

YORUBA BELIEFS AND MONARCHY IN YORUBALAND AS SEEN THROUGH OLA ROTIMI'S *THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME*

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Abstract : This paper aims at examining critically Yoruba beliefs and monarchy in Yorubaland as seen through Ola Rotimi's play *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. In Africa, there are many ethnic groups which have their beliefs, customs and traditions. Among these ethnic groups, there is the Yoruba ethnic group of Nigeria. Although most Africans have embraced Christianity and Islam, many Yoruba still adhere to their traditional religion. Yoruba religion is complex, featuring many deities, but only one supreme God, called *Olorun*, rules them all. Many rituals are performed to worship these deities and Christians and Muslims also perform these rituals as a form of cultural dedication. Although some dismiss these rituals as sheer irrationality and thence deplorable, most of them opt for local – religious – consumption by valorising their indigenous knowledge. Hence the necessity to carry out this study to examine Yoruba beliefs in relation to monarchy in Yorubaland through a study of the chosen work. The literary theory used in this research work is mythological criticism which explores the universal patterns underlying a literary work. This type of criticism draws on the insights of anthropology, history and comparative religion to explore how a text uses myths and symbols drawn from different cultures and epochs. The study has found that Yoruba beliefs are tightly linked to monarchy in Yorubaland. The research work focuses on a critical appraisal of Yoruba beliefs and monarchy in Yorubaland in the work under study with illustrations. The paper recommends and concludes that Yoruba beliefs and monarchy in Yorubaland need to be safeguarded and perpetuated for the welfare of the Yoruba ethnic group and of the African continent at large.

Keywords: Yoruba beliefs, monarchy in Yorubaland, traditional religion, deities, rituals.

LES CROYANCES YORUBAS ET LA MONARCHIE EN PAYS YORUBA VUES À TRAVERS *THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME* DE OLA ROTIMI

Résumé : Cet article vise à examiner de manière critique les croyances yorubas et la monarchie en pays yoruba telles qu'elles sont vues à travers la pièce théâtrale *The Gods Are Not to Blame* de Ola Rotimi. En Afrique, il existe de nombreux groupes ethniques qui ont leurs propres croyances, coutumes et traditions. Parmi ces groupes ethniques, il y a l'ethnie yoruba du Nigeria. Bien que la plupart des Africains aient embrassé le christianisme et l'islam, de nombreux Yoruba adhèrent encore à leur religion traditionnelle. La religion yoruba est complexe, avec de nombreuses divinités, mais un seul Dieu suprême, appelé *Olorun*, les dirige toutes. De nombreux rituels sont accomplis pour vénérer ces divinités et les chrétiens et musulmans accomplissent aussi ces rituels comme une forme de dévouement culturel. Bien que certains considèrent ces rituels comme purement irrationnels et donc déplorables, la plupart d'entre eux optent pour une consommation – religieuse – locale en valorisant leurs connaissances indigènes. D'où la nécessité de mener cette étude pour examiner les croyances yorubas en relation avec la monarchie en pays yoruba à travers une étude de l'œuvre choisie. La théorie littéraire utilisée dans ce travail de recherche est la critique mythologique qui explore les modèles universels sous-jacents à une œuvre littéraire. Ce type de critique s'appuie sur les connaissances de l'anthropologie, de l'histoire et de la religion comparée pour explorer la manière dont un texte utilise des mythes et des symboles issus de différentes cultures et

époques. L'étude a révélé que les croyances yorubas sont étroitement liées à la monarchie en pays yoruba. Le travail de recherche se focalise sur une évaluation critique des croyances yoruba et de la monarchie en pays yoruba dans l'œuvre étudiée avec des illustrations. L'article recommande et conclut que les croyances yorubas et la monarchie en pays yoruba doivent être sauvegardées et perpétuées pour le bien-être du groupe ethnique yoruba et du continent africain en général.

Mots-clés : Croyances yorubas, monarchie en pays yoruba, religion traditionnelle, divinités, rituels.

Introduction

Most Yoruba people still practise the traditional religion of their ancestors and this practice is perpetuated from generation to generation together with their monarchy. However, some people who have embraced religions such as Christianity and Islam consider such practices as heathen. Hence the necessity to carry out this research work in order to unveil the importance of Yoruba beliefs and monarchy in Yorubaland. Yoruba traditional religion holds that there is only one supreme God and hundreds of minor gods called *Orisha*. In Yoruba pantheon, there are three gods available to all. Is there any link between Yoruba beliefs and monarchy in Yorubaland? It is evident that there is a link between Yoruba beliefs and monarchy in Yorubaland. The purpose of this research work is to show this through a study of the chosen play. The theoretical framework of the research work has to do with mythological criticism which explores the universal patterns underlying a literary work. It is a type of criticism which draws on the insights of anthropology, history and comparative religion to explore how a text uses myths and symbols drawn from different cultures and epochs. The methodology used falls on documentary research which includes books and internet sources, especially online articles. The pertinence of the theories and methods used lies in the fact that they will induce an understanding of the theme under study and a literary appraisal of Yoruba beliefs and monarchy in Yorubaland through a study of the selected play. The paper is divided into three sections: the central role of Ogun in Yoruba Pantheon and his implications in Yoruba monarchy, the concept of human destiny in Yorubaland, the necessity to revisit some aspects of Yoruba culture occurring in the play.

I. The Central Role of Ogun in Yoruba Pantheon and his Implications in Yoruba Monarchy

Yoruba people believe in one supreme God called *Olodumare* (the owner of heaven), the Supreme God. J. A. I. Bewaji (1998, p. 8) thinks that "Olodumare is the Most Powerful Being for Whom Nothing is too Great or too Small, Below or Beyond to Accomplish." For E. B. Idowu (1962, pp. 40-41) as quoted by J. A. I. Bewaji:

The powers of obas, ancestors, elders, witches, herbalists, medicine men, divinities, etc., are all derived from Olodumare and are limited and limitable by Him. It is this feature which transmutes in the language of patristic and scholastic church-men into the concept of omnipotence, and this cannot be quarreled with, since the Yoruba obviously believe that all good and bad take their origin from Olodumare.

