

# Social Cohesion in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*: A Resonance of History, Culture and Law

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## Abstract

The crisis of the Yoruba Nineteenth Century was a display of internal dissensions, internecine wars, and inter-personal ego. However, the Alaafin remained the ruler of the Oyo empire, but depended on Ibadan and Ijaye for defense. In 1858, Alaafin Atiba summoned all the leading chiefs in his territory to introduce his Crown Prince, Adelu, as his successor. This move was against the constitution of Oyo, which stipulated that the Crown Prince (*aremo*) commits suicide on the Alaafin's death. Ibadan agreed to the change, while Ijaye opposed the imposition. This is the kernel of historical narrative used by Ola Rotimi, in constructing his play, *Kurunmi*, to reflect rivalry between the Ibadan warriors and those of Ijaye. This essay examines the conflict to reflect and suggest the need for just, peace, and unity for social cohesion among Yoruba people, and by and large, Nigerians.

## Introduction

Before the emergence of *Kurunmi* as the Are-Ona-Kakanfo of the Oyo Empire, the cohesion of the Kingdom had been reduced to smithereens due to the continued internal strifes and external attacks. The reign of Alaafin Abiodun was the closing chapter of the cohesion of the empire, while the time of Alaafin Aole ushered in the birth of the chaotic moment in the history of Yoruba and the glory was lost, and not yet found. It is germane to make reference to this era so as to paint a vivid picture of the plethora of the subversive factors that created the smokescreen of the Yoruba 19<sup>th</sup> century disintegrations of a one-time cohesive society. Aole's time was noted to be unhappy one, because of the attendant cruelty, usurpation, treachery and interpersonal ego between the king and Afonja, who became the Are-Ona Kakanfo, after Oyabi

of Ogbomoso. However, Afonja was perceived as the most potent enemy of the king, although, a prince on the maternal line, and the only hurdle to be crushed. This was the reason, as the tradition demanded to fight the enemy of the king, the Kakanfo became the object of the royal attacks. For this to be done, a ploy was made to exterminate Afonja by sending him to lead a war to Iwere, a place strongly fortified by nature. The intended motive was understood by Kakanfo, and this mission offered a good opportunity for other war Chiefs in Oyo to hit back at Alaafin Aole. In reversed action, Afonja and other warlords connived to get rid of the king. After the siege laid by the city gate for forty-two days, an empty covered calabash was sent to Aole as a signification that the society rejected him. Aole had no choice than to commit suicide as a mark of honor, but before then; he placed curse on the Yoruba nation as he says:

My curse be on ye for your disloyalty and disobedience, so let your children disobey you. If you send them on errand, let them never return to bring you word again. To all the points I shot my arrows will ye be carried as slaves. My curse will carry you to the seas and beyond the seas, slaves will rule over you, and you their masters will become slaves' (Johnson 1921:192-201).

Ever since the death of Afonja, the control of Ilorin fell into the hands of the Fulani, and the de-facto dream of the Uthman Danfodio was to dip Quran into the sea (the subversion of the entire Yoruba nation) was to be realized, however, several attempts made by the Leadership of Yoruba to flush out Fulani from Ilorin failed. Alaafin Atiba had once lived in Ilorin, as a prince, before moving to Ago Oja- the modern space of Oyo, and he played a prominent part in the frantic efforts to dislodge the Fulanis from Ilorin during the Eleduwa War of 1830 (Jonson: 263-8). It was during this war that Atiba demonstrated capacity of a strong leader and signaled his aspiration to the throne was evident to all. The hope was that Atiba would eventually save the Yoruba nation from the Fulani yoke. In order to realize his ambition, he plotted with others to ensure the downfall of King Oluewu; he made alliance with "Oluyole of Ibadan by promising him the title of Ibasorun, and Kunrunmi of Ijaye by promising him that of Kakanfo" (Johnson 1921: 279-80). After the death of King Oluewu and the collapse of the ancient capital of the Kingdom, the crown was offered to Lagunade, but he declined and suggested that it should be bestowed on to the powerful aspirant, Prince Atiba of Ago Oja. Atiba enthusiastically accepted the offer, and he became the Alaafin who subsequently moved the capital to Ago Oja- the present Oyo city. Alaafin Atiba fulfilled his promises to Oluyole and Kurunmi, and they became Basorun and

Kakanfo respectively. He went further to decentralize the administrative control of his Kingdom by giving each a part to be administered by Oluyole and Kakanfo, hence Ibadan and Ijaye became prominent seats of power.

