

Modernity Versus Tradition in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Wole Soyinka has been recognized as one of the most talented of twentieth century playwrights. Nigerian writer Soyinka who wins the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986, always emphasizes his Yoruban roots in plays. His play, *The Lion and the Jewel*, was published in 1959, just before Nigeria becomes independent and while Nigerians are debating whether to move into the future or leave their past behind. The focus of this paper is to explain how Soyinka uses art of characterization and plot construction to investigate the Nigerian conflict between modernity and tradition.

Keywords: Wole Soyinka, *The Lion and the Jewel*, modernity and tradition.

Introduction

Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian playwright, novelist, poet, and essayist in the English language. He was awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature, the first sub-Saharan African to be honoured in that category. After studying in Nigeria and the UK, he worked with the Royal Court Theatre in London. He wrote plays that were produced in both countries, in theatres and on radio. He took an active role in Nigeria's political history and its campaign for independence from British colonial rule. Soyinka has dramatized the conflict between

modernization and tradition through the characters of Baroka and Lakunle, whereas Lakunle embraces all things progressive and new, Baroka defends traditional values through oftentimes underhanded means.(Zargar 85)

Modernity versus Tradition

Erapu (1975) comments that there was a huge Odan tree next to the market in the village of Ilujinle. The space next to it was the centre of the village. The rural school is located there. The sound of children reading can be heard while passing by. Seeing the beautiful girl Sidi, the school teacher closed the window of the twenty-three-year-old Lacunle and then left the school and approached Sidi. Lacunle wanted to help pick up his water jug. But Sidi did not agree. He warned her not to take a heavy water jug on her head as it would make her neck shorter and thicker. He replied that he had never said anything about her appearance before. She agreed with him and then said that it is not feminine to carry such a burden. She also reminded him that she should cover her neck because if she didn't, people would look at her neck and have sex with her. Lacunle tried to convince him but Sidi replied that people call Lacunle crazy and stupid.

Lacunle was surprised and said that he was actually above the ridicule and ridicule of all these barbaric people. Sidi became very angry and showed his fist. Women's brains are smaller than men's, Lacunley said. So, he will not argue with her anymore. Whatever he tells her will go over his head. Sidi wanted to take his earthenware pot and leave. Lacunle apologized to him and told him it was a matter of science; women are weaker than men. Sidi asks him that women are not weak because they can plant red potatoes and corn. Lacunle explains to him that soon they will do all this work through machines. Sidi says it will turn the world upside down.

Lacunle refuses to return his pot of water until he agrees to marry her. Lacunle says that he will open his heart with love. Sidi tells him that his words are completely

meaningless. He will agree to marry her if she pays the dowry of his marriage according to the village price. If she does not realize it, the villagers will call her a bad girl. Lacunle, a believer in Western culture, refers to it as an old and uncivilized ritual. At this time, Lacunle does some talking so that Sidi is somewhat attracted.

At one point Sidi gets annoyed and understands why everyone calls him crazy. At this time some people from the village and drummers were present there. A girl tells Sidi that the one-eyed box - that is, the foreigner with the camera has come again. He has brought his previous photos and magazines. Sidi wants to know if there is a picture of Sidi in the magazine book. Then the stranger tells him that Sidi has been given the form that the goddesses dream of. A girl tells Sidi that the village chief Baroka is looking at her pictures very well. Baroka is pretending to be very proud but in fact, she is feeling very jealous. The girl further informed him that there was a picture of the baroque among the pictures but it was next to the toilet in the village. Sidi felt very proud. He began to think of himself as more respected than the head of the village.