J. A. I. Bewaji (1998, p. 8)

This quotation shows that the Supreme God is at the origin of whatever occurs on earth. It means that He is the instigator of the good and bad things which human beings do on earth. Moreover, as He is omniscient and omnipotent, He knows everything and He is endowed with endless power. The Yoruba people, like other African peoples, use minor gods to reach Him by communicating through invisible spirits. “The sacrifice may be used for preventive, foundation, votive, meal and drink, propitiation and substitutionary offering or sacrifice” (J. O. Awolalu and P. A. Dopamu, 1979, pp. 85-86). The Yoruba people’s belief in God can also be termed as ‘Henotheism’ which is adherence to one particular god out of several gods and goddesses. Whenever they have a problem touching the interest of the whole community, sacrifice to the gods is the last resort. The sacrifice takes place after the consultation of the most prominent gods in order to know the root cause of the problem at stake. This is the case in *The Gods Are Not to Blame* where sacrifice occupies a paramount place. The excerpt below illustrates this fact:

FIRST CITIZEN: Let us sacrifice rams to the gods.

ODEWALE: Sacrifice, did you say? To what gods have we not made sacrifice, my chiefs and I? Soponna, the god of poxes? Ela, the god of Deliverance? What god? Sango, the god of thunder and rainfall, whose showers can help wash away the evil in the soil on which we stand? What god have we not called upon to help us?

SECOND CHIEF: We have sent for Baba Fakunle, the greatest of all medicinemen in this world. He will be here soon. [...].

PRIEST: We have sent Aderopo to Ile-Ife, the land of Orunmila, to ask the all-seeing god why we are in pain.

O. Rotimi (2000, pp. 11-12)

The above excerpt clearly shows the importance of gods or divinities in Yoruba pantheon. Through it, the dramatist intends to show that sacrifice to gods is highly regarded in Yorubaland. The Yoruba have recourse to them in order to get some favours from the Supreme God. “In many societies, it is believed that God punishes people through illness, misfortune, barrenness and even death. The Yoruba consider God to be the judge over all, and when misfortune befalls a moral offender, people say, ‘he is under the lashes of God’” (J. S. Mbiti, 1970, p. 77, quoted by J. A. I. Bewaji, 1998, p. 11). “There is no doubt that God is the most powerful Being and that He has all the superlative attributes one can consider, but the Yoruba do not think that such a being cannot do evil or cause evil. It is part of the attributes of the Supreme Being to be able to utilize all things” (J. A. I. Bewaji, 1988, quoted by J. A. I. Bewaji, 1998, p. 11). In Ola Rotimi’s play, the people of the Kingdom of Kutuje are suffering from a painful disease eleven years after Odewale has come to power. However, they do not know the origin of such a calamity. Although they have made sacrifices to all their important gods, the problem still persists. Z. Sofola (1979, p. 135), among other critics, maintains that “it is unthinkable that the people of Kutuje would make a total stranger their king.” They have misused their divination in the play insofar as “the people of Kutuje would have consulted the oracle before making Odewale their king” (Z. Sofola, 1979, p. 135). In Yorubaland, before the selection of a king, the *Ifa oracle*, the traditional consulting deity of the Yoruba, has to be consulted because it plays a lot of roles in selecting the right candidates to the throne. E. B. Oladumiye and I. B. Kashim point out that:

The Ifa oracle (traditional consulting deity) has a lot of roles to play in the selection of a king in Yoruba land. Having obtained [the] necessary information about the candidates, a stone or cowries is given a special marking for each candidate. The chief in charge will whisper the name of the candidate to the stones or cowries, all of which are then handed over to the heads of *Ifa* priest[s] who will consult [sic] the oracle. After careful examination he hands over the stone or cowry, which promises to be most potent to the community, the name of the person is then announced by the high chief. [...]. This print illustrates the duty of *Ifa* Oracle in the coronation of a new king. The *Ifa* Oracle has the ability to discover things to come and to uncover past event and secrets. The instruments used to carry out divination are made of shells of some hard nuts, or seeds tied in four rows of four shells each.

E. B. Oladumiye and I. B. Kashim (2013, p. 8)

Before the coronation of a king, he is empowered with various kinds of supernatural power which he has to show by demonstrating them during his monarchical duties as the king. However, in King Odewale's case, the *Ifa* oracle has not been consulted before his coronation as the king of Kutuje. The people of the Kingdom of Kutuje have abruptly and unilaterally decided to make him their king simply because he has actively participated in the tribal war against Ikolu and led them to victory. His crowning thus comes as a reward for the victory whose main actor he is. After becoming the king of the tribe, he has the obligation to respect the tradition of that tribe by marrying the Queen mother of the former king. As a result, he accidentally marries his own mother. The ensuing consequences of this act are fatal, for there has only been eleven years' joy in the kingdom after King Adetusa's death. The following quotation reveals this fact:

We have all lived in joy
these eleven years
and Kutuje
has prospered.
But joy
has a slender body
that breaks too soon. [...].
There is trouble
now in the land.
Joy has broken
and scattered.
Peace, too, is no more.

O. Rotimi, (2000, p. 8)

The trouble that is now in the land, as referred to in the foregoing quotation, is that people die of a strange sickness all over the Kingdom of Kutuje. The playwright uses this trouble to reveal that the awkward way in which the people of Kutuje have made Odewale their king without consulting the *Ifa* oracle has caused a great calamity in the land. He means that if a king is not crowned in the normal way, then the people have to undergo the ensuing consequences. Joy has broken and scattered and there is no more peace in Kutuje because its people have offended the gods. This situation clearly shows that no human being can offend the gods, and by extension the Supreme

God, and go unpunished. The assertion that 'Power is divine' is thus verified through the predicament of the Kutuje people. As the head of the monarchy, Odewale has the moral obligation to be concerned about his people's welfare. When a calamity has befallen the kingdom depicted in *The Gods Are not to Blame*, the citizens complain when the king meets them. They do so because they look upon their king as the sole person who can find solutions to their problems. The following excerpt is an illustration of this fact:

FIRST CHIEF: Enough! People of our land! People of our – the King stands before you in greeting.

FIRST CITIZEN: What are greetings to a dying body? [...].

FIRST WOMAN: Yesterday, my twins died — both of them. [...].

SECOND CITIZEN: When the head of a household dies, the house becomes an empty shell. But we have you as our head, and with you, our Chiefs, yet we do not know whether to thank the gods that you are with us or to look elsewhere for hope.

