

LEADERSHIP AND CHANGING COMMUNAL VALUES IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *KONGI'S HARVEST*

Tekena Gasper Mark
&
Remigius Anayochi Anyanwu
University of Port Harcourt

Abstract

*It is a statement of fact that a nation without good and visionary leaders can hardly enjoy peace and social stability. More importantly, leaders are regarded as the custodians of customs and traditions of the people. However, problems are bound to occur when leaders fail in the duty of leading their followers to their established goals. Besides, most Nigerian leaders display an unreserved disrespect for their own culture and tradition, preferring the Western culture to their own because they lack the necessary cultural foundations to effectively lead the people. Consequently, African traditional theatre is continuously declining in terms of patronage due to the effects of modernism and neocolonialism. This transition into modern cultures instead of adapting the modern culture to suit their needs and aspirations results in change traditional societies. This study, therefore, examines how changing communal values, the cause of modern conflict, have affected African traditional theatre and African traditional societies. In examining the concept of leadership and the effects of changing communal values on African traditional theatre, the study undertakes a content analysis of Wole Soyinka's **Kongi's Harvest** and concludes that conflict would be largely abated if African cultures adapt, rather than adopt, received foreign cultures to suit local needs.*

Introduction

This study examines how changing communal values, the cause of modern conflict, has affected African traditional theatre and African traditional societies using Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* as its primary text for analysis. For the purpose of clarity, it is necessary to define some key terms, as they would be used in this study. These terms are: communal values, conflict, African traditional theatre, society, social change, and leadership.

Communal Values: This refers to values derived from the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective

experience or memory (english-heritage.org, par.1). This means that communal values are the core ideals tied to the culture of a group of people in a particular place and at a particular time; that they believe in, and which identifies them as distinct from other communities or groups.

Conflict: Conflict is defined as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interest or concerns (www.ohrd.wisc.edu, par. 1). It is some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unaccepted to one or more members of the group or another group.

African Traditional Theatre: African traditional theatre entails those forms of entertainments and theatrical nuances that were in existence before the colonization of Africans by the Europeans. African traditional theatre is an expression of the people, institutions and experiences of the African communal society (Krama 3). Traditional or cultural festivals are also part and parcel of African traditional theatre.

Society: Society refers to a collection of people at a particular place and at a particular time. It is seen as people in general, living together in organized communities with shared laws, traditions and values.

Social Change: This refers to the alteration in patterns of culture, social structure and social behaviour over time. It refers to the modifications that occur within social institutions, in social attitudes, beliefs, values and patterns of relationship and behaviour (Igbo 24).

Leadership: This refers to the act of guiding or directing a group of people towards the realization of established goals and objectives. It can also be conceived as a process of social influence in which a person can win the aid and support of a group of people, serving as their representative and head.

Social Change and Conflict and their Effects on African Traditional Theatre and African Traditional Societies

Social change has been described as the alteration in patterns of culture, social structure and social behaviour of a people over time, which may be gradual or quick (Igbo 24). Conflict is therefore created when societies transit from one culture to another. This conflict arises largely from the lacuna created as a result of the loss in the shared values of groups in the course of their

transition. Hence, when traditional societies transit into modern societies or embrace popular culture, the inability of the transiting groups to live up to the dictates of the modern culture leads to conflict.

Since the advent of the Europeans to Africa, African traditional theatre and African traditional societies greatly suffered a major setback in terms of development. In this vein, Krama observes that the structures of modern society locate the Western culture as the “Super structure”, and the only frame of reference, and that it is the carrier of human excellence and civilization (76). Consequently, this places a limitation on the African culture and traditional theatre; and the resultant effect is seen in the attitude of most African scholars and urban dwellers who loathe African theatre or regard it as unacceptable (Krama 77). Hence, most African scholars would prefer to engage in researches aimed at improving the subculture (new culture) than on those geared towards developing African theatre or African traditional societies. This situation was further worsened by the coming of the Christian religion, which condemned and still condemns African theatre as barbaric and the Islamic religion, which frowns at any form of imitation, which is the base of African theatre.