Alaafin Atiba was of age, he considered before his death, the necessity to ensure the continued peace in the land; he reminded all the chiefs of the new law of succession he had sanctioned. He enjoined them to stand by his Crown Prince Adelu, he did not wish him to die with the king, his father as the tradition sanctioned. After the death of Atiba, the first king in the present Oyo, Adelu was pronounced the king. His kingship was recognized by all, except Kurunmi of Ijaye, the Are-Ona-Kakanfo. His position was of the law. He considered it contrary to custom that the Crown Prince succeeded his father; therefore, he refused to pay homage to the new king. This is the kernel of his historical narrative used by Ola Rotimi, in constructing his play, *Kurunmi*, to reflect rivalry between Ibadan warriors and Ijaye warriors. The playwright finds this historical narrative interesting to espouse leadership crisis in post-independent Nigeria. Significantly, Ola Rotimi preoccupied himself with thematic realization of leadership problems in most of his plays, including *Kurunmi*, for failure to realize the aspirations of the people after independence. The play was premiered at Ife Festival of the Arts, 1969 by the Oro Olokun Players of the University of Ife, Ile-Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and was first published in 1971. It is obvious that the playwright's conscious intentionality focused the play to address the raging crises of the Nigerian Civil War between 1967- 70.

It is important to note here that, change and law are intertwined and constant in human development. In the process of change there is always continuity, it is in this process that the past finds its relevance in the present; "within this reasoning that the twin concepts of continuity and change" (Alao 2018: 3-5) that human society progresses. At this point in history, Kurunmi failed to realize that the custom he referred to came to be as a result of change. For a Crown Prince to die with his father came to be after the death of Alaafin Ojigi. King Ojigi was a good leader, powerful and great, but a too indulgent father. It was during his reign he expanded the Kingdom to Dahomi, Benni and towards Niger in the north. However, he overindulged his Crown Prince, who willfully misconduct: avenged and showed wanton cruelty to all unmindful of the enormity and consequences of his action. Hence, this disposition brought the attendant angst and the promulgation of the law for the *aremo* to commit suicide on the death of the father.

Should Kurunmi not remember what led to the custom of the *aremo* committing suicide on the death of his father? The change now is not only an indication of continuity alone, but to buttress the point that history itself moves on the cyclical path of repetition. Another question arises now, considering

all the internecine wars, civil wars, and series of fratricidal wars fought in Yoruba nation, were they as the result of the potent curse placed on the race by Alaafin Aole? Or were the internal dissensions, rivalry, jealousy, despotic tendencies amongst the chiefs and war lords, and inter-personal ego, not effects of succumbing to dictates of anarchy and authoritarianism of human foibles and social despondency? Or should we read meanings of fatalistic influences of time and space into what transpired between Ibadan and Ijaye on the borders of unchangeable change? Or the rule and the ruled lack the perspicuous intellect to read meanings into 'causal factors' of the time past, and the 'implications of the influx and changing situations' (Alao 2018: 2-3) of the time present, so as to harness their ideas for the time future? Or should we say that violence and anarchy are fundamental nature of man? These pertinent questions are germane, perhaps in the mind of the playwright, at the moment of searching through valences of history in order to get a story (creative material) for this play, *Kurunmi*. If not, I personally find them relevant here. For this thesis, I overtly rely on the play of Ola Rotimi, I may have recourse to make references to *Ijaye* by Wale Ogunyemi, more especially, to *The Times if Kurunmi*, by a younger playwright, Yinka Kareem, not on the level of critical comparison, but to evince the timeless hideous phrase that 'history repeat itself', and to question it.

### **Playwrights and History**

Many great writers find history as a veritable material to work with in various genre of literature. The relevance of history to any human society is quantum. No matter the faces and phases of history, every individual, every society, every nation, by passing events on every day; history is made in its multiplicity and multi-dimensional to keep in-time, cultures, customs, living expressions in the process of continuous growth and transformation (Mey-erhoff, cited in Alao 2018: 3-4). The relevance of history is to seek for constant transformation of society, both animate and inanimate (the reason all areas of knowledge have their respective history), its environment in relation to others in order to function to progress and in contradictions for constant change. Every writer is steeped in his/her society. In this he/she finds the use for language, customs, cultures, social norms and moral values, laws (taboos) and especially history.

