

The Dynamic Formation of Memory for the Traumatized Self's Mental Survival: An Exploration of Wole Soyinka's Local Modes of Survival

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The investigation of memory and its significant role in the psychological development of the self generate different modes for the traumatized self's mental survival. Since the individual's system of memory depends on the interrelatedness between different life experiences, memory disorder handles the continuity of the individual's life. Due to the traumatized self's exposure to different scenes of torture within communities dominated by tyrants, the traumatized self suffers the effect of indelible and intrusive memories which causes his self's entrapment within a single moment of psychic and mental torture. Therefore, the traumatized self's memory practices for attenuating the indelible effect of such distressful experience are crucial for the traumatized self's mental survival.

Memory as a continuous act of creating new meaning for the experience of oppression generates different strategies and policies for the traumatized self's survival. These strategies are various and depends on the individual's mental shift in the memory retrieval of different scenes of torture. The mental reversal of different scenes of torture attenuates the indelible effect of the intrusive memories. The individual's mental engagement in different mental and contemplative practices is the key factor in the process of trauma recovery. In this paper, I state the view that the individual's memory practices and his contemplative processes of the mind contribute to his mental survival.

The Trauma of Imprisonment as a “Signifying Practice”

Soyinka’s “mental activities” to perceive the trauma of incarceration recreate the prison not as an establishment of oppression but as a place where prisoners can undergo progression and consciousness growth. With different means of representation, according to Homi Bhabha’s views, the traumatic incident “conceives” its new meaning (98). In “Chimes of Silence,” Soyinka recreates the physical landscape of prison and reveals the psychological, mental, and physical traumatic torture the traumatized prisoners suffer. Soyinka’s mind perceives his experience of imprisonment as a “signifying practice” (Bhabha 98) in which his mind is engaged in mental activities to reproduce his traumatic experience of incarceration. The “Chimes of Silence” is divided into two parts, “Bearings” and “Procession.” In “Bearings,” Soyinka portrays the prison as a “site of memory,” a place where the prisoners gain their knowledge about their collective wound (Assmann 15). The portrayal of the physical landscape of prison represents another mental shift to communicate the daily suffering of the traumatized Black prisoner.

“Wailing Wall,” a Symbol of Psychic Degeneration of the Prisoners

The different prison walls’ imageries in the poems, “Wailing Wall,” “Wall of Mists,” “Amber Wall,” and “Purgatory” symbolize Soyinka’s mind “contemplative process” to detect his fellow prisoner’s suffering and pursue his role as a spokesman for Blacks’ trauma (Ojaide *The Poetry of Soyinka* 1). The symbolical reflections on the prison encapsulate Soyinka’s castigation of the prison officials.

In the first poem of the section, “Wailing Wall,” Soyinka represents the acts of the atrocities occur in one of the prison cells, “wailing wall”. It is “the yard of torture where political prisoners impose to all kinds of oppression” (Edgar 5).

Wailing Wall (I named it that, because it overlooks the yard where a voice cried out in agony all of one night and died at dawn, unattended. It is the yard from which hymns and prayers rise with constancy matched only by the vigil of crows and vultures. (Soyinka

Collected Poems 132)

The cries of the prisoners behind the wall articulate their “agony.” The auditory image of the “cries of agony” communicates the prisoners’ non-verbal pain. The “unattended” voice of the prisoners’ cries reveals the denial and ignorance of their traumatic suffering. The “wailing wall” has a dual function, serving as both a wall for prayer and a wall for physical and psychological torture. The “vulture” and “crows,” the prison officials, perform their prayers behind the wall.

However, the prisoners receive their psychological and physical punishment behind the wall.

At the beginning of the poem, Soyinka reveals the actual function of the wall as a wall of

prayers.

It is an enclosed area in Jerusalem near the mosque of Omar. This area is supposed to contain the stones of King Solomon’s temple where Jews gather every Friday to worship

and lament. (Edgar 5)

The “wailing wall,” according to Emmanuel Edgar, is a wall of prayer, a sacred place where people perform their rituals and prayer. Soyinka’s symbolical representation of the “wailing

wall” as the wall of torture castigates the Nigerian leaders who preach charity.

Wailing wall

Wall to polar star

A roof in blood-rust floats beyond

Stained-glass wounds on wailing walls

Vulture presides in tattered surplice. (134)

Soyinka transforms the “spiritual atmosphere” of prayers into the “atmosphere of physical torture and psychological degeneration of human spirit through prevailing “blood-rust” and “stained-glass wounds” (134). Transforming the spiritual atmosphere of prayers into the atmosphere of bloodshed and hatred reveals the corruption within the Nigerian leadership who serve the system of oppression. Soyinka portrays priests as “vultures” and “crows.” The vulture, the priest is an oppressor who causes “schism” instead of union (Soyinka *A Shuttle* 134). Priests are “altars of evil” and “a charity of victims”; they are agents of destruction (134). The paradox between “charity” and “victims” is symmetrical to the Paradox between “altars” and “evil,” reflecting the contrast between the roles they should perform and evil and destruction they bring.

Ironically, the prayers are for “the mass burial” of those traumatized prisoners whose

cried voices are “unattended” (Soyinka 132).

Of wall of prayers, preyed upon

By scavenger, undertaker.

Nightly the plough

Furrows deep in graveyard of the sky

For a mass burial. (Soyinka *A Shuttle* 134)

The psychic and verbal shift from “prayers” into “preyed” in testifying the prison officials’ executions of prisoners lambast the oppressors’ policies to destroy the prisoners’ mental faculties. The “prayers” symbolize the oppressors’ false claims. The traumatized prisoners are “preys” for the “vulture” and “crows.” Through the “mass burial” of their “preys,” the oppressors claim “charity.” The plural form of “prayers” indicates the increasing number of the victims. The image of the “mass burial” represents the collective burden the Black prisoners share. The oppressors, the evil spirits, are “fed” with “the wounds and tears” of their victims.

At the end of the poem, the image of the “sky” is met with “clouds drift across the plough” and “hope buried in soil of darkness.” Every moment of hope is met with despair and agony. The “clouds,” the traumatic memories intrudes Soyinka’s contemplation of the “sky.”

Bulks against the sky

Glow of mourning candles in far spaces

Cloud drifts across the Plough

The share is sunk, and hope

Buried in soil of darkness. (134)

Soyinka’s processes of mind transform the scene of the “mass burial” into the sky with its “candles”. This image gives hope for renewal and rebirth for the Black prisoners. But the image of the “cloud” changes hope into despair as if the “mass burial” of the Black prisoners brings the memory of death. The image of death intrudes the present moment of contemplating the sky. As a result, “hope” is replaced with “darkness.”