African cultures thrive on communal existence unlike the modern culture that places more emphasis on the individual than on the community. Thus, an anomaly is created when Africans embrace the modern culture at the expense of their own traditional culture. A major cause of the changes in the value system of Africans comes from outsourcing; a tendency to prefer foreign-made goods and values over that of your home country. A typical example is seen in the consumption attitude of most Nigerians, who place more value on foreign-made goods, while denigrating locally made goods. African/Nigerian institutions and industries are involved in the production of social imageries that did not develop from their traditional culture, hence Western thought pattern and imageries are imposed on Nigerians, and since these were not generated from the people, conflict is bound to be created. Nigerians neglect the infrastructure (the culture of origin) and build on the super-culture (modern/foreign culture). Consequently, the indigenous culture which contains African ethnic values is abandoned, and this creates a battle between the subculture and the traditional culture.

Social change, which encompasses the noticeable differences, gradual or rapid alterations in the social processes or life of a people due to prevailing social circumstance, is thus induced by the presence and the threat of foreign culture, which destroys African core values, which form the foundation of African traditional society. This therefore endangers the development of

African traditional theatre. Hence, this new socialization produces personality crisis in the African/ Nigerian and a loss of his/her original identity because he/she now has two cultures to grapple with: the traditional culture and the modern culture. Therefore, modern conflict is created as a result of the changing communal values (African core values), which is orchestrated by the adoption of a foreign culture; and this is inimical to the growth and development of both African traditional theatre and African traditional societies.

This same problem is the cause of the leadership crisis facing modern African societies, as most African leaders adopt ideas that are alien to the people they are leading. Prominent among the problems facing Nigeria today as a nation is the lack of good leaders who have the interest of Nigerians at heart. These leaders find their way into political offices through political manoeuvres and with the help of political godfathers, whose instructions they obey to the letter as soon as they assume office. Consequently, since these leaders were not chosen by the people through their votes, it is not out of place for them to make decisions and laws that do not capture the needs and aspirations of those they are leading.

Furthermore, in as much as every society has the right to retain those cultural practices or modes of behaviour that agree with their perception and aspirations, the social imageries produced must secularize the traditional thought patterns of Africans if African/Nigerian theatre must survive. For Karl Marx, class struggle is the basis for social change, and every society has the right to recreate those experiences that are consistent with their beliefs and aspirations. For this conflict to be resolved, rather than 'adopt' the modern culture, Africans/ Nigerians must 'adapt' the modern culture to suit their own needs and aspirations. This will in turn create room for the growth and development of African traditional theatre and African traditional societies (modern African theatre and modern African societies).

To understand the differences between the traditional and the modern society, it is important to observe the views of some key theoreticians. Auguste Comte identified three distinct and progressive stages of the intellectual development of societies: the fictive theological stage- which is characterized by man's search to understand and explain his physical environment, the Metaphysical stage- when man exercised his mind and engaged in reasoning and conscious thought, and the Positive stage- which corresponds to the industrial society (modern society); marked by the adoption of positive thinking (Igbo 12-13).

For Emile Durkheim, the modern society is characterized by a complex division of labour with far much greater opportunity for individual development. It is characterized by organic solidarity (based on the dissimilarities between individuals and these dissimilarities is the basis for inter-dependence and it is upon this dependence that the division of labour rests). In this society (complex society), relationship between individuals is determined by the goods and services which they require from each other (qtd. in Igbo 16). In the same vein, Herbert Spencer divides societies into two main types: “Militant” and “Industrial” societies. Militant societies are characterized by external and internal coercion while the Industrial society is based on contractual relations. Industrial societies are characterized by voluntary cooperation rather than forced labour, individual initiative, constitutional protection of individual human rights, self-control and relative permanence of peace. In militant societies, social positions are inherited unlike in industrial societies (which are open systems), where social status or ranks can be achieved by anyone who works hard irrespective of parental background (qtd. in Igbo 22).