THIRD CITIZEN: When the chameleon brings forth a child, is not that child expected to dance? As we have made you King, act as King. Sickness has been killing us all these many days. What has the king done about it? [...].

SECOND WOMAN: Sickness has been killing us all these many days. What has the King done about it?

O. Rotimi (2000, pp. 9-10)

The people have directed their complaints to the king in the foregoing excerpt because he is responsible for their welfare, including their health care. The dramatist uses this to show that the king exercises the executive power, the kingdom being a kind of republic. So, just as the president of a republic is referred to for whatever problem occurs in his country, the king is the last resort for any predicament occurring in his kingdom. The citizens of Kutuje further complain to Odewale as shown in this quotation:

THIRD WOMAN: You overwhelmed the bushmen of Ikolu when they attacked and enslaved our land. Now we cry in pain for help and there is silence.

SECOND CITIZEN: When rain falls on the leopard, does it wash off its spots? Has the richness of kingly life washed off the love of our King for his people?

FOURTH CITIZEN: We have suffered long in silence!

FIFTH CITIZEN: How long must feverish birds tremble in silence before their keeper?

O. Rotimi (2000, p. 10)

The head of the kingdom, the king, is seen as the supreme personality whose unquestionable decisions positively or negatively impact the whole kingdom. So, for every problem that the kingdom faces, the citizens have to refer to the king for a suitable solution as prescribed by tradition. That is why King Odewale believes that his people wrongly accuse him of not taking care of them by ridding his land of the sickness which is menacing it. He tells them with gloom:

My people. Children of our fathers. Sickness is like rain. Does the rain fall on one roof alone? No. Does it on one body and not on another? No. Whoever the rain sees, on him it rains. Does it not? It is the same with sickness. You do me great wrong, therefore, to think that, like a rock in the middle of a lake, forever cooled

by flowing waters, I do not know, and cannot know the sun's hotness that burns and dries up the open land. Indeed, you do me great wrong, my people...

O. Rotimi (2000, p. 10)

The King's allegation that his people have done him great wrong as mentioned in the aforementioned excerpt lies in the fact that they ignore that the sickness has not spared his palace too. Odewale answers his people confidently and informs them of the measures he has already taken. For example, he has sacrificed to the gods and sent Aderopo to the oracle at Ile-Ife. He endeavours to show them that the plague has also affected him because his children are also suffering from the same sickness. The citizens have no option but ask for his forgiveness. Prostrating themselves, they say in unison: "We beg for forgiveness" (p. 10). The King proves his innocence by asking his wife to bring his children so that the citizens can realise that they are really sick. Then he pursues: "Now to answer your question. What have I been doing about the sickness in the land? Have I been sleeping? If so, I am sick in the head: for only a madman would go to sleep with his roof on fire" (p. 11). He criticises his people for being too passive and for doing nothing to fight the plague. Although the citizens' complaints are awkward, the King has to forgive them because as the monarch of the land, he has the responsibility to endure all sorts of accusations from his citizens. He is a kind of dustbin where people can throw garbage, provided that they do not throw with fire lest they should burn the dustbin. The oracle at Ile-Ife, *Orunmila*, has declared that the plague is due to the fact that King Adetusa's murderer is in the Kingdom of Kutuje without further details. So, the gods have to intervene in order to unveil the identity of the murderer. In his quest for the murderer of the former King of Kutuje, Odewale relies on the gods of the land by taking an oath before Ogun, the God of Iron, as revealed in the quotation below:

Before Ogun the God of Iron, I stand on oath. Witness now all you present that before the feast of Ogun, which starts at sunrise, I, Odewale, the son of Ogundele, shall search and fully lay open before your very eyes the murderer of King Adetusa. And having seized that murderer, I swear by this sacred arm of Ogun, that I shall straightway bring him to the agony of slow death. First he shall be exposed to the eyes of the world and put to shame the beginning of living death. [...]. May the gods of our fathers – Obatala, Orunmila, Sango, Sopona, Esu Elegbara, Agemo, Ogun – stand by me.

O. Rotimi (2000, p. 24)

The above quotation reveals that King Odewale solely relies on the gods of the land to discover the murderer of King Adetusa so as to find a lasting solution to the plague which prevails in his kingdom. Referring to the playwright, Ola Rotimi, C. Anyokwu (2012, p. 69) contends that his "tragic plays come across as tragedies of situation based on collective heroism in which myth and history interact in a common search for meaning and essence." It is obvious that Odewale uses the gods to take revenge on the murderer of King Adetusa. Unfortunately, he, himself, proves to be the murderer, even though he does not know that the person he killed eleven years earlier was King Adetusa. He tells the people of Kutuje what follows:

Minds are not clean, my people. Evil doers are many in this land; evil doers backed by heavy money, heavy influence. The manner of your King's death is all too clear to me now. Bribery. Men with money bribed villains to kill King Adetusa. With their influence, they dug His grave and in it buried his body and his memory. Then with money and influence they sheltered the murderers. Now Ifa says we suffer for their act.

O. Rotimi (2000, pp. 23-24)

From the aforementioned quotation, it is clear that Odewale tacitly accuses himself of being an evil doer since he is, in fact, responsible for the murder of King Adetusa. He tells Baba Fakunle, the great seer: "There is a plague in this land, and Orunmila tells us from Ile-Ife that the cause of this suffering is the presence of a murderer, one who murdered King Adetusa, the King before I became King of this land of Kutuje. Pray, tell, who is the murderer?" (p. 26). Gbonka later unknots the situation when he tells Odewale, the first child of King Adetusa who was meant to be sacrificed to the gods, about the sacrifice in these terms:

GBONKA [subdued]: Pray, have mercy, I meant you no wrong. I only tried to spare your life, my lord, I meant no harm. They ordered me to kill you in the bush. But I took pity and gave-

ODEWALE: Who ordered you to kill me?

GBONKA: The man behind you, my lord, the Priest of Ogun.

OGUN PRIEST [gravely]: It is the custom: when the gods command, we men must obey!

