

The Quest for Cultural Renaissance in Wole Soyinka's *Childe Internationale* and *Alápatá Àpáta*

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Abstract

Critics of Wole Soyinka's works have always identified the cultural impulses of his Yoruba origin in his dramaturgy. This engagement can be segmented into slants that seek a renaissance of his culture through his use of its tropes to intervene in the social malaises mirrored in his works and through a commitment that seeks the survival of his culture in the postcolonial milieus. This paper focuses on Soyinka's engagement with the subject of cultural renaissance through a postcolonial reading of *Childe Internationale* and *Alápatá Àpáta*. While underscoring Soyinka's commitment to the survival of his culture in the hybridised contexts presented in the plays, the paper points out that Soyinka's dominant discussions on cultural renaissance have been primarily associated with his 'Children plays'. The paper exhibits some of the critical aspects of culture that the playwright has isolated to validate his quest for a cultural renaissance. The paper's conclusion gives accreditation to the playwright's concerns about the dwindling fortunes of his Yoruba culture and language but doubts if there is any remedy in sight on account of some other overwhelming adverse social conditions in the plays.

Keywords

Wole Soyinka, children plays, cultural renaissance, postcoloniality

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1. Introduction

Conversations on the relevance of culture and its forms have always taken dimensions that examine its uses and impacts in any work of art. The manifestations of oral forms derived from the Yoruba culture have always been critical in Soyinka's plays. The complexities and contradictions of social realities in different spaces today have generated diverse concerns in ethnic criticism and

cultural studies. Whereas the current social contours in other spaces are predicated on peculiar human experiences such as adventures, wars, and other forced or self-initiated migrations, in Africa, the colonial experience and its aftermath have remained the major rallying points in cultural studies. Armed with the weapon of literacy, writers, such as Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* (2007), have presented racist narratives that surrogate the African (black) culture to that of their Western colonisers. However, Oloruntoba-Oju & Oloruntoba-Oju capture the attempt by the first generation of African writers to re-write this narrative thus:

Early African attempts to counter racist colonial narratives resorted to imagery and categorisations that ironically reinforced the colonial tags of African intellectual inferiority, effeminacy and ineffectuality that were employed to justify the conquest and slavery of Africa in the first place. The African representations were, therefore, unwitting continuations of Europe's negative image of Africa. (Oloruntoba-Oju & Oloruntoba-Oju, 2013, p. 5)

However, Jeanpierre (1965) cited Jean-Paul Satre's "Anti-Racist Racism" thesis (1948) to prove that the negritude poets were entangled by the same vicissitudes they set out to correct in their quest for cultural retrieval. This same point was complimented by Gerald Moore (1978, p. 246), who noted that "... mere trumpeting of the indigenous themes [as common with negritude poets] will convince no one but a rediscovery of it through the obscuring veils of colonial and foreign education, is the most powerful evidence an artist can give for its residual strength." Biodun Jeyifo's refraction of the Hegelian dialectics of thesis, antithesis and synthesis took the discussion further by attenuating that the critical stance, which eventually invalidated the approach of the negritude poets "rested on the thesis of a fundamental clash of worldviews, an incommensurable antithesis between African and European cultural traditions, an antithesis thought resolvable only through abstract syntheses of the best attributes and values of both traditions" (Jeyifo, 2004, p. 48).

Soyinka's outspokenness on the topical issue of cultural renaissance, which has also appeared in his other essays such as "And After Narcissist?", "From Common Backcloth", "The Writer in Modern African State", and his Nobel Lecture, "This Past Must Address Its Present" began in 1967 at the African Scandinavian Writers' Conference in Stockholm. Soyinka amplifying Chinua Achebe's submission in "The Role of a Writer in a New Nation", not only criticised what he described as "a tendency in some African writing towards hankering backwards, trying to recreate an experience for its own sake, rather than examining the past given the present social needs," (Asein & Ashaolu: pp. 21-22) but also tasked African writers on the need to find, for the African culture, intervening roles in the quest of resolving Africa's social malaises. In *Wole Soyinka: An Appraisal* (1994), Nadine Gordimer's "Soyinka the Tiger" identifies the intricate nexus between Soyinka's interrogation of culture and the social maladies of his space by summarising, in two statements, 'Wole Soyinka's vision and life' as "a Tiger doesn't have to proclaim his nigritude and 'The man died'. She explains further:

The first (statement) made graphic, with the poetic wit and impatience of one who was himself a young interpreter, the concept of negritude that Jean-Paul Sartre, with a French philosopher's distancing analysis, defined as 'the ebb in a dialectic progression. The theoretical and practical assertion of white supremacy is the thesis. But this negative stage will not satisfy the Negroes who are using it and they are well aware of this (Gordimer, 1994, p. 36).

