene of Sidi being courted by Lakunle establishes as the representative of tradition and hence Africa. The following scenes also confirm her symbolic role as a trope of Africa. Baroka, the village chief, sends

hi senior wife Sadiku to Sidi so as to inform her of his intention to add her to his harem. Sadiku here performs the traditional role of the village bale's senior wife who seeks a new wife for her husband. Sadiku's act of convincing Sidi to be Baroka's youngest wife provides ample evidence that Sadiku is also the symbol of her continent because she performs a traditional duty perhaps at the expense of her own desires. Even though she is not constructed as a mother trope, Sadiku proves to be a bearer of the Yoruba culture just by this act of wooing Sidi for her husband. There can also be another reason that pushes her to think that Sidi should be Baroka's youngest wife. Indeed, Sadiku is also aware that Sidi runs the risk of being modernised because she is courted by a young teacher. Thus, by helping her husband to marry Sidi, she kills two birds with one stone: performing her duty as the village bale's senior wife and preventing Sidi from marrying a modernised man. Allegorically Speaking, Sadiku acts as a trope of Africa and encourages Sidi not to stand for westernisation. Therefore, her action of wooing Sidi for her husband may add a further argument to the assumption that Sidi is an allegory of Africa in the sense that Sadiku prefers Sidi to be her husband's youngest wife rather than the wife of a modernised young man. Sadiku is indeed frightened by the fact that many young girls will follow in the footsteps of Sidi if she gets involved in a "modern" marriage.

Furthermore, Baroka's full determination to marry Sidi can be read at the allegorical level. In this vein, it has been claimed that "Baroka's intention to marry Sidi is aimed at retaining her in the village in order to pass unto her the Yoruba cultural values" (Kemi and Chijoke 2017: 7). By being young, Sidi stands for the village's (and hence Africa's) future. Therefore, her marriage with Baroka can be metaphorically understood as the continuity of traditional culture in modern Africa.

In addition to the allegorical meaning that Sidi's establishment of marital relationship with Baroka might denote, Sadiku provides Sidi with solid arguments that would ultimately convince her to wed a village chief. More particularly, Sadiku claims that the best position that the young woman in Ilujinle can afford is to be the head wife of the village chief. While Sadiku already enjoys such a position, Sidi will do so as soon as Baroka dies.

> Sadiku: Sidi, have you considered what life of bliss awaits you? Do you know what is to be the Bale's last wife? I'll tell you. When he dies-and that should not be long; even the lion has to die sometime-well, when he does, it means that you will have the honour of being the senior wife of the new Bale. And just think, until Baroka dies, you will be his favourite. (Soyinka, 1963: 20)

Once Sidi becomes the first wife of the next bale, she would continue to perform her role of being the custodian of the African cultural values and mores. But Sidi is not convinced by Sadiku's arguments, although these arguments appear to be more plausible than the ones advanced earlier by Lakunle. It must be further noted that it is not only in the different conversations that take place between Lakunle and Sidi that the African woman in Soyinka's play identifies herself as the representative of the African traditional culture; the conversations between Lakunle and Sadiku provide also further evidence that the African woman is a trope of Africa *par excellence* in Soyinka's work. Basically, Lakunle accuses Sadiku of being simple-minded despite her old age. Furthermore, he sharply criticises her for looking for new wives to her husband. He indeed tells her

Your mind is simple and unformed
Have you no shame at your age;
You neither read nor write nor think?
You spend your days as senior wife,
Collecting brides for Baroka (Soyinka, 1963: 59)

Interestingly, then, Lakunle once more borrows from the colonial discourse about Africa in order to deride Sadiku. Africa has been described in the Western literary discourse of colonialism as "tabula rasa" and Lakunle makes use of such a stereotypical description in his attempt at thwarting Sadiku Earlier in the play, Sadiku accuses Lakunle of not being representative of normative masculinity in the traditional society. She indeed urges him to work hard on the land for one season or two so that he can afford the bride price which is precondition for his marriage to Sidi.