O. Rotimi (2000, p. 68)

According to the custom that the Priest of Ogun has referred to in the foregoing excerpt, the gods have commanded him to kill the child to prevent a calamity in the kingdom. Odewale has sworn by Ogun, although its Priest warns Aderopo not to swear by the hot-tempered god: "My Master, Ogun, is a god with fierce anger, son; one does not call him to witness so freely" (p. 35). W. Soyinka (1976, p. 140, quoted by P. J. Conradie, 1994, p. 32) describes Ogun as the "God of creativity, guardian of the road, god of metallic lore and artistry. Explorer, hunter, god of war, Custodian of the sacred oath." So, the solution to the plague should rather be sought in Odewale's special relation to Ogun. As J. O. Awolalu (1979, p. 32) maintains: "In Yoruba mythology Ogun is known as a god who sometimes gave way to anger, as the priest also says. When he was the first king of Ire, he once returned from a battle and started killing his own subjects because they did not honour him." There is a reference to this incident when Odewale tries to break loose from the spell cast on him and mutters:

When Ogun, the god of iron,
was returning from Ire
his loincloth was
a hoop of
fire.
Blood ... the deep red stain
of [the] victim's blood
his cloak. (pp. 48-49)

O. Rotimi (2000, pp. 48-49)

The above-mentioned quotation clearly shows King Odewale's reminiscence of the scene of the murder which he is responsible for. He refers to mythology at this level to justify his act. The literary theory applied to this study, which has to do with mythological criticism which explores the universal patterns underlying a literary work and draws on the insights of anthropology, history and comparative religion to explore how a text uses myths and symbols drawn from different cultures and epochs, is proved at this level. Its relevance lies in the fact that the gods or divinities mentioned in the foregoing quotation have to do with mythology and thence refer to myth and symbols drawn from Yoruba culture from times immemorial. Odewale even imagines that the god, Ogun, has ordered him to shed blood:

This is ... Ogun
and Ogun says: flow!
Flow ... let your blood flow [...].
O. Rotimi (2000, p. 49)

Afterwards, however, Odewale feels guilty because he has used Ogun's instrument wrongfully. He laments: "Ogun ... I have used your weapon, and I have killed a man. Ogun ... ! With my own hands ... with my own hands I have killed. Burst open ... burst open ... Earth, burst open and hide me" (p. 49). The dramatist stresses the misuse of mythology here insofar as Ogun is not meant to be imitated by human beings. While acknowledging that he has wrongfully used Ogun's weapon to kill a man, Odewale indirectly testifies to the fact that he has taken myth for reality. However, his act of killing King Adetusa may be interpreted as a punishment of the god Ogun for Gbonka's failure to abide by his will by really sacrificing the evil child in the evil grove. Although King Adetusa does not know that Gbonka has not killed the evil child, he is held responsible for the failure of the sacrifice. Referring to the plague which has occurred in the Kingdom of Kutuje, M. F. Nutsukpo declares:

They live in harmony until a plague sweeps through the land. Aderopo is sent to Ile-Ife, to inquire of the all-seeing god, Arunmila, about the cause of the plague; he returns with the revelation that the murderer of King Adetusa lives in their midst and is responsible for the plague. For further clarification, Aderopo is sent to fetch Baba Fakunle, now the oldest and most honoured of all seers who, on arrival, accuses Odewale of being a "bedsharer" and "the cursed murderer" (28; act 2:1). Shocked and angry, Odewale accuses Aderopo of conspiring with the seer to facilitate his downfall to his advantage and banishes him. He then embarks on a quest to uncover the truth.

M. F. Nutsukpo (2019, p. 104)

The aforementioned quotation reveals that Odewale wrongly suspects Aderopo of trying to overthrow him and take over power with the complicity of the Priest of Ogun. Through this false accusation, the playwright denounces the dictatorship which prevails in the kingdom depicted in the play. Aderopo therefore decides to swear by Ogun in order to prove his innocence even though the Priest of Ogun has prevented him from taking the oath as mentioned before. After the

revelation that he is the murderer of King Adetusa, Odewale feels guilty of the false accusation that he has heaped on Aderopo, his younger brother, and tells him: “My brother, I have done you much wrong with my grave suspicions” (p. 70). For Aderopo, however, “It is nothing [...]. It is the way the gods meant it to happen” (p. 70). Odewale’s behaviour in the excerpt below proves that he does not blame the Gods but himself as he replies to what his brother has said in these terms:

No, no! Do not blame the Gods. Let no one blame the powers. My people, learn from my fall. The powers would have failed if I did not let them use me. They knew my weakness: the weakness of a man easily moved to the defence of his tribe against others. I once slew a man on my farm in Ede. I could have spared him. But he spat on my tribe. He spat on the tribe I though was my own tribe. The man laughed and laughing, he called me a ‘man from the bush tribe of Ijekun’. And I lost my reason. Now I find out that that very man was my ... Own father, the King who ruled this land before me. It was my run from the blood I spilled to come the hurt of my tribe, that brought me to this land to do more horrors. Pray my people – Baba Ogunsom.

O. Rotimi (2000, p. 71)

As revealed in the above-mentioned excerpt, Odewale blames himself for the dilemma in which he finds himself rather than blaming the Gods. He sees himself as the sole responsible for the tragedy which has occurred in his kingdom. This tragedy has caused him to resign and go in exile with his two children, Adewale and Adeyinka. As they are leaving, he tells his people what follows:

Let no one stop us and let no one come with us or I shall curse him.
When
The wood-insect
Gathers sticks,
On its own head it
Carries
Them.

O. Rotimi (2000, p. 72)

The townspeople have no alternative left but “kneel or crouch in final deference to the man whose tragedy is also their Tragedy” (p. 72) as Odewale and his two children start their journey on the last page of the play which has a sad ending. Although he has reigned over his people for many years, he has ended up in exile. So, in Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, things fall apart after King Odewale realises that the woman he has married is his mother and that he is the one who has killed his biological father. In addition, the way Queen Ojuola commits suicide due to the fact that she cannot resist such an abomination testifies to the tragic end of the play.