From his earliest plays, such as *The Swamp Dwellers* (1964), to his latest, *Alápatá Àpáta* (2011), one finds at least two significant dimensions. What has drawn most critics' attention is his use of the Yoruba mythologies as intervening tropes in his engagement with the social conditions of his postcolonial space. For instance, these avant-gardist dispositions are seen in his use of the Ogun typologies in avatars such as The Bulgarian exiles for Total Liberation in *A Play of Giants* (1984), Miseyi and Sanda in *The Beatification of Area Boy: A Lagosian Kaleidoscope* (1995), the masses in *King Baabu* (2002) and Alaba in *Alápatá Àpáta* (2011). The second traction, my concern in this paper, raises concerns about the survival of

the Yoruba culture in the hybridised postcolonial space. Soyinka laid a foundation that explained his Yoruba worldview in plays, such as *A Dance of the Forest* (1964) and *The Road* (1965). He continued in this direction but with a perspective that mirrors the crises triggered by contacts between his native Yoruba culture and the (colonial) Western culture in *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) and *The Lion and the Jewel* (1964). Soyinka's engagement with the cherished values of his Yoruba culture and its survival in the postcolonial space, however, returns with vigour in his latest play, *Alápatá Àpáta* more than twenty years after his first attempt with *Childe Internationale*. The interconnection between these two plays not only has to do with the fact that they are also Soyinka's plays that raise the question about the survival of his Yoruba culture, but that in seeking survival, Soyinka has deployed children characters more than he has done in his other plays with similar sensibility.

Childe Internationale presents the family of a semi-literate Nigerian politician, Kotun, who decided to send Titi, his only daughter, abroad for secondary school education. Unfortunately, Titi's return to Nigeria after just a term in school shows she had lost all the cultural values and moral decorum expected of a Yoruba child. The tension in the short play is triggered by the infelicities of Titi, who got initial support from her mother and the stiff resistance from Kotun, an avowed traditionalist. Notwithstanding the multi-dimensional attractions in *Alápatá Àpáta*, where Soyinka satirises "the idiosyncracies and excesses of ...contemporary Nigeria society: the corruption of power: opportunism and cultural alienation" (CI, p. i), we find children characters in prominent roles. The protagonist and Ogun's reincarnation in the play, Alaba, has decided to spend his retired life as a butcher on a rock bequeathed to him by patrimony. Nearing his first hundred days on the boulder doing nothing, Teacher, under whose tutelage Alaba is learning to be great at doing nothing, gave the task of making a commemorative post to his students. However, the students were not skilled in inscribing tonal markers on Yoruba words. Pressured by the need to complete the task, they consulted Alaba, whose guesses of where the tonal markers should be placed changed the status of his boulder from *Alápatá Àpáta* (the butcher that lives on a rock) to *Alápáta Àpáta*

(The King or Ruler of Àpáta town). Although the children were only accidental catalysts to the crises in this play that mimics the current political dispensation in Nigeria, Soyinka not only uses the interactions of the children with adults in the play to raise the alarm over the decadent posture of the Yoruba language but also endeavours to resuscitate those cultural nuances and values that are becoming extinct.

Until very recently, Soyinka never used Yoruba titles for his plays that dwell on the cultural ethos of his people. But the title index and the playwright's sub catalogue which designates *Alápatá Àpáta* as "A play for Yorubafonia, a class for xenophiles" (See cover page) stratifies the play within the cultural matrix. The critical targets in his excursion on cultural renaissance are well catalogued in "Letter to the Director" where Soyinka, relishing his long-time vision of producing plays for children, says,

I have always wanted to write a full-length play for youth, one that would provide as much fun and chaos... So, the play I was engaged in at the time, my long contemplated full-length play for schools – and any youthful company– took an embedded didactic turn. It occurred to me to turn it into a piece whose events turn absolutely on the correct transmission of Yoruba words... It can be argued that the play [*Alápatá Àpáta*] should have been written entirely in Yoruba. Indeed, that project is already in process, in collaboration, and will certainly appear before Yoruba audiences, perhaps even before the performance of this English version. (pp. vii - x)

Although the play has "youth" characters in 1st Student and 2nd Student, the educational status of the children in the play makes Soyinka's use of "youth" in this excerpt relative to children of primary and secondary school ages. This is understandable because the early ages are periods when social consciousness is being framed; with maturity into adulthood and consequent independence, pedagogies of culture become challenging to imbibe, if not impossible.