For Karl Marx, society evolved through several stages: the first stage was characterized by the ownership of properties by whole tribes or communities (communal ownership of property), in the second stage of evolution, private property emerged with the institution of social classes: the class of free citizens and the class of slaves. The third stage was the feudal stage. The feudal society was based on a complicated tenure system, in which the nobility owned the land, and the serfs (subjects) worked on the land for the feudal lords. The fourth stage was the rise of modern capitalism. The modern capitalist society is based on private ownership of the means of production (capital) (qtd. in Igbo 23-24). Marx believes that social change is created by the struggle between two major classes: the class that owns the land and means of production (the bourgeois) and those who actually produce (the proletariats). These two are in perpetual opposition. Igbo observes that the emergence of modern capitalistic society can be accounted for by economic factors and class conflict (24).

From the foregoing, the modern society is a complex one, driven by capitalism and contractual relationship between individuals unlike the traditional society, which is communal in nature and characterized by mechanical solidarity. These two societies are different, and so the values that obtain in one might not work for the other. It is therefore not possible that European values will work in environments that are completely alien to them (environments where these values were not produced). This thus creates a

problem and is the cause of conflict in modern societies. Modern conflict is therefore orchestrated by the inability of transiting (traditional) societies to effectively adapt to the social changes brought about by the alterations of their traditional values and an adoption of the values of a foreign, popular or mass culture.

Synopsis of *Kongi's Harvest*

The play is a satire on the rulers of a fictitious kingdom of Isma, somewhere in Africa, during the preparation for celebrations and aftermath of a New Yam festival. The ruler of Isma, Kongi is a repressive, ambitious autocrat, who is assisted by a ubiquitous Organizing Secretary. Kongi, advised by a fraternity of largely sycophantic Aweris and enthusiastically supported by a brutal carpenter's Brigade, puts some of his most powerful opponents including Oba Danlola, in detention and wants to usurp Danlola's position. He wants to receive the New Yam from the Oba's hand and present himself to the people as their protector and spiritual leader. He also wants Oba Danlola to acknowledge his supremacy. This position is challenged by his ex-mistress Segi, her female supporters and by Daodu, Danlola's nephew; a leader of a successful farming cooperative. Danlola is unwilling to give up his religious functions to Kongi but Segi and Daodu want Danlola to pretend to cooperate so as to draw Kongi to the public celebration, where they have planned to assassinate Kongi. However, their assassination attempt fails and Segi's father is killed instead. Kongi is shocked after learning about the conspiracy and chases away Daodu and Segi.

Leadership, Changing Communal Values and its Effects on African Traditional Theatre in Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*

In Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*, we find Kongi resolved to modernize the state of Isma and this means a sharp break from their (African) traditional values to that of the new regime (military dictatorship). Kongi imprisons Oba Danlola and dissolves the old Aweri council of elders, which acts as an advisory body to Oba Danlola. In Oba Danlola's words:

This is the last our feet shall touch together
We thought the tune obeyed us to the soul
But the drums are newly shaped and stiff arms stain... (10).

Kongi depends on the newly formed Aweri Fraternity as his factory of wisdom, as they debate on the idea of building a new image. We, however, notice that the fraternity is more interested in high sounding words and

making verbose statements than in performing their duty. The new regime depends for its continuance on its own propaganda ‘the government loudspeaker’, for which the Aweri Fraternity plays a key role, as a word-factory.

The play satirizes modern African dictators who suffer from megalomania; this is seen in the members of the Reformed Aweri, who propose that they be recognized as Magi, as this would automatically lead to Kongi’s elevation to the status of “God”. Kongi equates himself with Christ and wants his name in the forthcoming harvest festival to mark the beginning of a new calendar, and with everything else taking from it. Kongi’s image boosting is aimed at impressing the outside world. He thus creates an attractive picture, which hides his monstrous personality. We see him taking a variety of postures so as to get a good picture in the international community. Kongi represents a modern paranoid dictator, who maintains total control of all instruments of coercion. These instruments of coercion are well established and are represented in the Carpenter Brigade and in the Superintendent.