To a playwright like Ola Rotimi, history becomes a story he works with. In doing this he weaves the historical text with dramatic text; in this process, story becomes a meta-text. Just as Hamed Yerima (2003) reminds us that, a writer is conscious that the historical material is not his story; it belongs to a people. This story is well known by the people it belongs and it belongs to

the historical material from which he carves out his play (61-68). In reconstructing, the playwright does not lose the meta-text, just like a carver does to the wood, without losing the original texture of the wood in bringing out the aesthetic structure of the object, so a playwright works on historical material to give back the story, despite the aesthetic embellishment and the thematic preoccupation to bring out the dramatic action. The audiences know it, when they see it. This fact is what Ola Rotimi confirms in his discussion with Adeniyi Coker Jr. (1992) that, "in ultimate terms, the writer and his matter belong to the people from whose cultural matrix his being and that derive. Herein lies the infinite sense of his relevance and lasting meaning of his matter" (60-63).

Yerima's quote from Paul Hamilton is relevant here to strengthen the relationship between history and aesthetics in the hands of a skilled playwright: "History and aesthetics do seem to have this vital fact in common, that they are concerned with events which are particular and individual rather than instances of the application of a scientific law" (Hamilton 1996:14-18). The vital fact is the interpretation by a historian, or a playwright. He calls a creative writer a historicist, because he uses historical materials to draw the thematic relevance of his work without injuring the historical sensibility of the community that the history belongs. Yerima (2003) says that, "history is an integral part of the soul of the community" (61-63) which owns it, and the reason for the writer to engage the story for the people within the context of time. To both historian and "historicist", "the hallmark of a good historical account is the logic of its thesis, lucidity of its language, credibility of its evidence, its factual accuracy, interpretive brilliance and narrative clarity" (Alao, 2018, 2-3).

### **Ola Rotimi's Interpretation of Historical Material in his Dramaturgy**

Ola Rotimi is known for using histories as material for dramatic intents. Rotimi's thinking for engaging history has dual purposes; first, to correct the European misconceptions about Africans and second, to reveal the past to current generation of Africans. In this regard, I find the discussion which Coker (1990) had with Ola Rotimi so relevant, thus:

My motivation is dual. First, to correct some of the misconceptions which European chroniclers of African history have represented as factual. Africans did not start publishing their history until the 1940s. Before this time, the texts and treatise of Whites had reflected their own perspective. No doubt they tried to validate their actions, the penetration of Africa through the use of arms. They have attempted to rationalize it at all costs, by

creating a theory- that but for the penetration of Africa by Whites, Africa would have remained savage, engrossed in mutual killings [...] Secondly, my motivation is to reveal our past to current generations of Africans. Under colonialism, we hardly studied our history- we studied European history, etc. As result we developed misorientation(sic) that placed preference for the study of European history over our own. Hence, my second motivation is edificatory: theatre leaves impressions in the mind (62-63).

*Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* were specifically written, as results of Ola Rotimi's motivation, to correct some misconceptions of the past- leadership crisis- and not only to edifying the past, but to ensure the current generation of Africans learns from the past for the purpose of the present. The reason his audience always become enthused in the performance of *Kurunmi*, each time it is on stage, and *Ovonramwen Noigbaisi* was played to about 6,000 people at Ogbe stadium in Benin City each night for three weeks. It is of note that the events of history in *Kurunmi* and *Ovonmrawen Nogbaisi* took place in the colonial Era, when colonial intervention in Africa was basically to fan the ember of discord in order to realize the imperial subjugation for their economic gains. *Hopes of the Living Dead* is another historical play that evinces the playwright concerns for the oppressed people in Africa under the colonial yoke. Rotimi's sense of history is noted in these three plays to show "political struggles of specific groups in the past" (Okafor 1990: 24-26), while plays like *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again, If...* and *Hopes of the Living Dead* demonstrate concerns for political struggle with touch of contemporary history. History becomes relevant to Ola Rotimi to draw the thematic relevance of power play and political struggles in the past of the Yoruba nation. It is however relevant in the contemporary setting in Nigeria, considering the spate of socio-economic and political problems arising from leadership problems in postcolonial Nigeria. This position is similar to what Yinka Kareem did, in *The Times of Kurunmi*, by extending the historical contents of the Yoruba 19<sup>th</sup> century in the structure of his play in prologue and epilogue in an attempt to really study history, interpret it in order to justify the reason for writing his play despite two great playwrights before him. I find a good reason for a playwright using history to weave his story in making reference to what Akinjogbin said about the task of professional historian that:

The framework within which any African history should be written today should be helping the nation, whatever nation, to find its soul. It should be the yardstick against which scholarship is measured. It should be the knowledge to which we all seek to contribute. (cited in Alao 2018: 3-4).