More than a decade after producing *Alápatá Àpáta*, it is not clear what has impeded the realisation of Soyinka's vision of producing his maiden full-blown play in his native language. However, while his audience and critics await the birth of this project, this paper examines Soyinka's vision of producing plays suitable for children in relation to his perennial dramatisation of themes of cultural renaissance. To validate this inquiry, therefore, the justification for this critical endeavour rests on the fact that despite the copious attention that critics have given to Soyinka's commitment to cultural tropes and themes, the nexus between his 'children play' and cultural themes has received very little attention. The postcolonial thrust of the study, therefore, naturally activates "an invitation to revisit the colonial past, to understand all its complexity and often surprising ambiguities the better, to cope with the enduring legacies of that colonial past in the perplexities of the postcolonial present and our uncertainties about the future" (Jeyifo, 2012, p. 8).

2. The Child Veil in Soyinka's Plays: An Overview

A cursory engagement with the best of critical works, or essays, on Wole Soyinka's works, such as Gerald Moore (1978), Derek Wright (1993) Adewale Maja-Pearce (1994), Mpalive-Hangson Msiska (1998), Biodun Jeyifo (2001 & 2004) and Duro Oni and Bisi Adigun (2019), shows that no nexus has been established between Soyinka's predilection for children and his discussions on cultural issues. However, Bernth Lindfors revealed the beginning of Soyinka's reflection on children in his works when he said,

...[the] first public performance" [of Soyinka] was "Keffi's Birthday Treat", a brief narrative broadcast on the "Children's Programme" of the Nigerian Broadcasting Service's National Programme and published in one of the earliest issues of the *Nigerian Radio Times* in July 1954...The story is a charming vignette of a young boy's attempt to treat himself to a visit to the University College Zoo in Ibadan on his tenth birthday. (Lindfors, 1982, p. 112)

Soyinka's commitment to children's literature fizzled out as he matured as a writer, as one can hardly find any serious engagement with children in his works. The manifestations of child characters in Soyinka's plays have been merely cosmetic or in their isolated appearances; they mostly strengthen his significant satirical dispositions. For instance, in *A Dance of the Forest* (1964), we see the motif of the half-spirit child, which he deployed to symbolise a pessimistic future for his country, which was just in its early years of independence. It was not long after this that his country was plunged into a civil war, which threatened its existence and unity. The motif of the spirit child, which we see in John Pepper Clark's "Abiku" (1967) and later more elaborately in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1992), is also presented in Soyinka's poem "Abiku" (1967). But Soyinka uses the spirit child here to assert the Yoruba metaphysics on the one hand and to demonstrate, on the other hand, his stoic resistance against the military leadership that clamped him in prison. Soyinka's protean use of children characters in his satiric plays continues in *King Baabu* where we have Biibabae, King Baabu's son; like his father, Biibabae objectifies devilry, crass opportunism, mediocrity, greed, lust, abuse of power and other negative representations. *The Beatification of Area Boy: A Lagosian Kaleidoscope* has nothing to do with the child, and the inclusion of 'boy' in the title index is tangible and cosmetic. Even though we have Boyco as a character in the play, the salutary invective discernible from the playwright's veiled use of 'Area Boy' lampoons the criminality, gangsterism, lawlessness and exploitative inclinations, crude abuse of power and blatant disregard for law and order that characterised the military regimes that were in charge in the Nigerian political space.

However, unlike these examples, Soyinka's *Childe Internationale* and *Alápatá Àpáta* remain his dramatic renditions where he has given attention to children in the context of cultural renaissance. Titi and Alvin reasonably assert the role of children in *Childe Internationale*, but in *Alápatá Àpáta* we have more children characters as students of primary or secondary schools. The centrality of children's role is also complimented by Alaba's memory, recall and interpretations of his childhood experiences, such as his failure as an apprentice Ifa priest and his

escapades as a pupil at the Queen Victoria Primary School that saw him break the school atlas.