Seeing all this, Lacunal's mind was filled with doubt and bitterness. Sidi smiled and thought to herself that she was so popular now that she would no longer have to marry Lacunle. He looked at her sad face and smiled, which broke Lacunal's heart. Then the people of the village asked Sidi to dance in honour of the travelling stranger. He told Sidi Nachal and Lacunle that Lacunle knew the outside world very well and asked him to play the role of a stranger. He did not want to do it because it seemed kind of silly to him but Sidi let him act. Their service began, and everyone shouted for joy. The musicians started playing. The four girls act together as the four wheels of a travelling stranger's car. He pretends to drive; at one point he gets out of the car with his camera. A snake and a frog scare him. He gets drunk and goes crazy. A girl sings and it looks like she has been looking for this girl for so long to take

pictures. He insanely eats asar in the river and at this time Sidi appears. Then the whole villagers came and stood behind him to take pictures of him.

Suddenly the baroque arrives and their service stops. The villagers on the other hand fell to their knees trying to get away like a thief in Lacunle. Baroka tells him to come back and continue his drama performance. Baroka wants to act there. What does it take to do all these stupid things? Baroka says if he does not, his life will be lifeless.

The service resumes with the punishment of the newcomer because he has ruined the innocence of the village. Baroka calms the people of the village. Sidi was brought again. Lacunle takes pictures of him again. He drank again and at one point fell ill. At the end of the play, Sidi tells Lacunle that she has acted very well as a travelling stranger. He should act instead of teaching in school. He then asked the girls of Sidi village to bring the traveller and bring him the magazine from him. They happily went and took Lacunle with them so he could talk to her. At the time, Baroka thought she had not been married in five months.

Sidi was walking in the market and his mind was caught in the middle of his picture. Lacunle was following him. At that time Sadiqu, the wife of the village chief, came to him. She told him she wanted to see him and that Baroka wished her well. Sidi was muttering about his picture. Sadiqu gives him a piece of important news. Sadiqu says Baroka wants to marry Sidi. Lacunle stepped forward and angrily interrupted his words. He sat down on the ground and prayed to Sidi not to listen to Sadiqu.

Sidi was annoyed by his words and said that she was a beauty and to leave him alone. She added that Seto was no longer the baroque's wife. Sadiqu told her to think again because it is a great pleasure to be the wife of a baroque. She reminds him more that he will die very soon at the age of baroque. Sidi, who will then be the head of the village, will have the status of his eldest daughter-in-law. Sadiqu says this from her experience because she has been getting the status of big wife for almost forty-one years. Sidi told him that Sadiqu was

wasting time. He further added that Baroque wanted him because his pictures appeared in magazines. He wants to be the owner of Jewel of Illusion.

Sadiku was surprised by Sidi's words. Then he started shouting and blaming Lacunle. He told her that all this was just for him. Sidi told her to stop and added that she had made up her mind not to marry him because Baroka was an old man. Sidi was looking at her picture, then she admired his skin and his chest and wondered why no one had ever told him anything about them before. Lacunley said he wanted to tell her but he thought it was not right. Sidi ignored him and started dreaming about himself. He knows that there is a message in his eyes that directs men to his destiny. He is much, much younger than the Baroque. Baroque is like a horse's saddle to the glitter of his form. She is young and alive on the other hand the life of the baroque is almost over. He is like a gem on the other side of the baroque and can be compared to the back of the lion. Sadiku is still the foundation. He informed Sidi that a banquet had been arranged in his honour at the baroque's house at night. Because his face printed in newspapers has increased the respect of the people of Iluginol. Sidi then joked that he knew about dinner but he did not eat with married people.

Sadiku refers to him as a rumour if he has heard anything. The woman who eats with him is not his mistress. Lacunle then began to shout that the railway project that was in this village for the people had been stopped by the baroque barrier. His father told him this. Sidi then wanted to know about this incident. Then Lacunle began to say, once upon a time prison inmates were brought in to implement this project. He draws a picture of the past. A white-skinned surveyor was lazily watching the work of the staff. A Jamadar was telling the workers who should do what. They were measuring the road to get the poles to the ground. Through this, business, progress, expeditions, success, civilization, respect, and international vision all came into the hands of Iluginol. Someone shouted and all the workers got scared. The baroque then arrived with his team and bribed the white-skinned surveyor so that the

railway tracks would not pass through the village. The Baroque feared that if this village got a touch of civilization, his leadership would end. By then the two women had fled away.