### **The History Behind the Dramaturgy, *Kurunmi***

The synoptic understanding of *Kurunmi* is centered on the character of the title of the play, Kurunmi- the Are-Ona Kakanfo, a great personality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century of the Yoruba nation. The Ijaye War was between the people of Ibadan and Ijaye, which started about 1860. The conflict of the dramatic action is the change in the traditional custom that stipulates that the Aremo, the first son of Alaafin must die as soon as the king dies. Atiba, the Alaafin of Oyo wants this changed so that his Aremo, Adelu, becomes the King immediately after him. However, the Kakanfo, would not consent to this, despite that all other important Chiefs in the Yoruba nation agree to this change. Aare Kurunmi does not attend the coronation of the new Alaafin Adelu, to pay homage. He is of the notion that tradition is tradition (Rotimi 2006: 19), and that it must be respected. On the personal ground, "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" (Rotimi 2006: 31-32). The Ibadan war chiefs are now on the path of collision with Ijaye, and Abeokuta is in support of war against Ibadan. Balogun Ibikunle employs the service of Kujenyo, an Ifa Priest to cast a spell on Ijaye to cross River Ose, there the Ijaye warriors meet their waterloo. Subsequently, Ogunmola leads his battalion to Iwawun, there all the five sons of Kurunmi die. Consequently, Kurunmi commits suicide having the news of the death of his sons.

I have earlier established the fact that 'change' is a natural continuum. This fact is argued with Kurunmi by Oluyole and Timi of Ede that tradition itself adapts to time and space in human experience. Human system of governance must be cognizant of this reality and must be susceptible to the phenomena of time and space to determine life essences; because "life's time" (Rotimi 2006: 30-31). The reason the political system of Yoruba was complex and continuously hanging on the delicate balance of checks and balances against misuse of power in the hands of an individual, or a family; was as a result of change which the narrative that led to the enactment in the constitution that engendered the Aremo not to succeed his father was given earlier. The Oyo Mesi, the Council of Chiefs determined such change and when it was done it became a law. Kurunmi fails to understand the fact that it takes time for tradition to change. The reason is that he wields enormous power as the Generalissimo of the race with such fangs of cruelty to determine the life and death of his subjects as he deems fit, and perhaps he equally aspires to building his own Kingdom. This could be the dream he carries beyond imagined boundary that he remains impervious to change, whereas the other Yoruba important chiefs in the Oyo Empire raise no objection to this change. Ibadan, therefore, is the prominent town that opposes the recalcitrant position of Aare kurunmi

and Ijaye. Another salient point is that Kurunmi's burst of ego becomes enamored to reason that it is tradition that he is to defend the kingdom not to rise against it as the Aare-Ona-Kakanfo. Ogunmola explains what the tradition expects of Kurunmi, thus: "as Chief Warrior, tradition calls him to defend the Kingdom starting from the left side of Oyo, and going up towards Ilorin, against attack from the people of Sabe and Popo" (Rotimi 2006: 47-48).

The Yoruba traditional legal agency is based on moral philosophy of taboos- the "dos and don'ts"; on this the society advances to the higher state from the lower state of development. In the history of the Yoruba, one finds that the conclave of Council of Elders base on the Ogboni doctrinal process draws together the cohesiveness of a society to advance its course. For instance, if a king was becoming overbearing, and the political system was becoming draconian with despotic tendencies, like Obaloran, Ajagbo, Odarawu, Karan, Jayin, Ayibi, Osinyago, and many others, ended ingloriously with various methods the society devised to see to end of tyrants (Johnson 1921). The Yoruba juristic thoughts devised means of rejecting such dictators by sending a calabash to him; he too understood that it would be more honorable to die by committing suicide. However, such despondency is replete in human history all over the world from ancient time till the modern age, if this fact is valid, then the Yoruba Elders in their wisdom from the conclave of Ogboni factored in traditional jurisprudence as a legal process to situate change as instrument of social development. This is what Akinwumi Alao calls, "a system of tendency is found in the Yoruba worldview that, in turn, defines social reality for them" (Alao 2018: 8-9). Alao further asserts that the agency of law as found in the body of thoughts in which language is the instrument of such expression was used by the Yoruba to define their social relations and that the "Yoruba legal and judicial systems recognized this and therefore found it appropriate in the determination of what was morally right and socially acceptable" (9-10).

