



Rituals and Ritualistic Trance: A Diatribe of the Caste System in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* and John Iwuh's *The Village Lamb*

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Abstract

*Caste denotes classification and stratification; a system where rankings, statuses, and social standings are pursued and maintained. The institutionalization and operational dynamics of the caste system are such that the upper social class and those in authority perceive others as puns whose social statuses should remain limited, confined within a particular boundary, and fit for religious cleansing and purification. Using content analysis anchored on Max Webber's theory of social stratification, the paper interrogates the caste system as exemplified in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* and John Iwuh's *The Village Lamb*, particularly on systemic ostracization, dehumanization, and social vilification. The paper finds the traditions in the two plays antithetical to social cohesion, peace, and development of the society for deploying its cultural and ritual crafts against the principles of fairness, justice, equity and inclusiveness. The paper avers that hiding under the toga of traditionalism and religiosity to commit murder even as such practices fall short of the tenets of modern justice should be discontinued. The paper concludes that these traditions are inhuman, exclusivist, divisionist, and should be discontinued in favour of a modernist, progressive, and unifying practice based on universal love.*

Keywords: Ritual, Ritualistic trance, Hypnotism, Caste system, and Drama

Introduction

Every society has a belief system that models the behaviour and lifestyle of the people. This lifestyle which is subsumed under the culture of the people manifests in the areas of marriages, coronations, weddings, festivals, naming ceremonies, burial rites, and wearing cloth ceremonies, and indeed, other allied matters such as class stratifications and social interactions. One finds that the categorizations above are closely knitted and define the way people relate to one another. Ritualism and ritual enactments are cultural elements that embellish and nurture social stratification and class distinctions.

Rituals from a literary point of view may be seen from the angle of what we do every day, our religious adherence to them as well as the way and manner we do them. No wonder Wilson (195) argues that ritual:

is a part of everyday life of which we are generally unaware... every one of us in our personal or family life develops rituals; a certain meal we eat with the family once a week, for example, or a routine we go through every time we take an examination in school.

That notwithstanding, ritualism as a concept, is tied to religion, the manipulative qualities of which continue to be important both overtly in the... world and covertly in secular art (Horn, 183). Duruaku (16-17) affirms that "the concept of ritual is often viewed from a religious perspective. This hinges on the belief that man craves incessantly to relate with his ancestors, deities and ultimately the supernatural being..." From a more elaborate perspective and tracing the origin of ritual and its religious connection, Horn (183-184) further asserts that:

The forces which govern man's world are beyond his control. There are sometimes palpable – rain, earthquake, animals, disease – and sometimes impalpable – fate, luck, and the apparent breakdown and discontinuities of causality. If it rains, there must be someone who makes it rain"

This person must be superhuman, invisible and elusive. There is a need, therefore, to physicalize and objectify sacred trees, and sculptured images for mediation through magical or ritualized worship. The priest or somebody with the unique knowledge and powers to supervise and lead the worship interfaces with the unseen agencies. Ritual in this context becomes a "culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized as Tambiah puts it, in varying degrees by formality (conventionality), stereotype (rigidity), Condensation (fusion) and redundancy (repetition)" (Layiwola 225). It also becomes, in what Nwanaju (260) terms "a stylized repetitive pattern of behavior associated with religious beliefs and practices and in some sense deemed to be sacred." Oftentimes, the person becomes a medium and once that happens, he is effectively no longer himself... his body and mind become occupied by the force and he speaks with its voice (Horn 184). In the process of asking the gods for protection and benevolence, severe rites requiring higher stakes are initiated. Such rites which bother on the lives, safety, and to a larger extent, the existence of a community or people are entered into with the gods. Human beings are placed as baits and thereafter regarded as weaker elements whose social status is limited and confined within a particular boundary. This is exactly what Adeyemi (2) meant when he argues that "culture's ability to give identity and a sense of belonging also makes it excludes, and engender the "us" and "them" feeling/attitude." Indeed, the caste system has always been a

class thing, a social stratification mechanism where some individuals are looked down upon, vilified, and treated with disdain and some kind of trepidation each time they tried forcing relationship. They are often seen as second-class citizens whose position in the society is already defined and any attempt to seek otherwise meets with strong refusal and deadly fisticuffs if necessary. The two plays under investigation provide an insight into the conundrum of the caste system in Nigeria.

Theoretical Considerations

This research is anchored on Max Webber's Theory of Social Stratification, which is a system of hierarchical categories. Max Weber defines stratification as the division of a society into distinct communities, which have varying assignments of "status honour" or prestige. Social stratification has been viewed by Weber in three dimensions: 1) economic class, 2) social status, and 3) political power (party). Each of these dimensions has its own stratification: the economic, represented by income and the goods and services which an individual possesses; the social, represented by the prestige and honour he enjoys; and the political, represented by the power he exercises. Power is the main element in his theory. Power has been viewed as the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action. Power gives social honour. Weber further viewed status from two distinct concepts: (1) class status, and (2) social status, which is primarily based on (1) mode of living, (2) a formal process of education that may consist of empirical or rational training and the acquisition of the corresponding modes of life, or (3) on the prestige of birth or of occupation. (www.iilsindia.com/).

