

# Culture conflict in death and the king's horseman

Literature



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Order 613427 Topic: Culture Conflict in Death and the Kings Horseman

## Introduction

The world cannot run on happiness alone; the scale of justice will tilt towards one way or the other, and one has to make constant efforts to strike the correct balance. Ego and pride come in the way of duties and obligations towards the society. We blame the societal ills for our current plight. Bitter recollections of the past forming part of one's own experiences or inglorious part of the history of the community/nation to one which belongs, haunt one and will continue to exercise variety of influences on one's social obligations and disposition. As mentioned in the Author's Note, " The play is based on events which took place in Oyo, ancient Yoruba City of Nigeria, in 1946"(5).

Culture conflicts are beyond the scope reasoning. They are faith-related and are valued by the people with tenacious regard than the articles of the legal constitution. The incident around which the play, Death and The King's Horseman is based on an event that took place in Nigeria during the British colonial rule. It pertains to the ritual suicide of the horseman of a prominent tribal Chief which was prevented by the law enforcing colonial authorities.

The people of the community resented this, as according to their unassailable conviction, the intended suicide if questioned and prevented, would throw a serious problem for the community. The horseman must die according to them for the overall welfare of the people of the tribe.

Reiterating these values, the Praise-Singer sings, "... there is only one world to the spirit of our race. If that world leaves its course and smashes on boulders of great void, whose world will give us shelter?"(11)

The impact of traditions and culture is strong; it blurs understanding of Life and Death. Elesin, the King's Horseman, has no qualms about embracing

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death, for his spirit must guide the spirit of the dead chief's ascent to the afterlife. Otherwise, it will fail to take off to the heavens and wander on Planet Earth to bring calamity to the Yoruba people. The jolly, happy and gay Elesin is out to celebrate his final day on Planet Earth, as acts like a possessed man as the rituals for termination of his life begin. The colonial rulers think that this is a barbaric act, besides being illegal, and intervene. In the world impacted by materialistic civilization, clash of old values and new ways is everywhere, and Nigerian society is no exception. According to the Yoruba people, the act of the British authorities is not just about saving the life of Elesin. It amounts to disruption of the cosmic order of the universe, as perceived by them and the welfare of the entire community is in peril. The people blame Elesin and Pilkings, holding them jointly responsible and condemn them of neglecting their spiritual obligations in preference to earthly and secular comforts.

Even modern education fails to make dent as for the traditional beliefs of the people at times. Presently, Yoruba community is seized with serious issues related to saving their community and Elesin's son, Olunde, who returns to his homeland after studying medicine in Europe, is willing to take on the responsibility to save the honor of the community and commits ritual suicide to undo his father's impropriety. This, he believes, will restore the honor of his family and set the universe in its proper course. Full of remorse, Elesin kills himself and condemns his soul to a degraded existence in the next world. The natives are still not satisfied with these remedial measures. They continue to lament that the world is now "adrift in the void."

## Conclusion

The culture conflict as depicted in the play is mind-boggling and it seems

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that there is no meeting ground between the western legal applications and the African traditions.

#### Works Cited

Soyinka, Wole. *Death and the Kings Horseman: A Play*. W. W. Norton & Company; 2002.

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