

Tracking the road of
subalternity in wole
soyinkas play ???the
road???.



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Tracking the road of Subalternity in Wole Soyinka's play The Road. After all, new uniform deserves new body. (The Road) The Road deals with the myriad issues bedeviling emerging modern Africa. Wole Soyinka envision a new Africa that would escape its colonial past by grafting the technical advancement of the present on its own ancient tradition. He envisaged a new future that would open its way to self-retrieval, Cultural recollection and cultural security. So he reformulated native myths, to accommodate contemporary reality.

He draws his archetypal pattern from the tensed social and political structure of his country or community. Such archetypes vibrate in such a way that a sympathetic resonance is set up within the reader. His works explore the connection and conflict between the western and Yorubian framework.

He also seeks to preserve and reintegrate the connection between ancient cosmic ritual and modern theatre. The colonizers demeaned the native as a savage, his land called a dark continent, his heart, heart of darkness, his religion barbarous and himself a cannibal. They are referred as the Subalterns which mean the people of inferior ranks without class consciousness; that is that group in society who are subject to the hegemony of ruling class. In case of Africa, these issues tightens and tense themselves in a much crucial way. What Crow and Banfield term the disruption of African history by the European imperialist is a crucial cause of current chaos. My endeavour in this paper is to track the road of subalternity in Soyinka's play The Road.

And for this, I have attempted to critically analyze the play under the notions??” issue, structure, character, language and non-verbal techniques. I have tried to deal Soyinka??™s relation to postcoloniality in order to fulfill the demand of my paper. I have not dared to delve in the details as The Road is still regarded as a rather obscure play and has already baffled many a critic when it was first published. The post colonial writers use their cultural myth to prove the ignorance of the colonizer and his racial prejudice. They prove through their myths the greatness of their religion, the cosmic vision engendered by it, the possibility of rejuvenation inherent in it and the lesson of universal brotherhood advocated by it. Myths engender ageless wisdom.

Soyinka as a great traditionalist uses myths as the core of all his writings. With the help of myth and rituals Soyinka brings to light the post-colonial agony in Nigeria. In The Road, the time is the celebration of the Ogun festival; the Alegamo ritual is also going on. The Alegamo is the cult of flesh dissolution which ends up in earthling of energy. Ogun, too, is a blood thirsty god, if not offered dog-meat he would demand a heavier sacrifice.

The dissolution of sensibility due to displacement and the disruption of the sense of time led to the disenfranchisement of the ??? self??? of the native resulting in the formation of the ??? other??? which was an alien to him forms the crux of his works. Thus, Ogun is the core of Soyinka??™s mythopoeia. The play is laid out at the transition phase of Nigeria, Death stalks the play; still it is not the end of life.

Life springs a new from death, which is the postcolonial solution to the upheavals caused by colonization and post colonization. Even the stage-

properties are agent of death. The stage properties are the ??? boleka?? (mammy wagon)??” turned ??? Aksident Store???, the spider reigning supreme in his web, with its predatoriness highlighted, as the postcolonial monsters; the shack and the road all have suffered a displacement from useful and harmless to the sinister and evil. The Spider is likened to the road awaiting the victims; the road is then equated to the snake that kills the unguarded.

Professor is another post-colonial spill over; he is both the agent and victim of postcolonial predicament. Soyinka??™s political activism is that he did not believe in the artist living in an ivory tower and composing works that had no relevance to society. In *The Road*, Soyinka??™s social concern is not merely on the number of accident-deaths but also on the cause. The cause for such an enormous amount of deaths on the roads of Nigeria caused by accidents in the belief of drivers and the passengers, who use the road, is tinged in Yoruba tradition. So the protesting mind of the playwright perceives this superstitions belief which has no relevance now.

Hence, giving a metaphysical touch to his theme he brings out his protest, leaving the rest to the audience or the readers to judge themselves. Soyinka chooses a conveniently thin plot to argue the very case of subalternity. The weightage shifts from plot to characters.

With a selective casting Soyinka achieves his aim as most of his characters come under the category of what is generally called subaltern. Salubi is jobless. Samson wants his driver companion, Kotonu to go back his driver??

™s job. Salubi wants a drivers license. Particular Joe, the policeman is corruption incarnate. There is also a chieftain of thugs, Say Tokyo Kid.

The Road is dominated by Professor, who symbolizes the western hegemony. He is a menacingly mysterious, death-in-life figure. Everyone in the play obeys him or respect him. He is virtually ??? the lord of the road??? because it is he who takes and forges the travel licenses with the convenience of an of an amazingly amenable policeman, Particular Joe.

The plight of the native or subalterns reflects in the character of Murano. Professor who tries to investigate death through Ogun mask, forces Murano to wear the mask; face to face with the Egungun, the spirit of death. The people gathered around are struck with terror at Professor??™s trivializing the ritual. ??? Do you want to go blind from things you shouldn??™t see??? remarks Say Tokyo Kid. He prevails on him to stop it, but Professor is adamant in his refusal to abandon this ritual. Professor, like the colonizers, has a sense of contempt for the natives or lower classes.

??? If you think I do this [providing shelter for the unemployed] from the kindness of my heart you are fools.??? He uses all his intellectual resources in order to make money. He charges the illiterate exorbitant ??? Consultation fees???, even when they want to discuss a simple problem. Like the very colonizers, he justifies his illegal activities as a solution, a compensation, a redress, a balance of inequalities??? and ignores its fatal ramifications. Professor is a sort of amphibian creature, neither African nor European. He is between the two worlds??” his connection with Christianity and his

closeness to the worshipers of Ogun. Besides Professor, there are men with names inspired by American crime and western films, like Say Tokyo Kid.

Such people adopt a Chicago gangster's drawl, yet sing traditional Yoruba. Say Tokyo Kid represents an ugly fusion of the traditionally African and the hard-headed materialism of an alien culture. Murano represents the true picture of subalternity as he has no ability to talk or to hear" he is dead and sinking toward dissolution. His muteness pricks the very question" Can the Subalterns Speak? There is no character in the play who is not diseased" there is an ambience of vice and greed. The play presents a grim picture of gloom and decadence, where a dog-eat-dog morality rules supreme.

People like Sergeant Burma and Professor embody the colonizers point of view and are ruthless and indifferent to human loss.