Kongi has the power but lacks the spirituality, which the office of the Oba holds and with Danlola’s surrender of the New Yam, continuity would have been maintained between the modern regime and the traditional predecessor. Kongi represents a decisive break with the past. This ascension spells doom for tradition itself. His intentions to replace the old superstitious festival by a state ceremony based on the principle of ‘Enlightened Ritualism’ means the destruction of what is truly African.

The play demonstrates the idea that conflict is bound to occur when societies (traditional) evolve into modern states (complex societies). Kongi decides to install a new government instead of working with the Oba, and this would have created the room to fully accommodate and maintain the traditional values of the people in the new regime. He covets the spiritual authority of the Oba, and this shows the powers traditional rulers have even in modern states. Kongi’s failure to achieve his goal buttresses the fact that a social change that does not meet with the perceptions and aspirations of the people is bound to fail. This is the problem with Nigeria. Nigeria has made a sharp break with tradition, embracing popular culture, and like *Kongi’s Harvest*, what we see is a failed New Yam celebration. Nigeria claims to be operating a democratic and federal system of Government, yet when stakeholders make decisions, it is for the interest of their ethnicity.

Kongi’s Harvest deals with African politics. It exposes the dictatorial tendencies of African political rulers, who in a bid to satisfy their selfish crave for power; employ every means possible to get this power and fulfill their

selfish desires, without giving a listening ear to the people. African dictators imitate other European states and thus want to replicate this in Africa, without giving a thought to the fact that a social product that is not produced in Africa cannot work or be successful as it is in Europe. Kongi destroys the established traditional authority, and installs his own version, worse than its predecessor. Furthermore, the excessive lust for power by African leaders is made clear by the Oba's refusal to relinquish his spiritual authority and by Kongi's plot to usurp the Oba's spiritual authority so as to make him the supreme leader of the state. This kind of cruel paranoiac black dictatorship whose origin can be traced to the Western world, is apparently new to the African experience, and endangers both African traditional theatre which is deeply rooted in the African tradition, as well as inimical to the growth and development of African traditional societies.

In an article titled "Kongi's Harvest of Intrigue and Hate" by Arthur Edgar E. Smith, it is observed that the clash between the modern and the traditional forces in an emergent modern African society is enacted between Oba (the traditional head) and the President, Kongi (the modernist and constitutional head), who is in himself a dictator (*Nathanielturner.com* par. 1-2). Kongi's modern dictatorship aims at absorbing the traditional system within itself in order to destroy it officially as a potential threat as well as capture its legitimacy, dignity, appeal and power. On this, Smith notes that clash manifests from the very start in the hemlock section of the play with the traditional forces being stifled by the propaganda and the paraphernalia accompanying Kongi's dictatorship. As suggested by the roll of drums which signifies the struggling between the two forces for supremacy (*Nathanielturner.com* par. 2). This is typical when societies evolve from simple to complex forms. Consequently, the mass culture (new regime) suppresses other cultures, and destroys alternatives so as to fully establish its superiority. This is the same problem challenging both African traditional theatre and African traditional societies. In *Kongi's Harvest*, the traditional forces are being repressed by Kongi's propaganda and instruments of coercion. Kongi seems to be winning the day as he has confined the Oba and his conclave of Elders to rot in prison, thereby confining the forces of tradition, and since the Oba cannot deal with Kongi directly, he is forced to battle with a junior representative, the Superintendent. Although Oba Danlola has been put behind bars and denied of his power to rule, he still retains mystical powers, dignity and symbolic values, which Kongi and his cohorts will sacrifice anything to get.

According to Smith, their complaints about the royal canopy taking too much silk and that the first of the new yams melted first in the Oba's mouth, is a sign of the greedy nature of political leaders, who are determined to capture many roles and titles, all with the aim of increasing their popularity and harmony (*Nathanielturner.com* par. 4). As common with most Nigerian intellectuals and leaders, Kongi has absorbed the wrong notion of the superiority of Western values and civilization over African traditional values, and so he replaces the traditional institutions with an absurd version of what he thinks is a modern version of society, without recourse to the effects this would have on the entire society. Kongi seeks to destroy the traditional institutions but also falls back to its legitimacy as he wishes to use this to win the minds of the people, and so he demands that Oba Danlola presents him with the New Yam, thereby presenting him as the protector and spiritual leader of the people.