2. The Concept of Human Destiny in Yorubaland

According to B. Hallen and J. O. Sodipo (1986, p. 105, quoted by O. A. Balogun, 2007, p. 118), “A person in Yoruba thought is made up of three important elements: *ara* (body), *emi* (spirit) and *ori* (human destiny).” “In the Yoruba concept of person, *ara*

(body) refers to all the tangible elements that make a person both externally and internally such as the brain, kidney, intestine, heart etc. and not just the body frame which houses other constituents of a person" (O. A. Balogun, 2007, p. 333). "*Emi* (the life-giving entity), the Yoruba believe, is an immaterial element that provides the 'animating force' or energy without which a person cannot be said to be living at all, talk less of being conscious" (S. Oladipo, 1992, p. 19, quoted by O. A. Balogun, 2007, p. 118). According to E. B. Idowu (1962, p. 169), it is "closely associated with the breath and the whole mechanism of breathing which is its most expressive manifestation." In other words, *emi* is regarded by the Yoruba as the life-force of a person. "The third element, *Ori*, represents the individuality element in a person. *Ori* is the element responsible for a person's personality and represents human destiny. *Ori*, an immaterial entity, otherwise called 'inner-head' is intractably connected with human destiny" (O. A. Balogun, 2007, p. 118). "It is responsible for the actuality and worth of man in the material world. For the Yoruba, *ori* is believed to be not only the bearer of destiny but also to be the essence of human personality which rules, controls and guides the life and activities of the person" (E. B. Idowu, 1962, 170). So, every person living on earth has come with his own destiny or *Ori*. In the same vein, S. Oladipo (1992, p. 36), quoted by O. A. Balogun states:

Human destiny is the mysterious power believed to control human events. Destiny or predestination is the belief that whatever happens or that will happen in the future has been preordained and happened according to an earlier master plan. It is the belief that every person has his biography written before coming to the world which consequently implies that anything one does is not something done out of free will but something done in fulfillment of preordained history.

O. A. Balogun (2007, p. 119)

As the narrator puts it at the onset on the play: "The struggle of man begins at birth" (p. 1). So, it is important that the future of every Yoruba child should be known at birth. When a child is born in a royal family in Yorubaland, some rituals are performed, especially when the newborn child is a boy, because he is the prince who will wear the crown after his father's death. As matter of fact, the divinities are also consulted in order to read the future of this newborn prince and know what he has brought from the world of the ancestors or rather from the gods. What the narrator says in the quotation below illustrates this fact:

It is their first baby,
so they bring him for blessing
to the shrine of Ogun,
the God of War, of Iron,
and doctor of all male children.
Then they call
a Priest of Ifa,
as is the custom,
to divine
the future that this boy
has brought
with him. [...].

Baba Fakunle,
 oldest and most knowing
 of all Ifa priests in this world,
 it is you I great.
 Mother waits, father waits.
 Now, tell them:
 what is it that the child has brought
 as duty to this earth
 from the gods?
 O. Rotimi (2000, p. 2)

As custom demands, in the Kingdom of Kutuje, the gods must be consulted in order to know the future of the newborn in the royal family as shown in the above quotation. This practice helps to protect the Kingdom from a possible misfortune or calamity. Yoruba religion is full of principles, prescriptions, laws and rules to be followed; and when a person fails to follow them, there are consequences not only on the person himself but also on the whole society. In Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, the newborn prince has brought his own destiny on earth. Baba Fakunle tells his parents what he has brought as mission on earth in the following excerpt:

NARRATOR: [...]. Now Baba Fakunle tells mother, tells father, tells the Priest of Ogun and aged keeper of the King's household and the land; he tells them what it is that the boy has brought as mission from the gods to carry out on earth.
 BABA FAKUNLE: This boy, he will kill his own father and marry his own mother.
 O. Rotimi (2000, pp. 2-3)

The foregoing excerpt clearly reveals the destiny that the newborn prince has brought from the gods. Unfortunately, the boy's destiny proves to be a bad one. For that reason, the Priest of Ogun has to do something urgently to prevent the child's bad destiny from coming true. The prediction is extremely bad and its outcome has to be prevented at all costs. It is an abomination for any sane person to kill his father or to marry his own mother in African communities and even beyond. So, there is no wonder when the narrator says:

Bad word!
 Mother weeps, Father weeps.
 The future is not happy,
 But to resign oneself to it
 is to be crippled fast.
 Man must struggle.
 The bad future must not happen.
 The only way to stop it
 is to kill,
 kill the unlucky messenger
 of the gods,
 kill the boy.
 O. Rotimi (2000, p. 3)

From the above-mentioned excerpt, it is clear that the situation is so serious that the child's mother weeps. The future of the child who is the messenger of the gods is not happy and must be crippled fast. When a new baby comes to life, it is a blessing and a great joy for the family. For King Adetusa and his wife, Ojuola, it is the contrary. A boy who will commit a double abomination by killing his own father and by marrying his own mother is not welcome in African societies and even beyond. So, the Priest of Ogun has to stop this mission before it starts, and the only out is to kill the unlucky baby and give him back to the gods as sacrifice. Therefore, the Priest of Ogun has taken the necessary steps for the sacrifice as the narrator puts it in the following quotation:

Priest of Ogun ties the boy's feet
with a string of cowries
meaning sacrifice
to the gods who have sent
Boy down to this Earth.
Priest bears boy to Gbonka,
The King's special messenger,
and orders him to go
into the bush
with the little boy,
to the evil grove.

O. Rotimi (2000, pp. 3-4)

This quotation shows that a sacrifice is necessary in order to appease the gods and the sacrificial ram is nobody else but the newborn child. The King's special messenger, Gbonka, who is supposed to kill the boy in the evil grove has failed to accomplish his mission. Instead of killing him, he opts to give him to a hunter in the bush. Gbonka's failure to abide by this custom has caused the calamity that the Priest of Ogun has tried to prevent. As a result, the latter's prophecy that the child is going to kill his father and marry his mother has eventually come true. The quotation below reveals King Adetusa's death:

It is now
two and thirty years
since that boy
was borne into the bush
to die, and dying stop
The awesome will of fate.
King Adetusa has met
rough death
and passed into the land
Of our silent fathers.