### **Language in Rotimi's *Kurunmi***

Language in its symbolic presentation offers mechanism of the methods and legal systems in the Yoruba worldview. It is quite telling to understand the primary assignment of the two forces, Ibadan and Ijaye, on the ground of to be, or not to be, for the sake of to be come, regarding change in the body of the legal framework for succession right. Balogun Ibikunle remains un-circumspect in his choice of diction for the need to draw caution before the entire society would be thrown into chaos, as he says thus:



IBIKUNLE: It is a matter of great regret that Kurunmi has chosen to wage war with Alaafin Adelu. And I know that it is the tradition for us of Ibadan to fight in defence of the Supreme Head of the Kingdom whenever a war is aimed at his Kingdom from within or from without. But, my brothers, that does not mean that we must jump up and start fighting like women in a harem (Rotimi 2006: 45-46)

Baale Olugbode supports the position of Balogun Ibikunle, and drums the sound of warning to all because the matter concerns life or death of the Yoruba race, which must be seen beyond personal aggrandizement, and either then and now; it is a timeless caution which every Yoruba leader, be it political, cultural or traditional must consider sacrosanct. This cautionary step warrants the need to appeal to the sense of reason of Kurunmi, yet he becomes so adamant and rude to the Head of the Kingdom and his colleagues, when they pay him a visit to further appeal to him, he treats them with disdain, unmindful to disgrace them before his slaves. The slaves themselves refuse to respect them in the presence of Kurunmi, this is a sacrilege in the custom of the Yoruba; for slaves not to honor the nobles. To further caution Kurunmi on the perilous path he is dragging the race along; a royal insignia is presented to him with calabashes with gunpowder and bullets to represent war and another calabash with sacred twins of the Ogboni cult that suggests peace as an answer for to be, or not to be. Kurunmi chooses war, and responds with a coded language in the traditional wisdom of Yoruba, when he puts okra stew on a white piece of cloth; this is to stain the honor of the new king.

It is Chinua Achebe that says in *Things Fall Apart* (1976), paraphrasing this, that proverb is like palm oil with which we eat words. In deeper measure of the importance of proverbs, in the recondite philosophy in Africa, Achebe further says in *There Was A Country* (2012) that understanding the pros and cons of the use of proverbs, is enough to live a cautioned life. In African languages, idioms and proverbs contain ingrains of legal principles that prescribe and initiate moral system in advancing social order. To buttress this point, Alao makes reference to Adewoye's understanding of Yoruba proverbs, which are meant to convey 'juristic thought' (Cited, Alao 2018: 9-10), the pristine of proverbs and esoteric language of Ifa corpus define the root of wisdom and moral precepts for human actions and inactions. Proverbs equally prescribe the consequences of the failure to observe the injunctions of the lore of knowledge as found in culture, history, and folklore to guide the society to uphold its moral philosophy. The application of this wisdom is what Samuel Crowther refers to in his book *A Vocabulary of Yoruba Language* which I find so exquisite to quote from the Inaugural Lecture of Akinwumi A. Alao, thus:

There is a degree of moral light observable in them (proverbs) which renders them peculiarly interesting and gives them, I may add, a real value in connection of the universe... but there is something more striking: the high standard of morality otherwise in the sayings of the Yoruba displaying as it does, peculiar virtues, which are commonly regarded as being appreciated only in civilized societies. Were we to measure this people by the standard of their proverbial morality, we should come to the conclusion that they had attained no inconsiderable height in the development of social relations having passed out of the savage barbarism in which an individual lives for himself alone into a higher state of being in which the mutual dependence of the member on another is recognized, giving room for the exercise of such virtues as a sort of moral contract for the safeguard of society (Crowther, 1852: 30-45)