The abrupt change in the physical landscape of prison symbolizes the mind shift from a state into another. This is evident in the mind’s shift from the image of the “wailing wall” into the image of “wall of mists.” In the poem, “Wall of Mists,” the auditory image of “shrill of laughter,” is in contrast with the auditory image of “voices of the dead.” According to Emmanuel Edgar’s views, Soyinka’s representation of prison includes two contradictory elements: the element of “consoling” and the element of “harrowing.” Imprisonment experience is “harrowing” due to the constant scenes of agony and human execution (4). In contrast, the consoling elements of such representation are the images of sky, birds and lights give hope for renewal (4). Thus, the image of “shrill laughter” reduces the severe effect of the “voices of dead.”

“Wall of Mists,” represents the setting of consolation where the traumatized prisoners

“feed no fires,” “prompt no pains,” and “wake no memories.”

Wall of mists, wall of echoes

High pitch, shrill laughter

They feed no fires, prompt no pains

Wake no memories: walls

Are the tomb of longing. (Soyinka 135)

“Wall of mists” is the “tomb” where the traumatized prisoners express their longing for freedom and comfort. The traumatized prisoner has no memories to recall. The reason for such peaceful state of mind is their reduction into “swine.” Ironically, the traumatized prisoners are stripped

from their humanity; they are transformed into “swine,” and “lizard.”

Mists of metamorphosis

Men to swine, strength to blows

Grace to lizard prances, honour

To sweatmeats on the tongue of vileness. (Soyinka 135)

The transformation of men into swine is an allusion to the Greek mythology in which the witch called “Circe” transforms its victims into swine (Edgar 7). Recreating the traumatic dehumanization of the Black prisoners through mythology reiterates the theme of traumatic dehumanization. The transformation is evident in the poet’s linguistic shift from positive words into a negative ones in “strength to blows,” “grace to lizard prances,” and “honor to sweatmeats on the tongue of vileness.” This shift represents the traumatized prisoner’s mental degeneration in perceiving their traumatic torture during incarceration.

The image of the “Amber Wall” represents another mental shift as Soyinka’s mind engages with the eye to reproduce the prison as a place for growth and progression. Edgar defines “Amber Wall” as a colored wall, a wall ornamented with yellow and red color (8).

Breath of the sun, crowned
 In green crepes and amber beads
 Children's voices at the door of the Orient.
 Raising eyelids on sluggish earth
 Dispersing sulphur fumes above the lake
 Of awakening, you come hunting with the sun. (Soyinka 136)

The images of the “Sun,” “green crepes,” the “voices of children,” “sulphur fumes,” and the “lake” change the mood of despair. The voices of dead are substituted with the voices of children. The repetition of “sun” eliminates the darkness of the sunset that ends each poem. Such shift in the representation of prison from a site of torture into a place where “consciousness growth” can be attained marks the traumatized prisoner’s mental development during incarceration (Rosemary 1). Thus, Soyinka’s creative power of the mind facilitates his mental flight at this moment of witnessing the brutality of the oppressive system against the blacks and protects his mind from collapse.

Soyinka’s mental shift to the image of “amber wall” reflects his “instinct for survival” (Rosemary 3). Such mental capacity matches Caruth’s definition of trauma as “an endless attempt to assume one’s survival” (*Unclaimed Experience* 64).

Fantasies richer than burning mangoes
 Flickered through his royal mind, an open
 Noon above that closed door.

I would you may discover, midmorning

To man's estate, with lesser pain

The wall of gain within the outer loss. (Soyinka 135)

The imaginative process Soyinka's mind undergoes brings hope out of despair. Soyinka's fantasies increase and grow "richer than burning mangoes" (135). Soyinka here recalls an image of a "child reaches for mangoes." According to Eldred Jones' views, such image of a child represents a "new experience" for the traumatized prisoner by means of which his mind acknowledges that "within the loss there is a gain" (199). This means that the experience of traumatic loss brings "self-knowledge" (199). Without the limitations of prison, the traumatized prisoner cannot perceive the meaning of freedom. Thus, the traumatized prisoner's "royal mind" perceives new life experiences inside the prison. This marks the traumatized prisoner's consciousness growth.

Early at this stage of traumatic disillusionment, the traumatized individual's mind lacks the mental perception of the new experiences due to the "unintegrated traumatic memories" of

1966 Biafran war and this hinders the development of his sense of self,

Unable to integrate the traumatic memories, they seem to have lost their capacity to assimilate new experiences as well. It is ... as if their personality which definitely stopped at a certain point cannot enlarge any more by the addition or assimilation of new elements. (Janet *Mental Hysteria* 532)

The traumatized individual's failure to reintegrate the traumatic experiences into the consciousness affects the subsequent life experiences. As a result, "the individual's development stops at a certain level" (Freud *Pleasure Principle* 18). But at this moment of memory "reproduction" (Freud *Pleasure Principle* 18), the creative power of the conscious mind

develops to perceive the painful past as “regenerative power” (Ojaide *Poetry of Soyinka* 11) for self-reconstruction.

Purgatory, a Room for Psychic and Mental Torture

The traumatized prisoner’s consciousness growth threatens the “mind-butchers,” the prison officials and therefore, they “create some prison conditions” to destroy the “minds they fear” (Soyinka *Man Died* 12). Soyinka reiterates the necessary “mental exercises” the traumatized prisoner has to pursue his mental survival. In “Purgatory,” the “reversal” (Jeiyo 255) of the purgatory’s function from a chamber where the dead spirits undergo “purification of their souls from sins to be given final access to heaven” (Edgar 8) to “a chamber” where the traumatized prisoner receives physical and psychological torture reveals the psychological tension the traumatized prisoner experiences during incarceration. It also exposes “the false trials” (Soyinka *Man Died* 12) the prison officials hold to stop the traumatized prisoner’s psychological development.

The prisoners’ trial opens with the “circus.” The image “circus” represents the comic trial

scene that includes unusual characters: “the surgeon” and “an observation squad.”

In puppet cast: first, by law compelled

The surgeon, ether primed for the ordeal

Next, a cardboard row of gaolers, eyelids

Of glue-the observation squad. And:

Hero of the peace, a towering shade a cross

The prostrate villain, cuts a trial swathe. (Soyinka 137)

“Puppet cast,” is an ironical representation of the jury. The comic representation of the scene as circus reflects the absurdity of injustice. Soyinka satirizes the “jury” is for their injustice. The scene has its horrible and demeaning implications as the political prisoners committed no sins, they have no salvation. The most pathetic image in the trial scene is the image of the prisoners as a “crowd of naked prisoners with a pail to empty trash from treated wounds and spittle” (Edgar 9). The prisoners “trudge the lifelong road to a dread/ Judicial sentence.” The prisoners’ “wounds” are the traumatic bruises inflicted on their bodies. They become visible through their “naked” bodies. Sarcastically, the traumatized prisoners receive treatment at the hands of a “surgeon” instead of a physician.