As common with military regimes, imprisonment and death are the only means through which Kongi maintains control over his newfound State of Isma. As characteristic of Government institutions, State bodies work to project their leader to the status of God head. Smith notes that the Organizing Secretary is completely at home in operating in the code of corruption. At first he appears dutiful and upright, later he is accused by one of the Aweris of collecting bribe; as he gives detainees under his charge comfort, in exchange for money, as well as collects huge bribes from visitors to the president, and makes much financial gain by his organization of the harvest. He speaks thus: "...Just how much do you think I will make for myself from organizing the Harvest anyway. I may as well hand you my entire profits" (Soyinka 29). To further buttress this, as part of the norm, the first Aweri also demands for his own share before he discloses his solution to him.

More so, Nwadiolor, in an article entitled "The Christian Church and the Quest for Cultural Revival in Nigeria", observes that the cultural heritage of the Nigerian peoples is decaying, and that it is doubtful whether much of the good values in the Nigerian cultural heritage can be revitalized. He observes the reasons for this cultural decay as slavery and slave trade, colonialism and imperialism, illiteracy, inferiority complex (7). According to Nwadiolor, just at the time the slave trade was dying and the Nigerian man once more had an opportunity of reconstructing his bearing, Western imperialism came to further shatter the fledging value systems, thereby further distorting the cultural profile of Nigerians. Nwadiolor notes that while leading in the fight against white colonialism, the Nigerian man still identifies himself most intimately with the culture of the Whiteman he is fighting, and this is

evident in the clothing style, eating habits, mediocre, mode of worship, language as well as the educational system of Nigerians (7).

Change Management and the Survival of African Traditional Theatre

Using the case of Nigeria, the need to propagate, promote and preserve arts and culture led to the establishment of various Councils of Arts and Culture in Nigeria. These councils were established with the following objectives: to promote and foster the appreciation, revival and development of the arts and culture of the nation; to plan and coordinate cultural activities and foster the development of literary, visual and the performing arts nationwide; to organize and promote exhibition in visual, performing and literary arts as determined from time to time by the Federal Government; to produce documentary films on the culture of the various ethnic groups for use in Nigeria and for export; to organize and conduct lectures or demonstration workshops to provide instruction in the arts; to cooperate with any other bodies or persons engaged in, or connected with the arts in the state or any part of Nigeria; to publish or sponsor, or cause to be sponsored the publication of any literature, periodicals and newspaper or broadcast materials in relation to the arts and to promote the development of music, traditional dance, drama, opera, cinema, films, photography, folklore, oral tradition, poetry, literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, town planning, general arts, woodwork, embroidery, weaving and similar arts (*National Council 3*).

For the realization of these objectives, the state governments have spent a huge amount of money on the management of these outfits. Areas of expenditure include; staffing, staff salaries, cultural projects and productions. From the outset, the Federal Government of Nigeria embarked upon the programme of full sustenance, support and financing of the arts. This resulted in the rapid promotion of the Nigerian Arts. According to Awodiya:

From 1960 to 1990, there was unprecedented proliferation of museums, galleries, arts councils, theatres and arts institutions, the size of their audiences and the level of funding. Many state arts councils displayed their newfound affluence in more elaborate arts festivals, large management staff and new performance facilities with more seats to fill. (19)

This shows that from the onset, the government has been really committed to the course of arts and culture in Nigeria. Audience patronage contributed irrespective of the fact that theatre or arts patronage culture of our people

(Nigeria) was just evolving. In spite of the great attention given to these councils, there have been increased public complaints, protesting the non-performance of these councils. In the last few years, the growth of these arts councils has been slow. Most of them have cut down on most of the programmes for which they were known, while some now live on past glories. On the part of the councils, there have been excuses of poor staffing or leadership, poor funding, and poor patronage for the Arts. The influence of the electronic media provided another strong complaint. The life styles of the youths, who form the potential audience, are changing as they are always presented with foreign cultures via videos, films, television and the social media.