O. Rotimi (2000, p. 4)

The first part of the prophecy has come true through the death of King Adetusa who has been killed by his own son, Odewale, who is supposed to be the son of Ogundele, a great warrior from a neighbouring kingdom. Gbonka has given the child

meant for sacrifice to the gods to Ogundele in the bush. The boy's destiny or fate is probably to live and fulfil his mission although it is a bad one. That is the only explanation to the fact that he is still alive despite the fact that the Priest has made the necessary arrangements for his sacrifice to the gods. W. Bascom (1969, p. 115) describes fate as follows: "Before a child is born (or reborn) the ancestral guardian soul appears before Olórun to receive a new body (shaped by the God of Whiteness), a new breath, and its fate or destiny (iwa) during its new life on earth. Kneeling before Olórun, this soul is given the opportunity to choose its own destiny, and it is believed to be able to make any choice it wishes ..." This happens before birth, however, and human beings do not know what their fate is. As J. O. Awolalu (1979, p. 23) states: "The Yoruba believe that men's fate is sealed by Olódùmarè before they come into the world. The people concerned do not remember what their allotted fate is on earth ..." Thus, there remains something incomprehensible in man's fate. The idea of an overriding fate also occurs. For example, W. Bascom (1969, p. 117) says: "A diviner explained that an individual cannot basically change his own destiny [...]." He goes on to posit: "Except for the appointed day upon which an individual's several souls must return to heaven, destiny is not fixed and unalterable" (W. Bascom, 1969, p. 118). In the same vein, J. O. Awolalu (1979, p. 15) maintains: "... the Yoruba believe that Olójó (the Controller of daily events), another name for the Supreme Being, has pre-determined what will happen to everybody in every moment of his life here on earth, including when he will die." A. Gurr (1981, p. 141) interprets Soyinka's remarks on Yoruba myth in his essay entitled "The Fourth Stage" as follows: "Man is smaller than his fate. The cosmos has an underlying frame of order." "If we set aside the satirical plays [...] we often find a strongly expressed desire to accept fate and destiny, a desire entirely consistent with the essay on Yoruba tragedy" (A. Gurr, 1981, pp. 143-144). So, the idea that there is a power stronger than man, and which has a part in determining his fate, is prominent in Yoruba thought. According to E. O. Oduwolé (1996, p. 48), "everybody has got his biography written before coming into the world, in such a way that whatever he does is not done out of freewill but because it has been preordained. Whatever a person does is not as a matter of chance or luck, it is something which has been settled in pre-existence state or by fate." As O. A. Balogun (2007, p. 124) concedes while commenting on E. O. Oduwolé's stand, "She avers fate to be the guiding force that controls actions which we ordinarily believe to be under man's control or over which man thinks he has a choice. Freedom in other words, is an illusion within the Yoruba causal explanation paradigm." However, as emphasised by Ola Rotimi in his play, man is partly responsible for his fate. For instance, when Odewale arrives as a stranger in Kutuje, he incites the people to struggle against the Ikolu attackers rather than appeasing them. The excerpt below proves this fact:

Up, up,
all of you;
to lie down resigned to fate
is madness.

O. Rotimi (2000, p. 6)

Apart from urging the people of Kutuje to wage a war against their neighbours, Odewale orders them to do something about the plague which prevails in their Kingdom as mentioned earlier. He asks them: "What have you done to help

yourselves?" Then, he argues: "If you need help, search for it first among yourselves" (pp. 12-13). The playwright shows that Odewale has a share in his own fate by referring to his hasty temper. He equates him, in this respect, to the god Ogun. This fact is justified when Odewale's friend, Alaka, declares that he used to call him 'Scorpion' because of his temper as tacitly revealed in the following excerpt:

One that must not
be vexed.
Smooth on the surface
like a woman's jewel;
poison at the tail.
O. Rotimi (2000, p. 43)

The phrase 'poison at the tail' in the foregoing excerpt refers to the scorpion which stings and injects its poison in its victim's body with its tail. Alaka compares Odewale to such a creature to show that he is hot-tempered. In the same vein, Baba Fakunle reproaches Odewale with his hot temper as follows: "Your hot temper, like a disease from birth, is the curse that has brought you trouble" (p. 29). Odewale, himself, admits it after his quarrel with Aderopo and tries to be calm like Ojuola: "... let her cool spirit enter my body, and cool the hot, hot hotness in my blood – the hot blood of a gorilla!" (p. 39). "The most fatal result of this failing was the killing of the old man on the farm near Ede. In this case his hot temper, aggravated by an insult to his tribe, led to an act which he bitterly regretted. In the final analysis it proved to be even worse than he thought, for he had killed his own father. Odewale is thus held responsible for what had happened to him." (P. J. Conradie, 1994, p. 34). C. Dunton (1992, p. 16, quoted by P. J. Conradie, 1994, p. 34) criticises the way in which Odewale's hasty temper is portrayed in the play in these terms: "No more than twenty minutes of stage time later, and Odewale has changed almost out of recognition from his early model of self-control and initiative. By the end of Act two he appears pathological." Although he thinks that the dramatist has introduced the idea too abruptly in the scene in which Aderopo hesitates to reveal the oracle's message, Odewale's impatience seems reasonable. "This criticism does not seem to be justified. A dramatist does not have the time for an extended character analysis and frequently has to juxtapose two different states of mind" (P. J. Conradie, 1994, p. 34).

The second part of the prophecy also comes true very soon with Odewale's taking over power and marrying his own mother. As custom wishes, in Yorubaland, when a king dies, his successor has to marry the deceased king's wife or wives as part and parcel of the royal legacy. The excerpt below proves this fact, as Odewale declares:

For eleven years now,
I, Odewale,
the only son of Ogundele,
have rule Kutuje
and have taken for wife,
as culltom [custom] wishes,
Ojuola, the motherly Queen
of the former King

Adetusa.
 She now is bearer
 of my four seeds:
 Adewale, and Adebisi
 his sister,
 Oyeyemi, her brother,
 and Adeyinka, [his] second sister.
 O. Rotimi (2000, pp. 7-8)