The stress and tension the traumatized prisoner suffers during the trial scene lead to his “mental state of surrender” in “Vault Centre” as the traumatized prisoner’s mental struggle against his “mind-butchers” goes in vain. The prison is transformed into a “graveyard.” The limited space of prison becomes obvious when the traumatized prisoner’s seclusion is juxtaposed with the freedom of birds.

Corpse of vault centre and the lone

Wood-pigeons breast my ghostly thoughts

On swelling prows of down, plunge

To grass-roots, soar to fountains of the sun. (139)

The poet is like a “corpse.” He loses control over the scenes of torture. The poet is degenerated “I, a shawl of gray repose,” he is reduced to a “shawl.” His sense of self is deteriorated by his experience of loss and this leads to his mental state of surrender. He is mentally exhausted due to the mental activities his mind undergoes. The only way available for him is to “look through the cracks of windows to see the morning sunlight” (Edgar 10).

The limited space for the traumatized prisoner intensifies his state of traumatization. The “juxtaposition” between the bird and the prisoner reflects “a paralyzing sense of helplessness” (Edgar 10). As a result, the traumatized individual suffers the “obsessive return to the past” (Rothberg 19). The “ghostly thoughts” represent the case of “repetitive compulsion” (Freud *Pleasure Principle* 18), a constant remembrance of the traumatic past. Therefore, the traumatized prisoner’s psychic development stops at a certain level.

The “Shuttle” as a Mechanism for Survival

The intrusive traumatic past still haunts the traumatized prisoner and interrupts his mental activities and even his imagination. In the second section entitled “Procession,” Soyinka portrays the hanging of five prisoners who “trudge” to their “passage” to death. The scene of procession communicates the prisoners’ encounter with psychological death. Witnessing the unbearable scene of the hanging, Soyinka’s mind transforms the collective psychic degeneration of the prisoners into a public representation of “procession.” Out of traumatic loss, Soyinka’s mind favors the attempts to survive the unbearable scenes of torture.

With the representation of the “procession” scene, Soyinka shifts the representation from the “crypt” into the “shuttle,” a shift from the psychic torture into the personal survival. The shuttle marks the turning point that Soyinka manages during his incarceration. According to Jeff Thomson’s comment on Soyinka’s “Procession,” procession is “an exploration of the duality of the shuttle” (95). He emphasizes that the “shuttle” is a “metaphor for both a cultural symbol of witness and accountancy and a personal emblem of the self-sustaining creative process” (95). Soyinka’s mind transforms the limited space of prison into a great hall for the “procession.” The shuttle is the “sorrow song of the poet,” the language of pain by which the poet can express his

state of “mental defeat” and by which he survives and achieves mental stability (2). Thus, Soyinka creates the “shuttle” in the “crypt” to “conceive new meaning” (Bhabha 98) for different scenes of torture.

In the poem, “Procession,” the image of procession portrays the five men’s passage to death.

Hanging day. A hollow earth

Echoes footsteps of the grave procession

Walls in sunspots

Lean to shadows of the shortening morn

.....

Withdraw, as all the living world

Belie their absence in a feel of eyes. (Soyinka *Selected Poems* 141)

The auditory image of “chimes” communicates the prisoners’ traumatic suffering; it articulates the sound of the chains by means of which the prisoners are tied together, conveys the prisoners’ traumatic suffering. However, the audible sound of the chains transforms the oppressors’ policies for disintegration into a language of pain for the prisoners.

The auditory images of “chimes,” “footsteps,” and “heartbeats” intensify the traumatized prisoner’s sense of hearing. The traumatized prisoner experiences a return of the traumatic symptoms due to the daily exposure to overwhelming experiences of dehumanization. The auditory image of “echoes footsteps” articulates the five men’s agony. The prisoners are chained together. Their trauma remains inarticulate; it is only through the image of their footsteps that they express the traumatic pain of confronting death. Prisoners walk “with the weight of the

world on each foot,” trudging to death (Soyinka 133). The echoes of their “footsteps” correspond with their “heartbeats” (133).

The scene of procession symbolizes the prisoners’ redeeming sense of self. They are objectified and dehumanized. They experience “the symbolic death,” they suffer the inability to tell their traumatic wound, and the “compulsion to repeat” it through “flashbacks” and “obsessive images” (Goldberg 134). Through the auditory images of “footsteps,” “chimes,” and “heartbeats,” Soyinka articulates the contrast between the inability to “talk” about the traumatic suffering and the “compulsion to repeat it.”

To intensify the scene of “symbolic death,” Soyinka draws a portrait of the “prisoners’ physical appearance.”

And glances that would sometimes
 Conjure up a drawbridge
 Raised but never lowered between
 Their gathering and my sway
 Withdraw, as all the living world
 Belie their absence in a feel of eyes. (141)

The visualization of the prisoners’ pathetic state reflects the way death affects human physical appearance.

These men are blindfolded and prepared for the sacrifice so they do not need any prayers. They glance sideways with their eyes raised and never lowered. These are the living dead, even before their death. They are out of this world and out of life. (Edgar 11)

Trudging their path towards death, the prisoners become “out of this world and out of life,” they died psychologically before their actual death. The prisoners’ “physical sensations,” the glance

of their eyesight, articulate their terror and fright and reflect their traumatic loss. The chorus in the poem articulates “the footsteps of death” in “Tread. Drop. Dread drop. Dead.” Thus, the atmosphere of traumatic suffering and agony reflected in the procession scene causes an extreme fury as if the whole world recognizes the five men’s plight of death.

Soyinka reclaims his position as a “witness” (Thomson 97) in the following “dramatic monologue,”

What may I tell you? What reveal?

I who before them peered unseen.

Who stood one-legged on the untrodden

Verge-lest I should not return? (Soyinka141)

Soyinka indirectly experiences the five men’s speechless terror. The poet “who stood one-legged on the untrodden Verge-lest” becomes paralyzed. However, he survives the traumatic encounter with death to tell the traumatic scene of hanging.

In “what may I tell you? Soyinka asserts “the unspeakable” quality of the Nigerian’s daily experience of death, it needs a revelation. The unbearable scene of hanging is “speechless” and “indescribable.” However, Soyinka sets himself as a “witness” for the traumatic scene of hanging.

The poet claims he cannot find the words to tell the story of people who have been tortured, raped, and murdered. Nevertheless, it is vitally important that the story be told.