Baroka is sitting in his luxurious room. His current most beloved wife Ailatu is pulling hair from his armpits. At the time, he was talking about the need for another new wife. Besides, he was criticizing his wife for hurting her armpit hair. His wife Ailatu was upset when she heard about the new marriage and was pulling her hair with more pain. When Sadiqu entered, he sent the other woman out of the room and asked her if she had brought him the perfumed stone. Sadiku tells him that Sidi is not willing to do anything with him. Sadiku was not bothered by this. But when Sadiku said that Sidi had called him old, he was upset. He then burst out in rage and shouted and began to say all the masculine things he had done all his life. At one point he called Sadiqu to comfort her.

Sadiqu was rubbing her legs gently to calm him down. Meanwhile, Baroka was looking at Sidi's picture in the newspaper and said that he was probably the best. His masculinity is at an end and now if he takes Sidi as his wife, people will laugh. Surprising Sadiku, he went on to say that he wanted to marry Sidi because of his desire to hold on to his pride. The baroque then told him that he had not told anyone about the incident and that Sadiqu should not tell anyone. He knows that he annoys but it's inappropriate because he is only sixty-two years old now. Baroka began to remember the soft hands of his previous wives. Sadiqu's hand is the best at the moment. She is his queen among all.

The night before Sidi was standing and looking at his picture. Sadiku quietly pulled something out of a bag-like thing. It was a small statue of the village chief. He was overjoyed to see the woman bring him like this. He looked at Sidi and told her that the war was over. Because the Baroque is now a manless man. Hearing this, Sidi burst out laughing.

Lacunle listened to them and came forward again. He wanted to know what they were laughing at. Listening to Sadiqu's joke, he understood what happened. She was surprised.

Suddenly Sidi said he had an idea. Sidi will attend the dinner that the baroque has invited him to. Sadiku felt a little excited and told him to go there as if he was shy and remorseful. Lacunle shook hands with them and told them not to punish this man anymore. He warned them that he could become dangerous at any time.

When Sidi left, Sadiku mocked Lacunle and said that getting a girl like Sidi was just a luxury for him. If he is not able to collect Mohrani from Sidi, then he should not waste time walking behind Sidi but should put oil on his wheel. The village will change in a few years as Lacunle makes him proud. Then there will be cars, newspapers, modern parks and other new things. The groom no longer has to pay the bride price to get married. Sadiku looked at him in horror. Lacunle looked at him and smiled and said he had to accept that and go to school like a twelve-year-old. He needs to restructure his bowels.

Baroka was wrestling with a wrestler. While the two were fighting, Sidi entered respectfully. He says during a fight, there is no one at the door to block the entry of the unwanted stranger! Sidi was surprised. Then the baroque remembered that today was a holiday. So, all the working people are on vacation. He said angrily that the Palace Workers' Union, formed by Lacunal, was closing one day a week today. Sidi then claimed that he had come here out of remorse. Earlier she had answered him without much thought. The baroque behaves indifferently in this matter which shocks Sidi. The baroque told him he answered so quickly that he would soon be in trouble. He began to speak to fulfil his purpose. He said that the favourite woman of the village head must be humble and polite. This time Sidi started talking a little bit and said, maybe the most beloved woman is dissatisfied with her husband. Baroka looked at him and asked if he had time to think about women's jealousy, violence and hatred. The sudden change of mood of the baroque made Sidi a little nervous. The baroque asked him to sit down and also reminded him not to think of him as an uninterested old man. He sat down and watched them wrestle. Sidi said the wrestler will win the game. Baroka said

he must win. Because the baroque has kept him from playing with him to increase his strength. The day the baroque can beat him, he will replace him with a new wrestler. Baroka further says that he also changes his wife when he gets tired of her.