Sadiku, thus, stands for the traditional wisdom of the Yoruba community in Soyinka's play. Not only does she sing and dance in a traditional way on different occasions throughout the play but also she is the only person who offers advice to such young characters as Lakunle and Sidi. But this does not suggest that she is depicted as an ideal character by the dramatist. As will be discussed subsequently, she seems to have motivated Sidi to go to Baroka's bedroom in order to celebrate female victory over male gender.

However, when an African woman functions as a voice of her continent through her rejection of the alien cultural values, she runs the risk of perpetuating her subordinate status which is naturalised by the culture that she attempts to preserve. This applies perfectly to Sidi and Sadiku who, in the process of protecting the traditional cultural practices against the increasing influence of the Western culture, seem to marginalise themselves as individuals with their own desires and dreams. Thus, these two women figures act most of the time because "they ought to" and not because "they want to". That is to say, by accepting the patriarchal status quo, no one of them unfolds a revolutionary vision of the role of the woman in her society.

Far from being depicted as a full-fledged individual, the African woman in Soyinka's work under consideration here is presented as an index of cultural development in Africa following its historic encounter with the West. Through her story, we can evaluate the extent to which Africa has been shaped by the forces of modernity in that the condition of the African woman in this play appears to be analogous to the African cultural condition. While Sadiku represents traditional Africa that was immune to the modernising forces since is never attracted by modernity, Sidi stands for traditional Africa that is endangered by modernisation. Noticeably, Sidi appears to accept aspects of modernity that fulfil her personal desire of being viewed as a beautiful girl. She is indeed very proud of her physical beauty once she learns that her picture is posted on a glossy magazine that is read nationwide. Still, Sidi uses the traditional culture as an argument to defend her own life choices such as her rejection of the Westernised suitor and her marriage to Baroka.

However, by rejecting Baroka's marriage proposal in the first place, she acts as a woman rather than as a representative of Africa. She makes an individual choice when she says that Baroka is too old to be her future husband. This is indeed one of the rare instances in which her symbolic importance as an embodiment of Africa can hardly be traced. While

she turns down Lakunle's marriage proposal for cultural reasons, she basically turns down Baroka's marriage proposal for personal reasons. As mentioned earlier, the fact that the female figures have some allegorical function does not mean that their own personal lives are not explored in this play.

In effect, Sidi rejects Baroka's proposal on many grounds. For her, besides being too Old, Baroka is no longer the most famous person of the village like her since her photo is posted in a Nigerian glossy magazine. In other words, she behaves as if she were a national celebrity. In her response to Sadiku who tells her about Baroka's intention to add her to his harem, Sidi says:

> Sidi: You'll make no prey of Sidi with you wooing tongue.
> Not this Sidi whose fame has spread to Lagos and Beyond the Seas" (Soyinka, p. 20)

She even compares herself to him in the following way:

> I am the twinkle of a jewel
> But he is the hind-quarter of a lion (Soyinka, 1963: 22)

However, despite expressing some sense of self-pride, Sidi is not the assertive female character that the feminist critics wish to see in fiction. Still, this further shows that Sidi does not only function as a symbol in this play; the playwright portrays her as a young girl who has a personal life that goes beyond what she stands for. Yet this personal life which can be summarised in the vanity that she displays as a result of her reputation as the most beautiful maiden of the village is not at loggerheads with her allegorical role in the play as a symbol of the African continent. Yet Baroka takes advantage of her vanity to lure her to his house. After analysing her character, he concludes that she would come to his bed to mock him if he pretends to be impotent.

Baroka is a traditional chieftain whose actions are primarily by his personal need of maintaining his power over the community and of adding the village belle to his harem. On the other hand, Sadiku seems to honour tradition for its own sake. But this does not suggest that her personal life beyond her symbolic role in this play is not explored. Some of her actions are motivated by her own personal character rather than by her desire for the continuity of the traditional world. For instance, she tells Sidi about a secret in her private marital life. More particularly, she informs Sidi that her husband has become impotent. Also, together with other women she dances in a traditional way to announce her "victory" over Baroka following the loss of his virility.