Ola Rotimi, having completed his course of study in playwriting and dramatic literature, on a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship for a graduate work at Yale University, USA, in 1966, was appointed a research fellow in the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. He found out, however, as he says, that, “a foreign language in the expression of our theatrical thoughts exposes us to doubts in the minds of our targets, the spectators. It diminishes our credibility” (Rotimi 1990: 56-72). He therefore discovered the need to “domesticate” the language of his plays written in English. This tempering the English language made his theater to reach a wider audience by the use of Yoruba proverbs, metaphors, symbols, images, allusions, idioms, songs, and dances in the structure of his drama, not only for purpose of aesthetic appeals, but for the overall understanding of his theatricalities. To this he says that, “to stimulate traditional African mode of speech, I have sought for its inherent texture of poeticism” (Rotimi 1990 Inaugural lecture). In *Kurunmi*, Rotimi uses proverbs, idioms, anecdote, and folktales; to keep his audience at breast with dramatic actions.

He uses ‘termites’ at the exposition of the play to suggest ‘enmity’ and ‘ground’ as a perpetual space of doom for the enemies of the protagonist (Rotimi 2006:11-12). The evocative relevance of the nature of termites as enemies of life, and the condition of their living in the bowel of anti-hill (underground) is to conjure forces of ‘immobility’ and ‘destruction’ using the power of words to destroy *Kurunmi*’s enemies as Abogunrin says that, “He who plots evil/against *Kurunmi*,/ Lord of this land of Ijaye, Ogun,/ let the earth burst open/ and swallow up his body;/ like a termite/may he dwell forever underground” (Rotimi 2006: 11-12). Bringing to evidence is the playwright’s keen ear for tonal sound of Yoruba language and his use of metaphor to create his sense of ‘poeticism’ like an ‘aged he-goat’, to hall insults on Timi of Ede and

Oluyole of Ibadan for coming to ask him rescind his steps of war, yet Kurunmi does not care to even drag them low before his slave warriors. In his temperament, he conjures metaphors of “gaboon viper”, “fire” and “ashes”, “iroko” and “baby ant” and “bull-frog” and “elephant”; all to create antithetical sequence of nature to impinge on the fact that he would not be as low as others to drag tradition in the mud of vanity- thinking that he is the only one that is right, the rest are wrong. Yet, two times he asks himself ‘am I in the wrong in this matter?’ he cannot fathom the necessity for a change in time, or he does only listen to his inner voice alone, without minding the tapestry of tragic end. Or may I say that my literal understanding of his name, “Kurunmi” (death destroys me), entails a metaphor of such tragic end for his entire race that having lost five of his children on a single day in the war, he has no choice than to become the gaboon viper itself, or the tortoise that embarks on “a senseless journey” (17-18). He commits suicide. His hubristic tragic end is as a result of his inordinate ambition to build a Kingdom, (Maybe he forgot what had happened to Aare Afonja before him). Ironically, he uses this metaphor of a tortoise against the person of the Alaafin Adelu, yet ends up being the one- tortoise, which is well known in African folklore as a little cunning animal with unlimited boundary of self-adulation that pushes it to the very verge of disgrace.

### **Yoruba Cultural Elements in Rotimi's *Kurunmi***

The playwright brings to bear cultural elements that make Yoruba unique anywhere and everywhere, in his play. Kurunmi becomes so powerful and grows up in stature that he becomes the custodian of all the notable gods: Ogun, Sango, Esu and the likes. Rotimi, in the stage direction at the opening scene of the play, describes Kurunmi's compound (*agbo'le*) with the sacred presence of all the gods of tribe in varying images of earth, granite, and wood (Rotimi 2006: 11). At the beginning of the war, Kurunmi, does not fail to supplicate with libation at the shrine of Ogun, while the war is raging, he goes there to elicit the god's support and finally, it is before the shrine of Ogun he takes his final exit into the ethereal world by committing suicide. The use of music, songs, drums, and dances at war camps and most especially, during the weekly festival in Ijaye, is of historical necessity, but the use of moods, tempo, and icons find credence in the playwright's interest embedded in culture of his paternal root. The use of incantation, recurrent use of traditional medicine and Ifa poetry by the generals and the warriors are clear reflections of all what Rotimi garnered in the course of his researches while working at the Institute of Cultural Studies in Ife as a Research Fellow. This he says in the personal conversation with Adeniyi Coker, Jr., “In my research years, I found