Who shall tell it? (Forche37)

Dori Laub states that “trauma is an event without a witness. (80). “The absence of a witness,” according to Dominik La Capra’s views, causes the denial and ignorance of the individual’s traumatic suffering. Thus, Soyinka, the “witness,” “retells” the traumatic scene of hanging to a

“larger audience” (Thomson 97) to gain public acknowledgement for the unbearable scene of hanging.

Soyinka’s symbolical representation of the procession scene reflects the constructive role of his memory during incarceration. Alessandro Portelli states that “memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings” (54). Soyinka’s memory practices to conceive different scenes of torture reframe the procession scene “with a mantle of poetic witness” (Thomson 98). Witnessing the scene of procession, Soyinka identifies himself with the “shuttle,” a kind of “tapestry weaver” who tells a story about the histories of the people. Soyinka, the shuttle, “wheeled above and flew beneath” (*Selected Poems* 141), the hanging men.

Tapestries are “elements of storytelling in West African cultures” (95).

Soyinka’s memory perceives the hanging men’s passage to death with new meaning. According to Caruth, trauma is an experience of construction and destruction (*Unclaimed experience* 98), depending on the individual’s reception of the traumatic incident. Soyinka perceives the scene of death as a generative agent for renewal and rebirth. In the poem “Passage,” Soyinka recreates the image of death through the recreation of the five men’s passage to death. The passage opens with the image of the land with “yeasting seeds” and “rain-sodden” where the traumatic experience of death is perceived as “part of the productive cycle of continuing life” (Jones 200). This means that out of traumatic loss, we can reconstruct our sense of being again.

Earth is rich in rottenness of things.

A soothing tang of compost filters.

Through yeasting seeds, rain-sodden

And festive fermentation, a sweetness,

Velvety as mead and maggots. (142)

The image of death has two different implications: reconstruction and decay. With reproducing the memory of death, Soyinka represents death as a constructive force. Soyinka celebrates death as a “generative power” that brings rebirth, “velvety as mead and maggots” (Ojaide *The Poetry of Soyinka* 11). The category of death that Soyinka intends is the death of the body or other living things. Death in this case is regarded as a welcome agent to life. This image of death is in contrast with the death of the five men in the procession scene.

Soyinka after traversing the passage to death, he questions the significance of death,
Of leavings on the mound, the feast is done.

A coil of cigarette ribbon recreates
A violet question on the refuse heap
A headless serpent arched in fire
In vibrancy of tinsel light, winding
To futile light, barren knowledge. (142)

Soyinka, the weaver, ties the threads of tapestry, the distracted thoughts, together “to impose meaning on the experience of death” (Thomson 99). He is supported by the “loom-shuttle unity” (Soyinka *Selected Poems* 95), the mental power and the free space, in his search for meaning for the “deaths of five executed men” (Jones 200). Soyinka comes out with “barren knowledge” that the death of the five men is futile. For Soyinka, there is no justification for the five men’s execution. The “passage to death” ends with “futile light” and “barren knowledge,” failure to integrate the traumatic scene of execution.

Soyinka, the tapestry weaver, creates a “personal mythology” to survive the traumatic experience of incarceration. With the creative power of the shuttle, Soyinka undergoes a mental

flight in which “he can capture a bird’s soul by stepping on its shadow as it flies above” (Thomson 99). “If you pass under, trap a sky-soul bird/ your foot upon its shadow as it flies” (Soyinka *Selected Poems* 144). Thus, the “shuttle” facilitates the poet’s flight from reality into fantasy to create his “protective shield” that keeps him away from the psychic degeneration of the crypt.

Soyinka captures the soul of the bird to protect himself from his mind-butchers” (Soyinka

Selected Poems 96).

In the passage of looms, to a hum
Of water rising in dark wells
There to play at trap-the-shuttle
To step on the flight of its shadow soul
And hold it captive in a home
Of air and threadwaves, a lamp
Of dye-fuels hissing in the sun.
Elusive as the thread’s design. (144)

The poet’s “captors” may “stop his mental flight.” However, Soyinka continues to weave the “threads” of Nigerian’s demise. His mental flight is characterized by “ontopoiesis” (Louchakova²), the creative power of the mind to survive the horrible conditions of prison. Therefore, his mind is not “touched” by “small minds,” the jailers who tend to “soil his being” (Soyinka *Man Died* 228). Soyinka’s memory practices to overcome the scenes of torture transform the traumatic experience of incarceration into a progressive experience. His act of memory during incarceration reproduces the images of decay and destruction as a vehicle for

renewal and rebirth. Thus, Soyinka’s mental shift in perceiving the scenes of torture leads to his personal salvation.

Cultural Manifestations of the South Africans’ Collective Memory

The cultural manifestation of a shared past through the cultural artifacts sustain the social cohesion and life continuity. According to Soyinka, rewriting and rereading the South Africans’ mythology and other oral traditions is a way of creating and envisaging new modes for responding to grief. The articulation of the South Africans’ collective burden preserves the South Africans’ past as part of their cultural heritage. This shift in the formation of memory from the personal myth of freedom into the mythical wholeness of the whole nation reawakens the South Africans’ consciousness and collective will to begin their transitional phase of reconstruction and rebirth.

Blacks’ Public Performance for Collective Unity

The South Africans undergo a process of recovery for their “oral traditions” for articulating their collective past. According to Erll Astrid’s views, collective memory refers to the different “practices by which social groups construct a shared past” (5). She asserts that myth, music, and other oral traditions are “different modes of referring to the past” within social groups (Astrid 7). “Blacks’ lyrical contention,” according to Whitehead, reflects the South Africans’ creation of “local ways of absorbing and responding to grief and conflict and envisaging modes of healing” (Whitehead 17).

The singer’s tongue is loosened

The drummer’s armpits

Flex for a lyrical contention
 For subterfuge has spent its course
 And self-acclaiming
 Spurs the Cause to the season of enthronement
 Acolyte to Craftmaster of them all,
 Medium of tremors from his taut membrane
 I celebrate. (4)

The South Africans envisage the mode of “talking drum” to communicate their grief (Nkeita 229). The drummer’s performance communicates blacks’ traumatic suffering and helps alleviate their traumatic bruises. In a certain sense, the collective suffering of the Blacks can be heard and visualized through “the performative acts of [Blacks’] cultural remembering” (Astrid 8). The audible sound of the “drummer” announces “the season of enthronement,” the beginning of a new stage of reconstruction.

The “drummer’s lyrical contention” reflects the “dynamic formation” (Thelen 1117) of blacks’ collective memory. Blacks shift the representation of their collective memory from the cultural to the public to articulate orally their loss. According to James Gibbs’ views, “O gun Abibiman impacts the oral on the written medium” (198). Blacks’ cultural manifestation of their collective memory through O gun’s myth is intertwined with blacks’ public performance of their collective suffering to enhance their sense of being. This interrelatedness between the oral and the written form reinforces the social act of blacks’ struggle against apartheid.