The afore mentioned issues form the challenges which artists and practitioners encounter due to the change in the society as well as the change in the leadership which ultimately affect the promotion and or survival of African traditional or indigenous theatre and performance. The effects of social change, as illustrated in *Kongi's Harvest* is still very prevalent in today's world of arts and culture and leadership. Yet, adapting to such changes and modernism speaks volumes regarding the management of the indigenous arts and culture. Therefore, it is not out of place to emphasize on the fact that cultural heritage is widely recognized as most important in defining the national and ethnic life of a people. As a people who inherited rich cultural legacy from time immemorial, the issue of arts and culture, which of course forms the basis of a people's origin and existence, has remained vital in Nigeria. Hence, every ethnic group in Nigeria has got some aspects of arts and culture to promote and preserve (Basden 23).

The changes that militate against the survival of African traditional theatre have been present since the coming of the colonial masters who never saw anything good in African culture, hence the obnoxious and contemptuous manner with which the colonial masters treated African arts and culture. The Whiteman who never introduced the knowledge of the existence of the Almighty God to the African, on arrival to the African soil behaved as if his Christian religion was superior to the African Traditional religion. Unfortunately, the African accepted and aided him in suppressing the African religion, which is an integral part of the African life. For instance, the Whiteman condemned and abolished African indigenous funeral rites, especially, for the noble and aged which is full of the various elements of drama and theatre, such as music, dance, chants, language spectacle etc. Yet, he feels obliged to observe annually the memorial of his own men and women of nobility whom he refers to as saints, martyrs, priests, religious, virgins,

confessors etc. It is really disheartening that the African accepted such a change which touched on his spiritual life without much ado. However, there is no gainsaying that prior to the coming of the Whiteman, Africans were rich in the knowledge of the existence of the Almighty God whom they already worshipped and had various names for him in their various languages. For instance, the Igbo would call him “Chukwu” which means Almighty God, “Chineke” meaning God the creator, etc., while the Yoruba call him “Olodunmare” meaning Almighty God, “Oba aye” meaning king of the universe, etc. This change due to modernism and leadership trend was also evident in some of the festivals of the indigenous African man. For instance, Nwachukwu recounts how an expatriate priest (Rev. Fr.) of a Roman Catholic Church changed the modalities of the traditional New Yam festival to suit his own religion, which is alien to Africa. According to him, the famous New Yam Festival in Mbaise, Nigeria was known as the Ahianjoku festival. In his words:

The Ahianjoku festival is as old as the history of Igbo land. Right from the origin of the Igbos, it has been one of the highest traditional religious festival (sic) of the land. It is associated with the god of farming or agriculture. ‘Ahiajoku’ the protector of the farm, farm crops and the farmer. He makes crops to germinate and makes the land to be fertile, according to traditional religion. Feast was devoted to Ahianjoku as a period of thanksgiving ceremony, as propitiation for his kind protection and gifts from the farm. (14)

The forgoing is evident that the African man started observing the indigenous arts and culture as soon as he found himself as a creature on planet earth. During the period, the traditional African farmers offered sacrifices to their gods in thanksgiving for the gift of life and goodness, and above all, for granting them a bumper harvest in their career as farmers. This ceremony attracted most of the friends and relatives of the farmers from within and outside Mbaise, in Igbo land. The celebration of the New Yam festival was held in high esteem by the pre-colonial Mbaise man, hence, it involved aggressive planning and publicity, to make sure that everything was made ready for this festival, which lasted for a traditional week of eight days. The initial ceremony usually began with meetings of the elders and the Eze ji titleholders who were in charge of the leadership of the traditional festival. It was at the meeting of these leaders that decisions were made regarding the

date and activities of the festival. The activities included daily display of cultural dances, exhibition of art works, wrestling competition, etc. In the words of Nwachukwu:

This was celebrated during the first yam harvest in August. Every community had an Ahianjoku shrine, a high priest in charge of the deity. Some slaves bought and dedicated to it, both male and female and a piece of land called Ahianjoku forest- 'Okahia Ahianjoku'. The priest and the slaves controlled the forest dedicated to Ahianjoku. The slaves of Ahianjoku were consecrated to the Ahianjoku god and were regarded as 'Osu' untouchables. (14)