Ife not to be lacking in priests of any type or description. They took me into their confidence, and I learned immensely. I had ample resource for research”, (Coker 1992: 61-63). There is a moment of interesting here, so humorous to douse the tragic tension, between Kurunmi and Rev. Mann, when he draws an African folkloric philosophy of frogs in strict comparison with Christian philosophy. Rev. Mann preaches the philosophy of love and humility as Christ enjoins Christians to do, this Kurunmi finds repulsive in the sense that it is a one-sided philosophy that only fans self-indulgence, without being balanced on human scale of give-take relationship. However, Kurunmi, refers to “Frogian Philosophy” from the frog’s aquatic tonal splendor in the rainy season, that is interpreted as “give me, I give you” – *Bu mi-i-i, Mbu o-o-o* (Rotimi 2006: 54-55). Another scene of a cultural note that involves Rev. and Mrs. Mann is the moment of encounter with a masquerade and ecstatic followers:

A band of Ijaiye Christians converts appears, led in a procession by the Rev. and Mrs. Mann. Suddenly from a distance the sound of ‘Egungun’ drumming breaks forth and the converts begin to react very uneasily. As the drumming and chanting come closer, members of the Christian group begin to run off one after the other. The Rev. Mann persuades Mrs. Mann to leave too, under the protection of an Ijaye man. She departs reluctantly. Screams, yells, hoots of wild excitement as a weirdly-clad masquerade rushes into full view, accompanied by a frenzied mob of Ijaiye old men and youths. They advance towards the Rev. Mann who stands reciting Psalm 23. The mob converges on the Rev. Mann, then moves away, leaving him bleeding from a slash on his forehead (Rotimi 2006: 22-23).

This stage direction gives a common picture of colonial intervention in Africa which creates culture conflict, or clash of cultures. It may be relevant to refer to *Ijaiye*, a play by Wale Ogunyemi on the same historical narrative used by Ola Rotimi. This point is not to question the right of a writer to choose from history how to make his story; I only find it important to make a reference to the colonial interventional motif as used by Rotimi, which Ogunyemi does not consider necessary in his play. The absence of this, does not render Ogunyemi’s play aesthetically less appreciated by his audience, but it could draw a balanced historical motive from the European accounts of the Ijaiye War. These accounts by British historians, Rotimi found out were mostly falsified, for instance, Robert Smith (1969), in his book *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, writes that, “His death in mid 1861 only emphasized the true character of the war as essentially a contest between the Ibadan and the Egba, The Ijaiye War confirmed the position of Ibadan as the leading power in Yorubaland” (38-39). However, Rotimi found out that none of the British historians refers to

the involvement of British merchants in the Ijaiye War. For this fact, Rotimi “relied mostly on the accounts of Ijaiye griots and oral historians” (Coker 1992:65-66). It is evident in this play, *Kurunmi*, that European Missionaries, British Merchants, and the British Consulate are involved in the raging war between Ibadan, Ijaye and Egba at that time, and it is clear enough that their interventional motive is subjective in all varied considerations. To support this position, historian Adu Boahen says that, ‘Egba and Ijebu had blockaded Ibadan to cut off her supply of arms from the coast; this situation angered the British merchants in Lagos who encouraged the Remo merchants to smuggle to Ibadan’ (Boahen 1967: 94-98). We can now find the reason *Kurunmi*, flouts Rev. Mann’s persuasions to stop the war, when he makes reference to the interest of the British Council to stop the war, *Kurunmi* retorts by saying that, “The people of Ibadan are armed: why do you want Ijaiye to stop arming?” (Rotimi 2006: 52-53).