Blacks’ changing modes for articulating their collective memory is a “reaffirmation of their being” (Attwell 36). The images of “duiker,” “lion,” “elephant,” and “egret” symbolize

Blacks' progression and development. The identification of Blacks with animals reflects Blacks' "strength" and courage.

In time of race, no beauty slights the duiker's

In time of strength, the elephant stands alone

In time of hunt, the lion's grace is holy

In time of flight, the egret mocks the envious

In time of strife, none vies with Him

Of seven paths, Ogun. (14)

The repetitive "proverbial chants" celebrate blacks' collective will. The rhythm of the chants reflects the unity and harmony within the Blacks' community (Okpewho 321). The collective performance of blacks' will retains in the traumatized black his sense of belonging to the African community and African culture. It creates a space for blacks to articulate their traumatic suffering through oral cultural materials.

Since Blacks are ignored and neglected for a long time; they are not seen by their oppressor, it the time for them to assert their existence. The revival of South African's "cultural materials" for remembering their past has its role in the constitution of Blacks' identity. Blacks acquire means for identification through the cultural performance of their collective will. Blacks are identified with their cultural heritage and their cultural artifacts. Thus, the revival of the South Africans' "cultural materials" for remembering the past "locates" Blacks within their African community. Such positioning of the Blacks "incorporates them within history" (Divya 314).

Thus, this section reflects Soyinka's cultural representation of the South Africans' struggle against white oppressors through his manipulation of O gun's myth, Yoruba symbolism, and "drum-talking" as different modes from African oral tradition. The transformation of O gun's

myth and Ogun's transcendence Earth to unite with the South Africans in their liberation struggle raises the South Africans' sense of unity. This creates the lost social cohesion within the Black nation. The cultural representation of the Blacks' collective will implies a return to the South African culture with its distinctive flavor, and hence the traumatized Black returns to his African origin.

Reconstitution of the South Africans' Past

The creation of blacks' mythopoeic community, Abibiman, and the accumulation of their will communicate their collective memory. Blacks' collective memory contributes to the reconstruction of their identity. According to Mary Weedon and Jordan Glen, collective memory incorporates "aspects of identification that may empower" (143). What is significant in articulating Blacks' collective memory is the reconstruction of a "meaningful relationship between past and present" (Huysen 3).

The major core of collective memory is the reconstitution of "the shared past" (Olick 335). Jeffery Olick states that "collective memory is the active past that forms our identities" (335). The "active past", according to Olick, is the past in relation to the present moment. That is why the reconstruction of a "meaningful relationship between past, present, and future is crucial for the identity-formation,"

Remembrance shapes our links to the past, and the ways we remember defines us in the present. As individuals and societies, we need the past to construct and anchor our identities and to nurture a vision of the future. (Huysen 3)

Memorizing the past in the present create new meaning for the traumatic past. Perceiving the traumatic past in the present provides means for self-definition. Blacks' present moment of

onslaught against oppression provides them with means for self-definition like, unity and culture. The “legendry encounter between Shaka and O gun”(Ogundipe-Leslie 198) in Blacks’ liberation struggle reconstitutes the meaningful relationship between blacks’ traumatic past and their present moment of struggle.

In the second section, “Retrospect for Marchers: Shaka,” Soyinka introduces the metaphorical union of Thomas Mofolo’s Shaka and O gun. Ojaide emphasizes that Soyinka’s *O gun Abibiman* depends on “Thomas Mofolo’s Shaka and its military tradition together with the O gun myth” to encourage the Black people in their struggle to gain freedom (*Soyinka’s O gun Abibiman* 153). Shaka is Zulu king, “a heroic figure who restores the dignity of his people. It is a sort of leader from Africa’s past” (Ojaide *O gun Abibiman* 153). Soyinka’s mythological characters, O gun, and Shaka, serve certain functions in the representation of the South Africans’ communal plight.

The unity of Shaka and O gun “reaffirms blacks’ sense of being” to regain their “lost possessions.” O gun’s revolutionary spirit in the first section creates blacks’ will and unity in their encounter with the white “usurpers.” While the metaphorical encounter between Shaka and O gun reconstructs blacks’ past as a vehicle for rebirth and renewal. Shaka comes from “the past” to reunite with O gun in Blacks’ liberation struggle against apartheid. Soyinka sets Shaka’s

figure as a symbol of blacks’ long history of traumatic suffering. For Soyinka,

History has been not so much a record of human actions as a demonstration of the manner in which social behavior so often symbolizes a sometimes voluntary, sometimes unwilling obedience to the subliminal impulse of the ancestral memory. (80)

In his definition of history, Soyinka refers to the interrelatedness between collective memory and history. He refers to history as a “social behavior” in which individuals unconsciously recall the

“ancestral memory.” Collective memory is a social activity, the different practices the individuals undergo to refer to the past. Collective memory and history are inseparable in blacks’ construction of the past.

The portrayal of Shaka is a symbolical reflection on the South Africans’ long history of traumatic suffering. The retrieval of “Shaka’s memory” recalls apartheid’s ruses to end the South African “kingdom.” Shaka’s “memory” allows Soyinka to “register the brutalities of apartheid.” In a certain sense, Shaka’s “memory” constitutes blacks’ collective memory as “another mode for referring to the past” (Astrid 7). Collective memory “challenges the monopoly of history over the past” (7). History is concerned with “the registration of certain past incidents” (Bal et al. 256). In contrast, collective memory represents “the image of the past recollected by people within community” (Halbwachs *On Collective Memory* 30). However, collective memory “offers history another kind of source or document; one that provides insights into the past as it lives in the present” (Bal et al. 256). Thus, Blacks’ collective memory serves a significant role in reconstructing their long history of traumatic suffering.

The unity between Shaka and O gun marks the turning point in the South Africans’ struggle against their white oppressors. With the union of Shaka and O gun, “O gun meets Shaka, and of that meeting of north and south, myth and history, Abibiman, the triumphant black nation, is born” (Owomoyela116). Such a “legendary encounter” is described as (Ogundipe-
Leslie 198),

Turmoil on turmoil!

O gun treads the earth of Shaka

Turmoil on the loose

O gun shakes the hand of Shaka

All is in turmoil. (11)

O gun “treads Shaka’s Earth,” and causes “turmoil.” O gun “shakes the hand of Shaka” and this announces their reunion. The repetition of “turmoil” symbolizes the encounter between O gun and Shaka in Blacks’ armed struggle. On meeting Shaka, “O gun shakes his hand” (11).

Shaka asks O gun to “restore” his “seeds” to “reclaim” his “seeds,” to support him in the process of reform and to “restore” his “manhood,” to recover his sense of being as “a founder-king” of the South Africans in their struggle against apartheid.