The inheritance of the widow(s) of a deceased king by his successor as revealed in the foregoing quotation is a practice which prevails in Yorubaland. The only problem in the play is that the deceased king's only wife is the biological mother of Odewale, the new king. Odewale has inadvertently and accidentally married his own mother after killing his own father without being aware of the two situations which have been prophesied by the Priest of Ogun as soon as he came to life at the beginning of the play. So, the prophecy as announced at the birth of the mysterious child has fully come true. It is in the perspective of respecting the tradition that Odewale has taken as spouse the wife of the late King Adetusa who proves to be his own mother later on. He has two children with his own mother, which is an abomination. The Yoruba people believe that once a man is sent on earth with a certain destiny, nothing and no one can change this. No matter what happens, that person should accomplish his/her mission. J. Hospers (1981, p. 322, quoted by O. A. Balogun, 2007, p. 119) states: "What is going to happen will happen", "whatever will be, will be." J. Hospers' stand is verified through what has happened in the play. Odewale's destiny as predicted by the Priest of Ogun at his birth has become true. Although the Priest has sentenced Odewale to death after seeing the bad mission that he has brought from the gods, he has ended up accomplishing the mission. His destiny has thus fulfilled itself. It means that no matter what we do, a man's destiny will find a way to fulfil itself. According to O. Morakinyo (1983, p. 78) as quoted by O. A. Balogun:

There are various myths on the methods of acquisition of *ori*, the destiny in Yoruba thought. While it will not be exhaustive embarking on an explicit examination of those myths in a paper of this nature, the central salient points shall be outlined. According to the Yoruba, it is believed that before coming into the world, everybody was obliged to go and choose an *ori* from among a large number of *oris* stored in *Ajala's* warehouse. *Ajala* (a potter) has the duty of molding human heads. The process of human creation is not complete without him. While *Orisanla* (arch-divinity) is understood by the Yoruba to be the maker of *ara* (body), who later passes the lifeless figure to *Olodumare* (Supreme Deity) to put *emi* (life giving entity), *Ajala* is responsible for the creation of *ori*. *Ajala* is a skilled potter, a drunkard, a debtor and an irresponsible and careless creature.

O. A. Balogun (2007, p. 121)

This quotation shows that myths occupy a paramount place in Yorubaland as far as human destiny is concerned. Even the creation myth which stipulates that man has been molded by some deities under the supervision of *Olodumare*, the Supreme Deity, is widespread in Yorubaland. Each human being therefore brings on earth his own destiny or *ori* which he chooses in the course of his molding. O. A. Balogun further writes:

In any case, *Ajala* through his utter carelessness is responsible for molding heads of different shapes and qualities (some are good and many are bad). In the house of *Ajala*, every man makes a choice of his own *ori*, after which every man coming into the world passes through the water of forgetfulness-*Omi igbagbe*, which is the boundary between heaven and earth.

O. A. Balogun (2007, pp. 121-122)

In another myth as accounted by E. B. Idowu (1962, pp. 173-174) and O. Morakinyo (1983, p. 72) as quoted by O. A. Balogun (2007, p. 122), the acquisition of one's *ori* is done by kneeling before the high authority *Olodumare* (Supreme Deity), who confers one's portion, that is, what a person would live up to on earth. This type of acquiring 'ori' is referred to as *Ayanmo* (that which is affixed to someone). In all these myths, *orunmila* (arch-divinity), the founder of *ifa* (oracle) system of divination, is noted to be a witness of man's choice of destiny. Little wonder he is referred to as *Eleri-Ipin* (the witness of destiny) and the only one competent to reveal the type and content of 'ori' chosen by each person. For a better understanding of the acquisition of *ori*, E. B. Idowu gives a trimorphous conception of the Yoruba belief in destiny. According to him, a person may choose his destiny in one of these three ways:

A person may kneel down and choose his destiny, this is called *A kun le yan* (that which is received kneeling). He may kneel down and receive his destiny – that is called *A kun le gba* (that which is received kneeling). Or he may have his destiny affixed on him – for this, Yoruba give the name *Ayanmo* (that which is affixed to one).

E. B. Idowu (1962, p. 173)

From the above quotation, it is clear that “the Yoruba believe that destiny once chosen by one or conferred is unalterable. In other words, it becomes doubly sealed up [in] such [a way] that the earthly existence of the person is an aftermath of the type of *ori* one chose or conferred on one” (O. A. Balogun, 2007, p. 122). S. A. Ali (1995, p. 104) argues that “the Yoruba conception of destiny is repugnant of harsh words of hard determinism, repudiating fatality and necessity.” O. A. Balogun concedes:

The choice of a good *ori* ensures that the individual concerned would lead a successful and prosperous life on earth, while the choice of a bad *ori* condemns the individual concerned to a life of failure and misfortune. Thus for the Yoruba, a prosperous person is referred to as *olori rere* (one who possesses a good *ori*) while an unfortunate person is personified as *olori buruku* (one who possesses a bad *ori*).

A. Balogun (2007, pp. 122-123)

The aforementioned quotation reveals that in *The Gods are Not to Blame*, Odewale is an unfortunate person who is personified as *olori buruku* insofar as he has acted in accordance with the dictate of his *ori* by killing his own father and marrying his own mother. His bad *ori* has led him astray on earth, thus causing his downfall as a king.

3. The Necessity to Revisit some Aspects of Yoruba Culture Occurring in the Play

The first aspect of Yoruba culture which is revealed in the play under study and which needs to be revisited is human sacrifice. This occurs *The Gods Are Not to Blame* when the Priest of Ogun declares that Odewale has to be sacrificed to the gods on the grounds that he has a bad future or a bad destiny. This may be considered as superstition even though the Priest believes that the prediction has been decreed by the god Ogun as mentioned earlier. The narrator refers to human sacrifice in the play in the quotation below:

Priest of Ogun ties the boy's feet
with a string of cowries
meaning sacrifice
to the gods who have sent
Boy down to this Earth."

O. Rotimi (2000, p. 3)

The above excerpt shows that the Priest of Ogun has made the decision to sacrifice the newborn to the gods. Human sacrifice, as practised in the kingdom depicted in the play, is a bad practice even though the boy has eventually killed his father and married his own mother, as the Priest of Ogun has predicted, after the failure of the sacrifice. It is true that killing one's own father is extremely bad and that marrying one's own mother is an abomination. However, in the play, Odewale has acted innocently without knowing that the two people – King Adetusa and Ojuola – are his biological parents. In other words, he has acted in accordance with the will of his *ori*, thus following his destiny. Simply because the Priest has predicted a bad future for the newborn, his life was about to be taken through human sacrifice. Despite the prediction, it is the sole responsibility of the Priest of Ogun to find another solution to prevent the misfortune from happening. The greatest problem in the play is the treatment of fate. M. Etherton sharply criticises it as follows:

Yorubas traditionally believe that your fate is your own doing: you kneel down and receive it as a gift from Olódùmarè before being born. Furthermore, it is intrinsic to Yoruba cosmology that a person's fate is never irreversible, and it can be changed from evil to good by appropriate sacrifices which the Ifa oracle at Ile-Ife will, in the last resort, always determine.