The Oyo Empire reached its glorious age, and the Yoruba nation extended far into the east, west, south and the north of the capital. What led to the decline of the empire were both internal and external as said earlier. Before the intrusion of the Fulanis and the colonial intervention in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there had been internal dissensions amongst the leaders, who for obvious reasons of rivalry and ambition to lord it over one another were evident. Consequently, resulting to moves for independence from the strong cohesion of the Kingdom of Oyo by its tributary states. In the play, the Ijaye War reflects the decisions of Ibadan and Ijaye, with the Egba, joining forces with Ijaye for a singular reason to revenge what Ibadan did to them in the past, and “to fish in the troubled waters of the politics of its former master, Oyo” (Rotimi 2006: ii). *Kurunmi* on his part becomes so ambitious with dream to build a Kingdom for himself, without minding the pit fall, and Ogunmola uses this moment to ensure he takes a “pound of flesh” as a voice says: “*Kurunmi*...*Kurunmi*...this is Ogunmola sending greetings from Ibadan camp. Come over and count the heads of your men in the ashes of my fire-place” (Rotimi 2006: 65-66). *Kurunmi* knows that crossing River Ose is lethargic, and against divine order by the gods. Yet as a result of the anxiety of the Egbas, they hurriedly push Ijaye warriors to flout the intrepid injunction not to cross River Ose, they do and the doom is cast. Maybe the malevolence casts on them by *Kujenyo*, the witchdoctor employed by *Ibikunle*, makes it impossible for the Egbas to listen to the voice of wisdom and respect the experience of the *Are Kurunmi*, who wishes to abide by divine order. Afterwards, Ijaye is reduced to rubbles and ashes and her generations are scattered all over the Yoruba nation, today. The events of the war remain in the indelible memory of the past, and only “The palm trees will grimly / show you, if you care / the scars from bullets / shot over a hundred years ago / but they will say nothing.” (Rotimi 2006: 3-4). But



after in painful memory of the past we remember how great we could have become, the reason we have to say something, the reason we have to learn from the past, if we would not allow history to repeat itself unduly. I wish to end with the last stanza from Chinua Achebe's poem titled *After War*, before the concluding part of this essay, thus

After years  
of pressing death  
and dizzy last-labour reprieves  
we're glad to dump our fears  
and our perilous gains together  
in one shallow grave and flee  
the same rueful way we came  
straight home in haunted revelry. (Achebe 2012: 255-61)

### Conclusion

This concluding part must be stemmed from the warning offers by Chinua Achebe's poem above, that we should be weary of this haunted past, but make no our home a dingy hole of regrets; and avoid to keep on the repetitive boredom. May be this is the reason the younger playwright on the same subject of *Ijaye War*, Yinka Kareem, titled his play *The Times of Kurunmi*. Here Kurunmi becomes a metaphor of the past in the present. The structure of his play offers epic narrative in the mode of contradictory reality of time the lyrical presentation of the chorus of bata dancers in modern costumes of post-colonial experience. Also, the epilogue has the corpse of Kurunmi on stage, and the chorus again renders its music in modern costumes, there the ghost of Kurunmi rises. This suggests what? A continuum? Yes. This is an affirmation from Abiola Akinboye, because we find despots everywhere, who wrote the foreword to the play as he says that:

One cue taken from this play is that it seems that our society has been unlucky to be having dictators and betrayers as our "rulers". Portrayed also in this play, *The Times of Kurunmi*, is the weakness syndrome of the "stocked" ruled. Why do the ruled succumb to the dictates of anarchists even when (sic) they know that they are wrong and evil? Shouldn't the ruled have its own way of checkmating the untold hardship lorded them by these despots (sic) (Akinboye 2008 : iv-v)

Since independence of Nigeria from the colonial rule, Yoruba has not been faring better in socio-political affairs. The seeds of discord are germinating



in varied forms. We remember the political upheaval between Obafemi Awolowo and Ladoke Akintola, we know too well, the inglorious role some of the Yoruba leaders played during the travails of Basorun M.K.O Abiola, the immediate past Are-Ona-Kakanfo. We are also aware of the feelings of the Afonja descendants in Ilorin who are constantly striving to regain the lost glory from the hands of the Fulani. Currently, there is no social cohesion amongst the leaders of the Yoruba race, because the political elite's deceit is ramifying. At a time, during the regimes of Obasanjo and Jonathan, the clamor for re-structuring of Nigeria was raving; now the so call proponents of the restructuring are at the center of governance; yet they keep mute about it.

There is no sense of understanding amongst the royal fathers and the political class for the interest of the Yoruba race. The Yoruba race should find her place again in the affairs of Nigeria. It is high time they came together, least they will fall together. Nigeria is not yet a nation. It is a country that has gone through various developmental straights. She manifests varied socio-political and economical dysfunctions, malfunctioned infrastructural facilities, and psychotic tendencies in human rights violation, electioneering malpractices and recurrent state of political distemper, and many more. In all these, where is the place of the Yoruba race in Nigeria without social cohesion? An answer to this question defines a peaceful coexistence amongst ethnic nationalities in Nigeria; a cohesion that is lacking in the present structure.

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