3. Soyinka's "Children" and the Contours of Hybridised Spaces

Universally, one of the major consequences of contact is the fracturing and consequential percolation of cultures into "alien" existences. The symbolism of Alaba's breaking of the atlas relays this point vividly in *Alápatá Àpáta*. Not only this, Soyinka amplifies the natural and divine causes for inter-space relations through his drawing from the creation myth of Adam with emphasis on Adam's condition of loneliness or lonesomeness as the catalyst that warranted the creation of Eve:

PASTOR: Isolation, my friend, isolation, the keyword is –isolation. Secrecy. Up on a rock or deep in the forest, the point is –he's all by himself. Unreachable. Untouchable. Man is a social animal, not a creature of isolation. What did Adam say to God when he was the only being in paradise? (p. 7)

The crisis of cultural relations is, however, drawn in the contention between the native culture and the alien culture because the latter appears to be growing in influence while the host culture remains retarded, stagnated or asphyxiated as seen in Alaba's analogy of the bush fowl and the guinea fowl:

ALABA: My school days may have stopped too soon, but Queen Victoria made sure the school never stopped. Only a primary school in my time, now it has gone up to secondary. Before, long they will call it a university. Just give the bush fowl a little space to flap its wings and it boasts it can soar higher than the guinea fowl (p. 32)

Soyinka's *Childe Internationale* and Alápatá Àpáta exteriorise the impacts of contact on the Nigerian child. In *Childe Internationale*, we have only five characters: Kotun, a successful politician and his wife Titi, their daughter, and Alvin, the American diplomat's son, who is Titi's classmate and boyfriend. There is also Godwin, whose role as Houseboy shows that he is not a "boy" in the real meaning of the word, but an adult. Unlike the colonial experience that saw the introduction of the Western culture into the African space, there is a reversal of contact typology, which saw Kotun's wife travelling abroad for Secretarial Studies and Titi, for secondary school education. The return of both mother and daughter sparks crises as their new foreign orientations clash with that of Kotun, a die-hard traditionalist. Kotun is unadjusted to the Westernised (dis) orientation of his wife, which radically targets his eating habits and social life. Titi's holiday, after just a term in school, turns sour as Kotun discovers that his daughter has lost all sense of morality and decency, she no longer has any modicum of respect for him and for the tradition that he so much cherishes. Soyinka's showing of the negative turn that Titi's contact with other lands has taken, in her irascibilities, her loss of manners, etiquette and decorum, her uncouth expressions, arrogance and disrespect for her parent, are antithetical to the ways children are brought up in his Yoruba culture. To make matters worse, Titi's attitude of an untrained child has grown other poisonous tentacles at school in her odious disregard for scholarship and preference for ballerina training and in her disdain and prejudices for some subject teachers, such as Mrs Fussport, the disciplinarian, who teaches Geography at the school.

Arguably, this dimension of Mrs Fussport, which shows her as the lone voice in the commitment to discipline in that school, exhibits Soyinka's castigation of the permissiveness and unregulated freedom not tolerated in his Yoruba culture. The foremost concern for Soyinka is with sound education and morals. Still, we see the failure of these and their consequences in Titi because she becomes a negative turning point of character disorder and immorality, as seen in her illicit relationship with Alvin. Titi's introduction of Alvin to her Dad exposes this decadence:

TTTT: Yes, that's him. Dad, this is Alvin...
my ...er... my boy friend.

Alvin: Hey pop. Glad to make your acquaint-
tance. Your daughter tells us you're a
Big Shot in the government. Is that
true or she is just bragging.

POLITICIAN: And I hear your father is a Big Shit in
your embassy. And now get back to
him and tell him to get you some home
training and clean your anus for you (p. 19)

The excerpt exhibits the crisis of moral upbringing in the foreign school that Titi and Alvin attend, which is unlike a typical African home or school where freedom of children is guided, controlled or moderated by parents and adults, teachers and caregivers. In Titi, the catastrophe of unregulated freedom is that she remains confused, rudderless, a spoilt brat who does not actually know what she wants. This dialogue about the weather and the metaphysics of rain (un)making reveals more:

TTTT: Mummy, is it really true that we still
have primitives who can make rain
fall?

WIFE: Some people make that claim.

TTTT: But it's all superstition. I suppose there
are still superstitious natives about.
Why doesn't the government educate
them?

WIFE: It's a slow process. It takes time.

TTTT: An ambassador's son was asking me if
there are still witch doctors and
superstitious natives in my home town

WIFE: What did you answer him?

TTTT: I told him that must be in the interior.

POLITICIAN: Baba re, your father's father,
 that is the person you are calling a
 superstitious native. Because he is still
 alive and he is a great rainmaker. So
 you can go and tell that to your son of
 the ambassador (pp. 12-13)

Intriguingly, Titi claims she got all the information about “jujuman” and rainmaking from the Geography classes she rarely attends. However, the contradictions above are problematic because, despite Titi's profession as an atheist, she is still curious to know, for instance, whether it would rain or is possible to invoke rain. She also longs to meet a superstitious and primitive rainmaker who the government should disorient from his primitiveness through the same education that she cares less about. It is, therefore, not a surprise that at the end of the playlet, Titi's overwhelming negative actions have frustrated her over-protective and indulgent mother who joined her husband in the smacking that would recover her senses and nudge her into moral uprightness. In his idealising of virtue and satirising the consequences of education without character, Soyinka juxtaposes morality and immorality, the modern and the primitive, the expatriate and the home-grown pedagogies. Therefore, Kotun's house becomes a microcosm of the postcolonial space where the African cultural values in the hybridised space continue to struggle for survival.