This means that the indigenous people were really in charge of the leadership of this new yam traditional festival. However, Nwachukwu goes further to inform us of how the festival became a victim of change due to the coming of the Whiteman and his western religion, otherwise known as Christianity. According to him, it was in the year 1945 when a catholic priest named Rev. Fr. Traick, CSSp who was among the expatriate missionaries to Uturu, Abia State, got worried that his converts to Christianity were still taking part in the celebration of the New Yam festival which his Christian religion regarded as being fetish. So, the priest took his time to study the festival and the attachment of the people to it and concluded that no amount of gospel preaching would stop them from taking part in the festival. After thorough studying of the festival, the priest removed the aspects of it that he discovered to be fetish behaviours and rituals, just to prevent the adherents of his Christian faith from committing sin against the Christian God. So, he introduced a new yam festival devoid of fetishism and fixed August 15, every year as the date for the new yam celebration. It must be noted that this August 15, is the day Catholics the world over, celebrate the solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven (15). This was how this traditional festival was changed from its original mode of practice to its current secularized form. However, the festival has also tried to survive the change because it still retains some characteristics of traditional African theatre such as dance, music etc.

African traditional theatre has also been affected by change even in some other traditional performances like chieftaincy coronation. In the traditional setting, especially in Igbo land, a king or traditional ruler is usually crowned at the shrine of the community or at the centre of the market square. This is so because it is believed that the shrine or the market square represents

the entire inhabitants of the community, which includes both their living members and their dead relatives, otherwise known as ancestors. All the rituals that precede or accompany chieftaincy coronation as an indigenous performance are performed at the shrine. But these days, most people claim that as Christians, they cannot receive titles or perform coronation ceremony in front of any shrine or at the centre of the community market square. Imagine a situation whereby parts of the programme for the coronation of a traditional ruler include the following: church service; blessing of the insignia of office by priests of the orthodox churches, presentation of the Holy Bible to the newly crowned traditional ruler, etc.

The aberrations which changing communal values bring to disrupt the African traditional theatre setting are really enormous. During this traditional coronation ceremony, the incantations which worthy elders and leaders of the community make in order to make the ceremony traditionally awesome are now replaced by the modern oath of office which any available legal or para-legal person administers to the crowned king. This really affects even the attitudes of the traditional ruler. Some now misbehave with impunity because of the fact that they are not dedicated to a traditional deity, but rather mere prayers are just said to a Christian God who is acclaimed to be kind, merciful and is never quick to anger. Hence, the so called leaders now live their lives as they like unlike when everything had the traditional setting, with its implications and penalties.

Going further in this discourse, this study also observes the change in leadership which also affects the survival of the traditional African theatre. According to the *Autonomous Communities and Chieftaincy Law*, No 11 of 1981, which has been amended at various times, the role of a traditional ruler, is to assist the government in the maintenance of law and order in their various communities. However, this is secondary to their foremost role or duty as the custodians of culture and tradition. In fact, a traditional ruler is one who can act as a representative of his community both within and outside his town (Nwoga 4).

The position of a traditional ruler may appear very simple and common but it is an exalted and dignified institution because it is not every person that can be considered for such an honourable and traditional post. In fact, to be made a traditional ruler means that one has been duly tried and tested and is found worthy of the traditional stool of his ancestors. For one to be chosen as a traditional ruler, he must be a man of great substance, hence, highly respected or revered. It is no gainsaying that apart from the functions stipulated by the constitutions or acts that established the office of the

traditional rulers, most of them because of their experience in different fields of life endeavours now get involved in other developmental issues and projects just to better the lot of their subjects, or the masses in general. As Nwoga postulates:

The modern ruler can now be found mobilizing, and motivating his subjects in the areas of education and health, agriculture, security and in the provision of those infrastructural facilities which can be undertaken by the communities. The ruler is now the voice that speaks for his community with both the local and the central governments... (5)

All these are welcome developments on the part of African traditional rulers as they make efforts to see that the presence of the state and federal governments are felt in their local communities. But what is rather worrisome is the fact that some of the traditional rulers, in the process of trying to get really involved in governance, now become so partisan to the extent that some of their subjects now see them as political opponents instead of the dignified royal fathers they are meant to be. This is another aspect of change in leadership which has really affected the traditional African theatre. A situation where the traditional ruler who should help the law enforcement agencies to maintain peace and order in the community now turns to a terrorist or a thwart, who supports and promotes crime and other social anomalies, can never promote, propagate or preserve African traditional theatre.