M. Etherton (1982, pp. 124-125)

The quotation reveals that the Priest of Ogun could have positively changed Odewale's fate through appropriate sacrifices. The use of human beings as sacrifice to gods is a very bad practice that vilifies Yoruba tradition and African traditions at large. This is a practice that has to change because human life, no matter what happens, is sacred and should not be abridged. Referring to child mutilation in Uganda, P. Bukuluki and C. M. Mpyangu (2014, p. 12) posit: "Although the practice of human sacrifice is not new in the mythology around sacrifice in Africa, the practice of child mutilation and sacrifice at least in Uganda was just spoken about as fairytale." This quotation suggests that human sacrifice or child mutilation is so unreal that it seems to occur in fairy tales rather than in reality. In the same vein, O. A. Balogun (2007, p. 126) refers to sacrifice in these terms: "It is founded on the ideal of mutual exchange or reciprocity between man and the spirits in order to influence or bring about positive

changes in man's life." Through this quotation, it is clear that sacrifice is not meant for bad things in fact and should not entail human beings as sacrificial rams. So, human sacrifice cannot bring about positive changes in man's life and saps the foundation of sacrifice as referred to by O. A. Balogun in the above quotation.

Yoruba customs and tradition are full of good things that allow the Yoruba people to trace their origins as Africans and to be really proud of being Africans. However, there are some practices that need to be revisited. For example, the way the Yoruba community depicted in the play resolves its quarrels with its neighbouring tribes or kingdoms is not good at all. This has to do with the wars which one tribe or kingdom wages against another one. In Ola Rotimi's play, Odewale has killed his own father in a tribal war and has fled the bloodshed he has caused to take refuge in the Kingdom of Kutuje. He refers to this fact in these terms: "I once slew a man in my farm in Ede.... And I lost my reason. Now I find out that that very man was my... own father, the king who ruled this land before me. It was my run from the blood I spilled to calm the hurt of my tribe, that brought me to this land to do more horrors" (p. 71). So, he has killed his own father because of tribal dissensions which have led to a tribal war. Odewale recounts how he has become the king of Kutuje after a war in this excerpt:

Crossing seven waters,
I, a son of the tribe of
Ijekun Yemoja,
found my way,
to this strange land
of Kutuje. I came
to see suffering. [...].
I gathered the people of Kutuje
under my power and under my power
we attacked the people of Ikolu,
Freed our people,
seized the lands of Ikolu,
and prospered from their sweat.
So it is —
he who pelts another with pebbles
asks for rocks in return.
Ikolu is no more,
but Kutuje prospered.
In their joy,
The people made me KING,
me, of Ijekun tribe.
They broke tradition and made me,
unmasked
King of Kutuje.

O. Rotimi (2000, pp. 6-7)

Through the foregoing excerpt, it appears that war is not a good way of resolving problems because it has a lot of consequences. For instance, the two warring tribes should have found a peaceful solution to their dissensions, instead of indulging in a war against each other and shedding blood. Yoruba tradition should teach the themes of love, dialogues, patience and tolerance so that peace should prevail. The two

warring tribes speak the same Yoruba language. Another consequence of tribal wars is revealed in the play insofar as Odewale would not have killed his own father as predicted by the Priest of Ogun if a war had not broken out between his adoptive Ijekun tribe and his own tribe. In the same vein, he would not have fled his adoptive tribe to become the new king in his own tribe and marry his own mother as predicted by the Priest of Ogun. It means that the war between the two tribes has made the prophecy come true in the ultimate analysis. Another aspect of Yoruba tradition which needs to be revisited as regards their beliefs is the way they venerate some of their gods. Because Ogun is the god of iron, the Yoruba people consider him as the god of war since the instruments used for wars – guns, arrows, machetes – are made of iron. They even take oaths on his behalf although they know that he is a violent god. At times, even people who inwardly know that they are guilty fail to acknowledge their guilt and swear by Ogun. As a result, they die through a violent death caused by things made of iron such as cars, motorbikes, bicycles, etc. This practice which consists in taking oaths on behalf of Ogun needs to be revisited. In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, the Priest of Ogun describes Ogun as a god with fierce anger when Aderopo endeavours to swear:

ADEROPO: May Ogun crush me before the break of ...

PRIEST: Don't swear!

ADEROPO: Why not?

PRIEST: My master, Ogun, is a god with fierce anger, son; one does not call him to witness so freely. Sit down, son, let us sit down and settle the fight. Sit ...

O. Rotimi (2000, p. 35)

As revealed in the above quotation, the Yoruba people swear by Ogun even for insignificant matters. Although Aderopo is innocent and will not undergo any harm, swearing is not a good solution to the problem at stake. Despite the fact that Odewale accuses him of conspiracy to overthrow him and asks him to swear by Ogun, he does not need to do so. Anyway, Ogun may be invoked for good things even though he is considered as a god with fierce anger. For instance, he may be invoked for prosperity or good farming since the instruments used for farming – hoes, machetes, hatchets, etc. – are also made of iron. People such as drivers may ward off road accidents through the protection of the god Ogun, which means that Ogun is not always a violent god.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to examine critically Yoruba beliefs and monarchy in Yorubaland as seen through Ola Rotimi's play, *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. It has dealt with three sections, namely the major deities of the Yoruba pantheon and their implications in human life, the concept of human destiny in the Yorubaland, and the necessity to revisit some aspects of Yoruba culture occurring in the play. The study has unveiled the links between Yoruba beliefs and monarchy in Yorubaland. It has also disclosed the necessity to revisit some aspects of Yoruba culture which cripple it. The study has found that Yoruba beliefs and monarchy in Yorubaland are tightly linked. Ola Rotimi has used literary techniques such as proverbs, riddles and flashbacks to convey his message. He has succeeded in impacting his readership by conveying a powerful message about the Yoruba ethnic group through the use of myths and legends in the play.

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