The children in Alápatá Àpáta have a moral rectitude that surpasses those of Titi and Alvin. They promptly attend to their chores and responsibly carry out given tasks. They also respect their parents and adults and are quite focused and ambitious. Alaba's engagement with his son typifies the traditional relationship between children and parents in the Yoruba worldview. From the beginning of this play, we see in the set instruction that Boy, Alaba's son, is “just completing his morning chore of sweeping the house frontage with a traditional broom” (p. 2). He returns on stage later, dressed for school and carrying “Alaba's breakfast and a small gourd of palm wine” (p. 18). Then ensues this dialogue that shows cultural indoctrination:

ALABA: Are you still keeping the world in your
assembly hall? On that tall shelf?

BOY: Sah?

ALABA: The world you know, that round atlas map
of the world. The one queen Victoria gave to
the school at her coronation. Is it still in the
assembly hall

BOY: Oh, the globe sah. Yes we still have it.

ALABA: Ah! yes, the globe –that’s what we used to
call it. Have they straightened it yet? (pp. 18-19)

The consequence of the fractured atlas remotely informs Soyinka’s careful choices of children characters that reveal the hybrid formations of his milieu. Whereas Alvin’s dad is an expatriate who works in Nigeria, the children in *Alápatá Àpáta* have diverse cultural and religious indoctrinations as seen, for instance, in Painter, a Kanuri boy, whose artistry is likened to that of Picasso, a foremost Spanish painter of the 20th century.

Unlike Titi’s petulance and crass ignorance, the dialogue involving 1st Pupil, 2nd Pupil, and 3rd Pupil shows a high intelligence quotient. Like the adults, these children probe the rationale behind Alaba’s routine postures on the boulder. They are also quite ambitious, time-conscious and have a passion for excellence. The billboard task that Teacher gave to his students has been completed, but at the point of hoisting it, Painter and Senior Boy discover the need to fix accents. Confronted with the option of failure or lateness to school, they settle for Alaba’s guesses, which place the three accents on the wrong syllables to alter the intended meaning and intention of the signpost. Incidentally, a butcher (*Alápatá*), who lives in *Àpáta* hamlet (*Alápatá Àpáta*), turns to a chief or royal head (*Alápáta*) who adjudicates over (*Àpáta*) town (*Alápáta Àpáta*). The accidental change in status is unknown to Alaba, who is basking in the euphoria of his delusive retirement until it is revealed, through Trader, in this dialogue that shows the capacity for initiative and genius of the children:

FRIEND: His son, the one in overseas, must have brought his friends to do it for us.

GIRL: No. I keep telling you, auntie. Our own school did it. One of our young artists, and he's still in the junior class.

FRIEND: Na true? Not even a Lagos sign-writer?

GIRL: No, in fact, my own classmate. Teacher calls him Baby Picasso

TRADER: (Looking closely) But when did he become a Chief? (pp. 100-101)

In the troubles that ensue after the mistaken accents, the audience may expect Painter and Senior Boy to enter the fray. However, characteristically, Soyinka always insulates his children's characters from other overriding social issues and only makes them visibly prominent in scenes that relate with the cultural renaissance. This assertion can be exemplified by noting that Titi has no part in Kotun's political activities and Boy's mask, in the fierce contest for Alaba's boulder, only diffuses the tension by dislodging Daanielebo who came in cohort with Figure in Red and other intruders.

4. Soyinka's "Children" and Cultural Renaissance in *Childe Internationale* and *Alápatá Àpáta*

Many scholars who attempted to concretise their position with facts explain the factors that aid the dynamism of language. Lewis Nkosi, looking beyond the internal dynamics of language, for instance, sees the art as the impetus for the dynamism of language by contending that "art is crossing frontiers more rapidly than even before, [hence] each idiom [is] modifying the one with which it comes in contact" (Nkosi, 1981 p. ix). Apart from its admission that languages are constantly in flux, this statement reveals that languages always have to contend with the new forms introduced into them through any means of contact. However, Damazio, Mfuné-Mwanjakwa noted that critical contention could exist between the native

language and the new language introduced to an environment. He, therefore, cautions on the areas of ‘difference’ because they “are a site for potential conflict and need to be handled with sensitivity and care to prevent them from leading to the outbreak of actual conflict [in contact domains]” (Mfune-Mwanjakwa, 2022 p. 156).