However; Baroka proves to be cunning since he just feigns impotence to attract a self-important young girl to his bed. It seems as though he was sure that Sadiku will divulge a secret of such kind and that Sidi's cheekiness will draw her to his bedroom. Therefore, with his trap, Baroka kills two birds with one stone: squelching Sidi's inflated ego and winning her as his youngest wife. It is obvious that Baroka's wit is behind his triumph at the end of the story. By contrast, Lakunle, despite being young, fails to convince Sidi to marry him. This is in tune with J. Z. Kronenfeld's interesting observation that "if 'tradition,' as exemplified by Baroka, wins (in the sense that Sidi becomes his youngest wife), it is mainly because he is wilier than Lakunle, not because he has appealed to better values" (Kronenfeld, 1993: 306). But it must be added that Baroka's victory at the end of the story is not only over Lakunle but over Sidi as well. As Biodun Jeyifo writes,

"Baroka's vitality, cunning, and wit (…) assure eventual triumph over Sidi" (2004: 108). If put differently, Baroka's triumph should not lead us to argue that he is the mouthpiece of the playwright who conveys his vision of the African continent. He wins because he is shrewd, all too simply.

Sidi's self-importance is mainly behind her "foolish" act of going to Baroka's house to mock his impotence. Ironically, Lakunle warns her against going to Baroka's bedroom. Indeed, when Sidi acts as a representative of the African tradition, she manages to resist patriarchal modernity as she refuses to be involved in a "modern love romance" proposed by Lakunle. Conversely, once she acts out of her growing self-pride, she becomes a victim of traditional patriarchy. Even more so, she has lost her virginity before her bride price is paid.

Sadiku is partly involved, however unwittingly, in Sidi's deception. Also, she does not behave as a symbol of Africa when she passes on the news of Baroka's impotence to Sidi. On this occasion, she acts on her own, i.e. she behaves like any individual who mocks the traditional chief for his inability to meet the requirements of normative masculinity in the traditional society. Sidi further argues that any other girl will do what she did once she knew that Baroka had lost his manhood. This indicates that in the play when the female figures act on their own, they are indirectly serving the interests of Baroka. Accordingly, besides the fact that Sidi's and Sadiku's roles are defined by the traditional cultural values and mores, they are depicted to be victims of their inflated ego.

Baroka does not want his traditional authority to be defied by any villager. Sidi's refusal of his marriage proposal on the ground that she is more important than him pushes him to set a plan in motion in order to trick her. Sidi appears to be somehow "naïve" once she believes the story of his impotence and consequently goes to mock him in his bed. While the conversation between Lakunle and her at the beginning of the play is reminiscent of the dialogue of the Eurocentric and the Afrocentric writers, Sidi's intention to mock Baroka following hearing the news about the loss of his manhood is "an aspect of the eternal war between men and women" (Kronenfeld, 1993: 309). That is to say, she acts as a woman rather than as a representative of her continent once she tries to deride Baroka for his impotence.

Still, Baroka's marriage to Sidi is not only good for him but also helps us, as readers, to conclude that Sidi is a symbol of Africa since her mind will no longer be polluted by the modernising rhetoric of Lakunle. Biodun Jeyifo makes the following observation:

> Sidi's visit to Baroka's bedroom to taunt him about his presumed impotence provides both the advantage Baroka needs to consummate his sexual conquest and the occasion for the two characters, across barriers of gender and age, to discover shared values and spiritual kinship. (Jeyifo, 2004: 108)

Indeed, Soyinka enumerates the destructive effects on the pristine traditional life of the village of Ilujinle in order to persuade her to forget about the discourse of modernity that Lakunle preaches. He also promises her to buy printing machine so that a stamp carrying her beautiful face will be designed. Thus he takes advantage of her self-bloating egoism in order to convince her to become his latest bride. Sidi is thus the symbol of Africa rather than female agency since she wins the battle as an individual who represents

her continent's culture and loses the battle as a woman who wants to claim victory over a man.