Conclusion

Philosophers make us to understand that change is the only thing constant in life and we do not really doubt it because we all see change in our daily living and dealings. Thus, it is no surprise then that the change mantra in Nigeria has affected every facet of the system as a nation, be it social, economic, religious, political or cultural. Traditional theatre cannot be left out of this change scenario; otherwise, it would not be seen as being part and parcel of the people's existence. However, what really matters is not the change; rather, it is what the people make out of it. In other words, what is the people's approach or reactions towards the change in the various aspects of life endeavours? From the discourse so far, it has been established that the so-called change is affecting Nigerians adversely and the survival of African traditional theatre, irrespective of attempts by the Nigerian government to propagate, promote and preserve the arts that led to the establishment of the

various Councils of Arts and Culture; a lot needs to be done to encourage the survival of African traditional theatre in this postmodern era.

This paper calls on Nigerian leaders to adapt rather than adopt the Western influenced change, so as not to disrupt the social order and cause social instability, as seen in the play *Kongi's Harvest*. This, the paper believes, will encourage the survival of African traditional theatre. A conscious all-inclusive attempt must be made by Nigerians and Africans by extension to ensure that traditional African theatre is protected from extinction irrespective of the ongoing changes in the society, orchestrated by the advent of film and television, as well as the social media.

Works Cited

- "About Conflict". *Ohrd. Wise. Edu.* Web. 8 July 2014
<http://www.ohrd.wise.edu/onlinetraining/resolution/aboutwhatisconflict.htm>
- Awodiya, Muyiwa P. *Managing Arts Institution in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Kraft, 2005. Print.
- Baden, G. T. *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*. Lagos: UPC, 1983. Print. "Definition: Communal Value". *English-heritage.org*. Web. 8 July 2014. <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/hpg/hpr-definitions/c./534-804/>.
- Hussain, Syed. "Achebe is concerned with the Social and Cultural Decay of Society." *Suite.io*. Web. 15 July 2014. <https://suite.io/syed-jaaved.hussain/4922238>.
- Igbo, Eddiefloyd. *Basic Sociology*. Enugu: Cidjap Press, 2003. Print.
- Krama, Clive. *African Traditional Theatre and Drama: Themes and Perspectives*. Port Harcourt: UP, 2001. Print. *National Council for Arts and Culture Act*. *Lawyard.ng*. Web. 3 Oct. 2017. <http://www.Lawyard.ng/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/NATIONALCOUNCIL-FOR-ARTS-AND-CULTURE-ACT.pdf>.
- Nwachukwu, C. I. "The Famous Iri-Ji Mbaise Cultural Festival was known as Ahianjoku Festival." *Annual Iri-Ji Mbaise Cultural Festival Brochure, Okpofe*. Port Harcourt, 2011. Print.
- Nwadiolor, Kanayo. "The Christian Church and the Quest for Cultural Revival in Nigeria." Web. 15 July 2014. <http://www.google.com.ng/search?q=cultural+decay+in+nigeria&prmd=ivns&ei=hlbEu82Ey4mR7Abu6110AC&start=O&sq=N>.

Nwoga, I. D. "The Role of Traditional Rulers in Governance." Royal Executive Seminar for Traditional Rulers. Owerri, 2006.

Smith, Arthur. "*Kongi's Harvest* of Intrigue and Hate." *Nathaniel turner.com*. Web. 8 July 2014.
<http://www.nathanielturner.com/WolesoyinkaKongisharvest.htm>.

Soyinka, Wole. *Kongi's Harvest*: London: Oxford UP, 1967. Print.