To de-escalate this tension, Soyinka uses *Childe Internationale* and *Alápatá Àpáta* to conscientise the children on the diverse aspects of his cultural heritage that need revalidation. The critical statements in this regard rest on the mentality of the Yoruba about morality, mannerisms and sociology of existence. The playwright postulates on issues of diet, greeting, fashion, oral and environmental hygiene, the relationship between children and adults, and the allowance for polygamy in the Yoruba culture.

Beyond these, however, he showcases more complex autochthonous designs to assert his lure for the renaissance of cultural values. Soyinka gives accreditation to the mystical and the mythical in his projection of the capacities and importance of gods in the Yoruba milieu by pointing at the invincibility and feriness of Esu and the wisdom of Ifa in Alápatá Àpáta. It is gratifying that these figures all rally around the personality of Alaba, the avatar of Ogun, Soyinka’s muse, in the play. Like Ogun, who resides on the boulder in Iree, Alaba has a boulder in Àpáta town as his habitation. His profession as a butcher also coincides with Ogun’s predilection for carnage and blood, while his love for palm wine coincides with Ogun’s Dionysian act. Ogun was made king by the Iree people after helping them to defeat their enemies, the same way Alaba is made king on account of his “exploits,” which successfully puncture the aggressions of General and Daanielebo, who launched different onslaughts to take over his boulder. It is understandable that Alaba’s “exploits” are much appreciated by the *Amuletira*, the traditional head of the domain, who sees General and Daanielebo as representatives of the system that has eroded the influence of the traditional institution over time.

Importantly, Soyinka's mythic project in *Alápatá Àpáta* continues to evolve through the diverse interpretations that the children (and adult characters) give to Alaba's occupation of the boulder:

1st PUPIL: That's still no reason to stone someone
sleeping peacefully.

3rd PUPIL: I am not tangling with him. My father is
a babalawo –he knows about these things, and
he says the man is Esu proper

2nd PUPIL: And our neighbour is a moslem aafa
who also knows him. He's spoken to him. In
fact, he's been begging him not to retire just yet,
because Ramadan is just around the corner...
that's when the butcher's leftovers are needed,
for Zakat. (pp. 53-4)

This dialogue recognises the presence of the 'imported' religions, such as Christianity and Islam, which have grown votaries in the space. However, the playwright also stirs the consciousness of the children to the existence of godheads in his Yoruba culture, such as Orunmila (the Yoruba divination god, whose protégé is the Babalawo), Esu and Ogun. His vent for cultural renaissance is further enshrined in his genius of mythmaking and myth-breaking manifested in the children's reappraisal and polarised opinions on the information they had about Alaba's prowess and recess on the rock.

Closely associated with this mythical ambience is an exhibition of the mystical and the metaphysics of existence from the perspective of the Yoruba worldview. We have seen the subtle mention of "rainmaking", "*juju*" and "*jujuman*", and the aversion of Kotun to the primitive label given to them by Titi in *Childe Intentionale*. Before *Childe Intentionale* and *Alápatá Àpáta*, Wole Soyinka, in *Myth Literature* and the *African World*, had theorised on the cosmogony of Yoruba world when he postulated that there are three worlds – the worlds of the unborn, the living, the ancestors and the "fourth stage". In his words, "The world of the unborn in the Yoruba worldview is as evidently older than the world of the living as the world

of the living is older than the ancestor world” (Soyinka, 1992, p. 10). Furthering on the complex relationship between those worlds and ..., he explains that the gulf of the chthonic realm does not preclude relationship, instead, it “is what must constantly be diminished (or rendered less threateningly remote) by sacrifices, ritual ceremonies of appeasement to the cosmic powers which lie guardian to the gulf” (Soyinka, 1992 p. 31). In *Alápatá Àpáta*, Soyinka brings these esoteric moorings into reality in the counselling session with Dele, the Lagos man accused of marital infidelity:

ALABA: You see? You see? You don't see anything
 The eyes are not meant to see forwards but
 backwards. Backwards is where our ancestors
 live, looking over our shoulders at how we, the
 living, conduct our lives... (125).