Sidi has finally chosen to marry Baroka even if he has deceived her into his bed. Despite the fact that Lakunle has once again tempted her to marry him following the loss of her chastity, she still turns down Lakunle's marriage proposal by saying that she is happy with her sexual intercourse with him. This means that she wants to assert that marrying Baroka is a personal choice. But it could be contended that Sidi is acutely conscious that Lakunle is now using her "shame" as a bargaining point to her disadvantage. More importantly, the final scene shows that Sidi is the victim of her sexual and African identity. She seems to have no better choice than marrying Baroka, even if she tells Lakunle that she is happy with the choice that she has made.

Once she makes her final decision of becoming the youngest wife of the village, she starts thinking immediately of bearing "children, sired of the lion stock" (Soyinka, 1963: p. 64). The play ends with Sidi's dream of becoming a mother. Had Soyinka continued the story, Sidi would have perhaps become the mother trope that symbolises Africa. Earlier in the play, she displays her favourable attitude towards child-bearing and hence motherhood. The latter is a highly respected status that a woman could reach in the traditional African cultures, even in the societies that were patriarchal. In the following conversation between Lakunle and her, she emphasises the need for the married woman to bear children:

> Lakunle: Sidi; I do not seek a wife to fetch and carry, to cook and scrub
> To bring forth children by the gross
> Sidi: Heaven forgive you, do you now scorn child-bearing in a wife. (Soyinka, 1963: 7)

Though Lakunle mentions a number of the traditional wife's conjugal duties that he resolutely opposes, Sidi reacts solely against his contemptuous view about child-bearing. More importantly, in the marriage dance which brings the play to an end, Sadiku invokes Yoruba "fertile gods" and this further underscores the intimate link between wifehood and motherhood in the traditional community of Yoruba. As James Gibb notes, Sadiku's invocation of the Yoruba fertile gods "anticipates rapturous fecundity" (Gibbs, 1986: 51). Once Sidi becomes a mother, she will accomplish her symbolic role as a representative of Africa in the play. We can safely say here that, despite everything, the play ends with a hopeful note because in the final scene the idea of fecundity which is positive in the traditional African mind-set is evoked. The play ends with some sort of idealising Sidi since a traditional ritual for the new bride to become a mother is performed by women during her marriage ceremony.

Finally, it has to be asserted that the role of the black female characters has changed drastically with the rise of female voices in the African literature. Apart from rejecting patriarchy, these voices have opposed the construction of the African woman as a trope of her continent. They have opted thus for a dynamic rather than a static representation of the African woman. And this could be achieved by "the introduction of women's vocality and the representation of African women's lives" (Oldfield, 2013: 17). Hence, a difference is to be made between giving an African woman a voice because she is African and giving her a voice because she is a woman. According to Gina Wisker, using women as

metaphors of their nations or their continent "does not actually enable [them] in fiction to have their own voice, and constantly places them in a sexually, politically and economically subordinate position as objects of the male gaze" (Wisker, 2017: 138). Soyinka manages in *The Lion and the Jewel* to use the female figures as tropes that offer a positive image of the continent by showing that they are not immoral or primitive, but he does not give them a voice that enables them to symbolise female militancy against the patriarchal ethos in contemporary Africa.

To conclude, Soyinka's construction of the African woman as a symbol of her continent is a double-edged weapon. On the one hand, this can be seen in a positive light since the African woman represents a positivised image of Africa as projected by the dramatist in the paly. On the other hand, this has indeed been frowned upon by the African feminist critics like Florence Stratton and Elleke Boehmer who prefer that the African woman be endowed with agency that enables her to act as a full-fledged individual subject who seeks her own self-fulfilling existence. In other words, whilst it is good for the African woman to be a representative of her continent in the discourse that aims at deconstructing stereotypical colonial myths about Africa, the African woman need not always be viewed as a trope since she has to be presented as an individual with her own hopes and desires. However, one can contend that it is difficult for a male writer to articulate the aspirations of the womenfolk in the way women writers do. But this should not be taken as an excuse for Soyinka's avoidance of creating a balanced representation of the women figures in *The Lion and the Jewel*. While they succeed in their self-appointed task of preserving the African tradition, Soyinka's women in the play fail to achieve anything when their actions are motivated by their personal desire. They appear to be successful only when they function as an allegory of Africa.

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