Gibbs and Lindfors (1993) points out that Baroka was talking very angrily about Ailatu. Sidi wanted to know what happened to Ailatu. This time he changed the subject, saying he would win the game. This time the baroque answered very politely and showed his strength. This time Sidi adopted a new strategy. Slowly she began to annoy him. In the context of Ailatu, he said that if Baroka took a new wife, he gave an example, if he were his father, would he marry her to an old man like him. In response to Sidi's words, Baroka slapped his opponent on the shoulder and struck him hard. He quickly regained his composure and started playing again with the Baroque. In the meanwhile, the conversation started. Baroka was deeply hurt by Sidi's parallel and subtle gestures. Sidi continued his sarcasm. This time Sidi said the baroque had not given birth to any children in the last two years. Baroka was so enraged by his words that he slapped his opponent's hand hard on the table. This time the baroque won. The baroque told him to take the gourd from the door as he left. At that moment, the baroque grinned like an old man. The wrestler was returning, and the baroque was boasting. She showed him an envelope and a magazine. Then an imprint stamp was shown. She told him their picture might have been engraved on their village stamp. The stamp was made with the device lying next to it. He also said that his picture could be published in the magazine if he wanted. When it comes to the magazine, Baroka says he is not really against improvement, but the problem is an improvement - making all people and their homes equal. Then he praised Sidi's appearance.

At that time, in the centre of the village, Lacunle was wandering around in despair. He was very angry at Sadiq for sending Sidi to the baroque. Because he knew the baroque would either harm him or keep him. At that time some actors were real there. Sadiku was calm, but

Lacunale's mental turmoil was growing. Sadiku stole coins from Lacunale and gave them acting bounties. Then they began to play music with his praise. Sadiku told them to praise Lacunale as he stole money from Lacunale's pocket. Then they sang about the life of the baroque. It was a lot of fun in Lacunle because they had a bit of a sneer at the baroque there.

Sidi appeared with a pale and scattered look. Lacunle saw him and understood what had happened. He got angry and said he wanted to sue in court. Sidi told the real story. Baroka tells Sadiku that he is actually a eunuch and he knows very well that Sadiku will not be able to keep it a secret, he will tell someone to ruin his honour. It was a baroque fad, so that Sidi came to him. After a while, Lacunale's anger subsided, and he expressed deep frustration. He proposed to her again without Mohrana because she is no longer a virgin. Lacunle is also happy in his mind because things are happening the way he thought. Sadiku later informs him that Sidi is preparing for his wedding. Later Sidi came out with the band to invite him to his wedding. Sidi Lacunle said she came to invite him to her wedding. Lacunle thought she was going to marry him. But Sidi tells him that Sidi has no interest in him, instead, he is going to marry Baroka. Lacunle was stunned to hear him speak. Sidi goes on to say that if the two are compared, the sixty-year-old still has full youth inside the baroque, and that Lacunle is like an animal that died ten years ago. Sadiku prayed to God for their well-being. When their marriage began, Lacunle was mocked by a young girl. She chased after him. Sadiku also followed him. Lacunle calmed himself down and began to dance, making room in the crowd.

Conclusion

The most prominent aspect of the play is the rapid modernization of Africa, coupled with the rapid evangelization of the population. This has driven a wedge between the traditionalists, who seek to nullify the changes done in the name of progress due to vested interests or simply not liking the result of progress, and the modernists, who want to see the

last of outdated traditional beliefs at all cost. Another core theme is the marginalization of women as property. Traditionally, they were seen as properties that could be bought, sold or accumulated. Even the modern Lakunle falls victim to this, by looking down on Sidi for having a smaller brain, and later by thinking it will be easier to marry her once she has lost her virginity since no dowry was required in such a situation. (Reynolds 599)

Willis (1998) argues that there is a conflict between education and traditional beliefs. The educated people seek to spread their knowledge to the tribal people in an attempt to make them more modern. This in turn is resisted by the tribal people who see no point in obtaining an education as it served them no use in their daily lives. Finally, there is the importance of song and dance as a form of spreading information in a world where the fastest route of communication is by foot. It is also an important source of entertainment for the otherwise boring village youths. The author shows the slow influence of modernization, for example, the wandering traveller influences Sidi's life drastically.

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