The belief of the Yoruba that spiritual forces can be mobilised to intervene on issues of physical existences is further asserted in *Alápatá Àpáta*. Daanielebo arrives at the boulder with Figure in Red and after his initial hide and seek, which brought no result, follows his resort to the metaphysical:

Daanielebo's strip-tease continues –Cap, agbada,
 buba, shoes, trousers, underpants, and now even
 the underpants are coming off, revealing a full
 armoury of grenades, gas canisters, pistols and
 a 'bante' made of fresh leaves, covering the front
 only, exposing bare buttocks. Amulets sheathed
 knives encase his arms from wrists to shoulder.
 A 'juju' necklace, leg charms... He stands
 revealed, a human cornucopia of medicine gourds,
 phials, leaf wrap, silver cross...(p. 141)

This metamorphosis then leads to the summoning of esoteric forces to dislodge Alaba from his patrimony:

DAANIELEBO: ...it is
 what we tell the garden egg that eggs in into the

soup- pot, it is what fire says to the hearth to
 which the hearth hearkens, the fire consumes
 the liar, water must down the plotter, let the
 power Alápatá has buried in this rock reveal
 itself, let it flow into this body and spirit of the
 true Master... I am the true Master

FIGURE IN RED: What is hidden in the farm belongs
 to the farmer, what is hidden in the home
 belongs to the homeowner, let what is hidden
 in this rock sweep off all usurpers (pp. 143- 144)

Soyinka's co-joining of Yoruba and Judeo- Christian spiritualities through Daanielebo's incantatory invocation syncretises the space of religion. This opens the space of hybridities that now transcend physical to mundane existences.

The hybridised texture in the excerpt cited above, which is conscripted in the synthesis of spiritualities, becomes more visible in the playwright's use of the Yoruba language in dialogue and in some songs rendered by Alaba. Soyinka's co-mingling of language codes shows both negative and positive tendencies. The latter tendency, in pidgin form, is reflected in the grafting of the English language into the Yoruba language in: "...*Guru morin sab*", "*Alápatá tí' nje buredí, awo nomo re lo nje ti o mo*" (p. 61), and in "*Vikitoria, Vikitoria, aiye re la wan je. O so/ gbogbo eru d'omo N'ile enia dudu*" (p. 74). The dynamism of language is enacted in "Good morning sir" rendered as "*Guru morin sab*," "bread" as "*buredí*" (p. 61) and Queen 'Victoria' turns to *Vikitoria* (p. 74), respectively. However, Soyinka points out the dangers that threaten the Yoruba language in manifestations which distort or supplant Yoruba words in the attempt to make them English. For instance, we have Titi, bastardised as Titty (p. 1) and "Tits" (p. 19), "Gerri" (p. 5) for "Gari" and "deudeu" (p. 14) for "dodo" in *Childe Internationale*. However, in *Alápatá Àpáta*, the concern is about pronunciation and correct use of the Yoruba language. Since the Yoruba language is a tonal language, the playwright emphasises the mastery of accents by presenting situations that show the importance of the mastery of accents to the Yoruba language. In making the advocacy for the need to pay attention to the use

of the language, therefore, there are examples with Senior Boy and Boy who have no idea at all of the tonal markers in the Yoruba language and Girl who needed to be prodded to read the inscription on Alaba's anniversary signpost correctly.

Alaba's use of proverbs, mostly in his interactions with the children, showcases the advocacy for using the Yoruba language. The playwright used proverbs to teach morals and virtue and indoctrinate the children into the social philosophies of the Yoruba life. In response to his son trying to understand the reason why he dropped out of school, Alaba says, "*Won ni, amokun, eru ori/ e wo. O ni -ab, a t' Isale ni*" (p. 20), (meaning, "the solution to a complex problem begins at its foundation"). Similarly, in his exchanges with Senior Boy and Painter, Alaba teaches the virtue of unity and cooperation by saying a proverb in part, "*Owo ni n we wo*" (p. 78), (meaning that both hands are made clean when they rub against each other). Also moralising on diligence, Alaba utters a relevant proverb: "*Bise o pe ni a o ki n pese*" (p. 80). (Literally rendered, "If work doesn't delay us, we don't delay work). While exalting the infallibility of wisdom in his teaching that wisdom cannot be monopolised, Alaba, after his error of accent misplacement, says: "*Owo omode o/ to pepe, t'agbalagba o wo kereqbe*" (The child's/ hand cannot reach the lintel, but neither can/ the elder's enter the neck of the gourd) (p. 110). Similarly, in the prelude to his judgment in the case of marital infidelity, Alaba also proverbially reiterates this principle of complementarity by stating that "The youth may boast a rich/ wardrobe, but he cannot match the elder for/ the tattered robes of experience" (p. 118).