Reclaim my seeds. Restore my manhood.

Their cries are trumpeted in the dead abode...

... O silent one, my tap-roots

Wait your filling draught to swell

To buttress. Restore my seeds. Reclaim

The manhood of a founder – king. (12)

The auditory image in “their cries are trumpeted in the dead abode”; designates the reunion as a kind of musical performance to highlight such a “dramatic moment” (Ogundele 58). The audible sound of their cries announces their reunion with the Blacks as a decisive moment in the South Africans’ history.

The alliance between Shaka and O gun leads to “the upheaval of” the South Africans’ “giant roots.” The reunion of Shaka and O gun symbolizes “Soyinka’s ploy to recover the South

Africans’ roots” (Ogundipe-Leslie 198).

When tap roots join across the years

Twining the landness spread too vast ...

... the mind may yield

Beneath the weight of earth about to be undone

At this upheaval of our giant roots. (12)

The repetition of “tap root” image reinstates that the return to African roots is an important step in the South Africans’ phase of reconstruction. With the South Africans’ return to their roots, the traumatized Black can regain his sense of self.

More significantly, Shaka’s alliance with O gun symbolizes the need for Blacks’ onslaught against their oppressors. It is a symbolical way to raise Blacks’ consciousness “to rise and deliver the last blow on the apartheid system.”

The O gun/Shaka alliance is Soyinka’s way of symbolizing the need for all of Africa to rise and deliver the last blow on the apartheid system, especially as all other non-military options (dialogue, entreaties, threats, sanctions and other “games of time pleading”) have failed. (Osakwe 467)

Blacks realize the whites’ ruses for exploitation and domination. The white usurpers’ dialogue and sanctions are the “febrile barks of the dog.” They are “games of time pleading.” Soyinka asserts that “apartheid plays games on human intelligence” (*This Past Must Address its Present* 438). The policies of apartheid tend to end the protest, “the steel event.” However, blacks expose the oppressors’ “febrile barks” and pursue their preparation for their onslaught. Thus, “the O gun/Shaka alliance” asserts the necessity of war at this phase of reconstruction.

The symbolical union between Shaka and O gun combines “history and myth, past and present” to create the decisive moment in the South Africans’ history in which Blacks “preserve their past as part of their cultural heritage” (Wang 307). As a result, Blacks’ traumatic suffering is “incorporated within history (Tolia-Kelly 314).

Our histories meet, the forests merge

With the savannah. Let rockhill drink with lion
 At my waterholes. Oh, brother spirit,
 Did my dying words raise echoes in your hills
 When kinsmen matched broad blades
 With Shaka's shoulders? The whites have come,
 And though you seize my throne, you will never
 Rule this land. (13)

The South Africans' long history of denial is culturally manifested through the metaphorical union of Shaka and Ogun. Soyinka's "mystification of history," the fusion of myth and history, communicates the past as it lives in the present. The fusion of history and myth represents a promise for resolution and rebirth for the South Africans. Such a "legendary encounter" between two different historical moments recreates the "cultural cohesion" within the African nation (Wang 37). Such cultural cohesion is the production of the reestablishment of "the meaningful relationship between past and present" (Keightly 58). Shaka represents the painful past of the South Africans. His "promise" that "no one can dominate the South African nation," "you will never/ Rule this land, articulates the rebirth of the South Africans as a powerful nation.

The "echoes" of Shaka's voice are heard all over the continent, announcing his alliance with the South Africans in their struggle against apartheid. With Shaka's unity with the South Africans, blacks regain their lost possessions. Shaka makes a promise to Abibiman that "no aliens will rule this land" (Nagara 99).

Their union is a historic moment for it signifies the union of the forests and savannahs, the merging of tropical and sub-tropical Africa as one continent and one nation, fulfilling his prophecy that his land would never be ruled by aliens. (Nagara 99)

South Africa's physical landscapes which bear the scars of the Igbo massacre and the Nigerian Civil War witness the new era of the South Africans' empowerment in their encounter with the white oppressors.

Revisiting the Past Brutal Atrocities

The resurrection of Shaka announces the rebirth of the African nation. The rebirth of the African nation is crucial for the phase of reconstruction, however it "carries a heritage of impurities." To achieve the rebirth of the African nation, the South Africans should be purified from the impure past. In doing so, Soyinka opens the South Africans' "wounds to cleanse them, to deal with the past effectively and so to close the door on that dark and horrendous past forever" (1). Thus, Soyinka resurrects Shaka to relive his past errors against the people of amaZula.

The metaphorical union between Shaka and O gun corrects the brutal mistakes against the oppressed. Shaka's voice articulates his brutal deeds against his people, "Shaka turned on his own men and slaughtered them" (Jones 207). Articulating his past brutal deeds, Shaka corrects the mistakes of the past.

Kind knows kind, but only as the wholeman

Knows his pus-filled finger, In what I did

Was Shaka, but Shaka was not always I (15).

In Shaka's dramatic monologue, "what I did / Was Shaka," Shaka recognizes his past historical mistakes against his people. Shaka destroys his nation, he "left nothing for the rains to suckle after" (Soyinka *O gun* 11). Shaka's memory articulates the brutalities of the past. Shaka is a representative of those African leaders whose personal affairs and exploitation causes the

destruction of the whole community. His brutal deeds against the people of amaZulu recall the history of the “white termites” that “eat” blacks’ “kingdom.” Therefore, blacks’ recollection of the image of the white “usurpers” reconstructs the brutal past as a generative power for rebirth.

Where I paused, Ogun, the bladegrass reddened.

My impi gnawed the stubble of thornbushes,

Left nothing for the rains to suckle after. (11)

The images of “stubble of thornbushes” and the “red bladegrass” illuminate the total destruction of Shaka’s land. Using the first-person pronoun, “I,” transpires Shaka’s voice, testifying to his brutal deeds. The voice of the victimizer, Shaka, confessing the destruction he has brought,

This gangrene seeps, not through Shaka's heart

But in his loins. The sere bequest yet haunts

Descendants of the amaZulu, empty husks

Worm- hollowed in places of bursting germ. (13)

The plague of trauma affects the “descendants of the amaZulu,” the successive generations. It is transmitted to the successive generation. It is like “gangrene, an infectious disease.” The trauma of “amaZulu” destroys the land; it eats even the “stubble of thornbushes” and leaves the land bare. Such description is projected on the cultural trauma of the South Africans, which shatters the physical landscape of the land.

Shaka’s confession of his past brutal deeds leads to his personal salvation. As a result, Shaka reconstructs his new identity as the “builder” and the “founder” of the South African nation. Shaka’s figure bears the image of the past as reflected in the present. His past brutal deeds are brought together with his new identity as the “founder” and the “builder” of the black nation to construct a meaningful relationship between past and present.