Soyinka's traditional system places a very high premium on names. Names given to children not only have parental or ancestral origins, children also inherit the panegyrics or totems of forbearers in their family lineages. Alaba's names in Alápatá Àpáta relate to his ancestry and parenthood as he is referred to as "son of Alonge". There is a popular maxim in Soyinka's Yoruba language that goes thus: "*enu nbe l'oko 'Longe, 'Longe fun ra e enu*" (meaning that "there is peril in the farm of 'Longe, 'Longe, a refraction of "Alonge", himself is perilous). On the surface, this name appears personal to Alaba. More than this, however, the name is a veiled

description of the dangerous condition of Soyinka's country, which is being run aground by successive incompetent leaders. The totemic expression, "Alápatá ti n f'eran dara" (p. 171) (the butcher that uses assorted meats in style delicacies) amplifies the exploits of Alaba as a successful butcher, but this changes to "Alápatá ti n f'eran da 'ran" (the butcher whose skills in making meat delicacies has attracted problems") (p. 171), to reflect the misfortune of his "reasonable offences". The sentence pronounced as consequence of his "reasonable offences" reverts to positive again as Oluwo pours encomiums on Alaba while, in withdrawing the treason sentence, he likens him to a man of valor endowed with strength of six men. The panegyric reads: "Okunrin mefa! / Abe 'gun l'ọju lai y'oda. Eku werewere ti nre gi labe/ ebiti lai gbo 'gbe. Jagunlabi" (p. 181).

Alaba's treason trial reveals Soyinka's imagination for a new traditional system in the hybridised milieu. The observable point is that Alaba reverences the traditional institution more than the western leadership system represented by Daanielebo and General. In the dialogue that ensues, after the court berthed by Alaba's boulder, we read:

ALABA: That his majesty would move
 his court into my humble neighbourhood? On
 behalf of all villages radiating from Orita Mefa
 where I now live in quiet retirement, let me just
 say how honoured...

OTUN: Shut your mouth!

OSI: Who asked you to speak?

OTUN: As if he is not in enough trouble already! (pp. 157- 9)

Unlike Investor, Prospector, General and Daanielebo, who are only interested in taking over Alaba's boulder to serve a personal interest, the royal court is concerned about cultural sanity in the physical and mundane existences. Hence, after taking into cognisance the antecedents of Alaba's ancestry and his successful career as a butcher, which they countenanced had improved the visibility of the town, Oluwo reads a 'lenient sentence' that shows a catalogue of propitiatory items:

OLUWO: Be glad you have not been banished from the royal domain. Instead of that life sentence, you will pay a fine, to be used for the cleansing rites of your abomination. The fine is as follows: one white ram, one black sheep, six turkeys, six cockerels and six fowl –not live, but killed and dressed as you were accustomed to before your –if I may say so –sudden suspicious, disrespectful and extremely inconsiderate retirement, bordering on subversion. Plus six kegs of palm oil, six kegs of melon- seed oil, and six bags of kola- nuts. Needless to add, you shall accompany all the foregoing with sixty-six skewers of prime suya in your best tradition. All to be delivered within eight days from now

ALABA: (Again prostrates himself) I prostrate before your royal leniency. (pp. 168-9)

The play winds down with Alaba's preparation to vacate the boulder, but the court returns through its emissary to quash the treason sentence and canonise Alaba as the traditional head of the new Àpáta domain. With Alaba in charge, space is created for a 'new traditional order' that is expected to co-exist with the vagaries of other realities, religions and social order, which had permeated the existence of the Yoruba culture and its institutions.

5. Conclusion

This paper has engaged *Childe Internationale* and *Alápatá Àpáta*, Wole Soyinka's plays that give prominence to the theme of cultural renaissance in relation to the Yoruba child. Although Soyinka set out to write these plays for children, not much success is achieved especially in *Alápatá Àpáta*, because of the plethora of other complex social issues that inundate the play. Indeed, the playwright's project of cultural renaissance is plausible as he can showcase the

aspects of his culture and relate them to children who are the future of his nation and tradition. The resolution of the crisis in *Childe Internationale*, which saw the return of Titi to reason and the making of Alaba as the traditional head in Alápatá Àpáta, has far-reaching implications. While the former speaks to the victory of Yoruba's moral culture, the latter speaks of the resuscitation of Yoruba's traditional values on the verge of extinction. The playwright is not seeking a reversion to the old order before colonialism but proposes mutual understanding, co-existence, and coalescence of all cultural values in the postcolonial space. Even though the optimism of success of the new order presented by the playwright is doubtful on account of the Herculean task before Alaba to manage the intricacies of the new space, the prospect of success is high if Alaba can fully harness the potential in his camaraderie with Teacher, the understanding between him, Pastor and (Islamic) Cleric, and his "friendship" with the Governor, Daanielebo.

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