Fought battles, invented rare techniques, created
order from chaos ...

Raised the city of man in common weal. (15)

With his new identity, Shaka “fought battles,” “invented rare techniques,” and “created order from chaos.” His active participation in Blacks’ struggle against their white oppressors creates a meaningful relationship between Blacks’ brutal past and their armed war, the present. In other words, Shaka leads the African nation to bridge the gap between the incomprehensible traumatic past and the present moment of the South Africans’ struggle against oppression.

Shaka “announces his being a new in O gun’s embrace.” He becomes the spokesman of the South Africans. Shaka asserts that Abibiman “was the nation” he “would build,” and the African land was “the earth” he sought

Oh, my pride of men! Their sparseness

Was the nation I would build, the earth

I sought, the dreams of race which beckoned me

From slaughter valley to the Hill of Destiny. (12)

Shaka articulates the future “agenda” for the reconstruction of Abibiman, the Black nation. He leads the South Africans to the transitional phase in which the traumatized Black regains his sense of self and his sense of belonging. He asserts the supremacy of the Black race.

Thus, Communicating Shaka’s memory of the past atrocities against his people, Soyinka fuses the present moment of the South Africans’ struggle with the past historical era of Shaka. According to Halbwachs’ views, “remembrance is in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from present” (*Collective Memory* 69). In other words,

Shaka's memory of his past brutal deeds reconstructs Blacks' collective memory of the past traumatic incidents.

More significantly, Shaka's memory is a reflection on apartheid's brutal past against the South Africans. Shaka's "excessive evil" represents apartheid's policies to usurp the South African land. The image of the white "termite" who "built their nest to eat the kingdom" represents the way the whites "usurp" the forest, the South African land.

The termites that would eat the kingdom

First built their nest

In the loin-cloth of the king. (13)

The white usurpers, "the termites," destroy the "kingdom," the African nation. Apartheid is being "nurtured and fed" by the support of the colonial powers; some rulers who support the oppressive regime (Osakwe 3). The symbol of "termite" in "Yoruba tradition" reflects destruction (3). The image in "built their nest/ In the loin-cloth of the king" debunks the white's ruses for interfering with the South Africans' internal affairs.

The portrayal of the treacherous South Africans' leaders who exploit the Blacks' land and rob their resources exposes the corruption and degradation within the apartheid system. The images of "scorpion in the thatch," "hyena," "dealer in death" reflects the greedy, bloodthirsty, disloyalty, and dishonesty of such leaders (3).

Bid all beware the scorpion in the thatch —

His cunning lacks all shame

Make note of the dealer in death

A stink of the hyena, gorged in carrion. (15)

The “scorpion” is invisible but he has his cunning ruses to cheat. “A stink,” an olfactory image, reflecting the way the African leaders’ strategies are exposed. They are being heard, visualized, and even smelled. The symbolism from “Yoruba tradition” reflects the role the African cultural materials play in the reinterpretation of the Blacks’ “cultural trauma.”

To distinguish between Shaka and the corrupted African leaders, Soyinka introduces the image of the “usurpers masked in skins” who pretend to be like Shaka. But in fact, they are” jester with grinning teeth.” The image refers to all treacherous African leaders who “tread” Shaka’s earth, Abibiman, pretending to follow his footsteps in the construction of the African nation.

Beware of life-usurpers masked in skins
 Flayed from the living forms of amaZulu
 Beware the jester masks with grinning teeth
 Of the corroded panga. (17)

Soyinka unravels the reality about the apartheid in South Africa. He shatters the “official memories” of the oppressors and this leads to the construction of Blacks’ “collective psychologies” (Wang 307). The repetition of “beware” is to set the contradiction between the resurrected Shaka, the builder of the South African nation, and the South African’s “usurpers.” The image of “Panga,” extracted from the African culture, promotes the African culture supremacy over the European and redeems the oppressors’ “official discourse.”

To eliminate the corrupted African leaders, the “steel event” must “gain completion.” As an agent for reconstruction, Shaka asserts that the “task” of the South Africans’ struggle for liberation must be completed. Frantz Fanon emphasizes that trauma recovery is impossible if the

colonial situation remains. Therefore, blacks' violent war is a necessity to end their long history of traumatic suffering.

The task must gain completion, our fount

Of being cleansed from termites' spittle-

In this alone I seek my own completion. (13)

Both Shaka and O gun reinstate that the South Africans' violent struggle against apartheid is a matter of "dedication." They "sought" Blacks' salvation from "termites' spittle," a mission which should be undergone for the achievement of the traumatized Black's sense of being.

Shaka undergoes "expiation" through O gun's "transformative ceremonies." O gun's "ceremonies" are for cleansing blacks from their traumatic bruises. Shaka's purification is a therapeutic process to purify the South Africans from the brutal past.

Through the "rituals" of Shaka's "purification," blacks announce their rebirth. The section ends with O gun's "transformation ceremonies for a post-climatic restoration for the Black race" (Soyinka *Myth* 57). The transformation ceremonies of blacks' phase of transition enhances the dynamic formation of blacks' collective memory as the representation of collective memory shifts from collective into public.

Our songs acclaim

Cessation of a long despair, extol the ends

Of sacrifice born in our will, not weakness.

We celebrate the end of that compliant

Innocence of our millennial trees. (21)

Alexander states that the representation of collective memory reconstitutes and reconfigures a collective identity. Blacks' oral performance articulates oneness and unity. Blacks' "song"

celebrates the end of their traumatic suffering. It articulates their collective will and their rebirth, the end of their “complaint” and their “long despair.” The pronoun, “we,” communicates Blacks’ unity and Blacks’ collective will. The image of the “millennial trees” represents the growth and the development the traumatized black manages during this phase. It refers to blacks’ consciousness growth regarding the communal trauma of the African nation and the reconstruction of their collective will.

Thus, Blacks’ collective memory is manifested through the cultural representation of the past. Aspects of memory, culture, and unity are brought together in the representation of the South Africans’ collective memory to register the fateful traumatic past of the South Africans. These three components: the memory of the traumatic past, the “cultural formation” of myth, and the unity of the African nation, Abibiman, set the basis for the construction of collective identity. It creates what Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka called “Concretion of identity.” (128). Thus, the South Africans’ consciousness growth helps “reproduce their identity” (128).

Collective Memory as a “Cultural Process”

The song for Shaka’s purification at the end of the second section, “Retrospect for Marchers, Shaka” dramatizes the incidents and links the second section with the third. In “Sigidi,” the last section in the epic, Soyinka communicates the Blacks’ collective memory through, Sigidi, “the war-cry,” a song from Yoruba tradition. “Sigidi” means “the song of the spear blade as it bites: I have eaten” (Nagara 99). Soyinka’s “war-cry” symbolizes the necessity of Blacks’ struggle against oppression. In this sense, collective memory is transformed into a “political force” which encourages the South Africans to begin their armed struggle against their white oppressors (Eyerman 16).

Soyinka's "war-cry" represents the South Africans' collective memory as an action. Participation in collective behavior is what constructs the collective identity of the group. Once to act the individual memory of the traumatized self breaks its barrier and the collective identity is reconstructed (Eyeran 14).

Blacks' collective struggle against oppression shatters the limitations of the traumatized Black's traumatic memory. Such a transformation of memory into an action marks the traumatized self's development from the phase of seclusion into the phase of unity and reconstruction. It is part of the "dynamics of collective memory" which marks the continuous progress the traumatized Black attains during this phase (Thelen 1117).

Soyinka establishes a dialogical exchange in which he addresses the opponents of the battle, recalling the memories of past atrocities. He recalls the South Africans' traumatic past to reconstruct the past "as a tool to bolster" their struggle against oppression (Hoelscher and Alderman 349).

And tell me, you upon whose human heart
 Descends this fear, this shadow framed
 Of the Apocalypse, say, pacific love
 If love survives the lash, contempt,
 The silenced screams in blood-lit streets,
 Say, if love outlasts the writing on the wall
 In hidden cells of Death's own masonry
 Say, if love survives the tether's end
 Will love survive the epitaph--
 Can love outrace the random bullet. (20)

He emphasizes that the South Africans' military struggle is a campaign against the dehumanization of the Blacks and the exploitation of their land. Soyinka emphasizes that war is the only solution in the face of tyranny, "a duty to sweep the tyranny away" (Jones *The Poetry of Wole Soyinka* 205). Soyinka states that "pacific love" does not work in front of the scenes of traumatic suffering. The visual image in "blood-lit streets" portrays a living scene of death. The image of "silenced screams" represents the inner traumatic suffering of the traumatized Blacks. The plural form of "screams" reveals the increasing number of the atrocities the traumatized Black witnesses. "Epitaph" refers to the traumatic scenes that are inscribed in the mind of the South Africans.

Soyinka's "multidirectional memory" recalls the atrocities of "Guernica," "Sharpeville," and "Lidice." Remembering such fateful events provides the South Africans with enthusiasm for implementing their struggle. The repetition of "remember" links past, present, and future. The negative expressions of "go sour" and "aborted fetuses" highlight the negative consequences of the South Africans' non-violent strategies in dealing with their "usurpers."

Remember this. And remember Spain-Guernica

Remember dreams that will go sour, ideals

A float on the cesspools of time-

Aborted fetuses-remember this. And remember

Lidice-then Sharpeville too. Remember,

When safely distanced, throned in saintly

Censure, the prophet's voice possesses you-

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world et cetera

Remember too, the awesome beauty at the door of birth. (21)

More significantly, the South Africans' collective struggle constructs the traumatized blacks' concept of the future and gives life its normal continuity. The memory of the future "dreams," that give "birth" of an era of construction the fruitful development at this phase. Blacks' "future dreams" shatter the limitations of the memory of the brutal past. Consequently, blacks achieve their conscious perspective of their future. The stanza ends with a "positive note" that the African nation can bring "beauty" out of violence.

The poet's voice is heard and Blacks begin to react.

The poet now is given

Tongue to celebrate, if dancers

Soar above the branches and weird tunes

Startle a quiescent world. (20)

"To startle a quiescent world," Soyinka deploys Yoruba traditions for celebrating the act of war. Soyinka emphasizes that music is part of Yoruba tradition; music is used in mythology, poetry, and other forms of expressions (*Myth* 148).

Soyinka composes a musical performance for constructing Blacks' collective memory.

Collective memory, according to E. Keightley, is a kind of performance (58). Such a performance makes the epic a "propaganda" by means of which Blacks gain the space for testifying their communal plight (Ojaide *O gun Abibiman* 160). The performance begins with the dancers' movements, announcing "the hour of ecstasy," the beginning of Blacks' struggle. Then the "talking-drum" provides Blacks' with the power for healing. "Dancing," as movements, symbolizes the action of Blacks' struggle, reflections on the progression of the traumatized Blacks. The audible "weird tunes" raises Blacks' consciousness concerning their decisive struggle against oppression.

Celebrating the act of war through “the arduous song” of the traumatized Blacks’ “grieving tongues” reflects the traumatic suffering of the Blacks. The song is “arduous,” it is an expression of pain. The image of “grieving tongues” shifts into the “drummer’s hand” in such a musical performance to “heal” the traumatic bruises of the past. And the “sorrow song” of pain changes to the “song of ecstasy on dancer’s feet.” In a certain sense, Blacks’ musical performance creates “one coherent discourse” for Blacks’ traumatic suffering (Adu-Gymfi 91).

Since song is arduous task to grieving tongues

And drums must pause while hands are raised

To heal, and to rebuild:

Now is the hour of song, the hour

Of ecstasy on dancer’s feet. The drummer’s

Exhortations fortify the heart. (22)

Soyinka represents the South Africans’ collective memory through “sorrow songs” to communicate their painful past. According to Soyinka, the sorrow songs “constitute the missing/ Chapter of the text.” It is the “role of the reader to fill the missing gaps within the song”. The reader’s participation in the Blacks’ musical performance creates a public recognition of the Blacks’ suffering.

The scene of Blacks’ “mythical wholeness,” articulating their sorrow songs of pain and celebrating their collective act of struggle reaffirms Blacks’ sense of being. It reshapes Blacks’ past as part of their “cultural heritage.” It asserts the “presence of the past in the present.” It reconnects the voice of the past with the voice of the present for the future and hence it reconstructs Blacks’ collective identity.

The Christian image of “transubstantiation” at the end of the section bears the transformation the traumatized Blacks manage at this phase. The image of “transubstantiation” is extracted from “the belief of the Roman Catholic that the wine and bread can be transformed into the blood and the body of the Christ.” It marks Blacks’ conversion from silence into action, from distraction into stability, and from seclusion into collectivity.

Now is true need

Of song and lyric, of festal gourds,

Libations, invocation of the Will’s

Transubstantiation!

O gun in the ascendant-let us now celebrate! (27)

The “invocation” of Blacks’ “Will” implies the transformation of the traumatized Black from a state of helplessness into a state of empowerment. The “oral components” of “song” and “lyric” communicate Blacks’ development and progression. They also promote the role of African oral materials in the interpretation of communal plights and the achievement of healing. The presence of “O gun” in the public celebration of Blacks’ progression recalls his “transformative power” for the achievement of salvation for the Black nation.

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