The relevance of this theory with respect to the two plays under investigation cannot be overemphasized. There is a social stratification or what can be described as a caste system in the two plays. Just as power is the bedrock of Webber's theory so it is also with the two plays. In both plays, there is a class distinction between the indigenes, strangers and slaves. Because this kind of stratification exists, those who wield political powers use it to not only influence their positions but to also suppress the lower class. The cases of Uzokwe, Okpoka and Udemba in *The Village Lamb* and Jaquna, Oroge and Tutor in *The Strong Breed* are all clear cut examples. Indeed, all that happened to Amadi, A Girl, Ifada and Eman in both plays are a result of social stratification.

Synoptic Breakdown of *The Strong Breed*

The Strong Breed is a One Act play. It opens with Sunma telling Eman to make up his mind soon because of the imminent departure of the last lorry for the day. Eman did not heed her advice. Ifada, an idiot comes around and Eman discusses with him. Sunma did not like that. A Girl dragging an effigy walks in and asks after the teacher. She decides to wait for him when she is told he is not at home. She plays with Ifada. As they play, the lorry hoots, and Sunma appeals to Eman to rescind his earlier decision and leave the village, even if it's for a day but Eman refused. The lorry finally departs, leaving Sunma dejected and

frustrated. Having lost the opportunity to leave the village, Sunma pleads that they spend the night together without stepping out but Eman, once again, refuses; arguing that there is so much going on outside. She tells him that he is a stranger and that strangers are not wholly accepted in their society. As they retire inside, the Girl and Ifada are seen coming back. Suddenly, two men emerge from the shadows and bundle Ifada into a sack and disappear with him. The Girl flees, leaving her effigy behind. Sunma comes out to hang a lamp, sees the effigy, and gasps. Eman rushes in and makes to carry the effigy but is restrained by Sunma. They retire to play Ayo. Suddenly, there is a heavy pounding at their door by Ifada. Sunma begs Eman not to open the door but Eman pushes her away and lets Ifada in. The elders surround his house and demand Ifada. Eman releases Ifada to them and they remind him that they only use strangers. Ifada returns to the house, sees the effigy where the Girl had dropped it on her flight, and begins to strip it of its clothing. The Girl accosts him and they begin to struggle with it. Sunma comes in and angrily asks them to go away. Realizing the significance of Ifada's return, Sunma rushes in and realizes that Eman is gone. She goes to look for him. Eman escapes before he could be prepared.

The manhunt for him increases. While Eman is in hiding, he encounters his past. His father tells him that theirs is the strong breed and that it is their responsibility to take down each year's evil and that he has done it for over 20 years and hopes he would follow suit. His father begs him to stay but he refuses saying that he is not prepared for the assignment. Sadly, his father tells him that it is in their blood to do so and that he will only go to give others what rightly belongs to them. Eman is whipped back to the immediate by Jaguna and flees. Sunma, in a rage, flies at her father clawing at him and demands to know what he has done to Eman. Jaguna strikes her heavily which takes her down to her knees. Ifada helps Sunma up amidst sobbing. Still in Emma's past, Omae flirts with Eman who tells her to go before his Tutor sees her. He tells her that they are not permitted to see any woman whenever they are in the camp. The Tutor comes in and threatens to expel Eman for breaking a strong taboo if only Omae would walk with him into his hut and wash some of his clothes. He tries to force Omae but she resists it. Eman comes out with a bundle of his things and takes Omae away amidst the protestations of the Tutor. On their way, Eman tells Omae that he is embarking on a journey that he does not know when he would be back and advises her to go and stay with his father. Back to the present, Eman begs a girl for water. The girl goes in to get the water only for her to invite Jaguna and Oroge. On seeing the duo of Jaquna and Oroge, Eman flees once again. Knowing that he is thirsty, they lay ambush for him at the village stream. In a trance, Eman remembers Omae and her excruciating death giving birth to his son and the agonies his father felt losing a daughter-in-law as well as nursing a new borne.

Eventually, Eman is captured and agrees to perform the rites. However, Jaquna and Oroge are not happy because they did not get the kind of applause and commendation they anticipated and vow that somebody would pay for this.

Synoptic Breakdown of *The Village Lamb*

The Village Lamb is in twelve scenes with prologue and epilogue at the beginning and end respectively. In Scene One, members of the Inner Cult visit Ujowundu. They seek to know if Ujowundu has told Amadi what he needs to know in preparation for the festival. They feel discouraged by the slow antics of Ujowundu and inform him that it is a tradition that must be upheld. Ujowundu believes that people's attitudes must change as time no longer supports some ancient practices. They tell him to inform Amadi of the things he needs to know otherwise they would visit as the shrine demands. Amadi walks in and the elders take their leave. In Scene Two, the village square is agog with drumming and dancing. It's the Ahiajoku ceremony. The elders discuss the lean nature of the yams for the ceremony and pray to the gods to accept them. Ugochi, Amadi's admirer and his chosen one does a solo and Amadi goes to congratulate her.

Through the discussions of the elders, we learn that members of the Inner Court have given Ujowundu one week to describe Amadi's mandate to him and persuade him to meet the maiden of his life. Two masqueraders emerge at the centre and dance to the intricate rhythm of the drums. They get to the point of picking the yam but never did. They turn their back on the yams; a sign of rejection. Suddenly, a girl runs out from the crowd renting her clothes in the process. She bites deep into one of the yams and dances as if possessed. Almost immediately, a boy runs out in the same manner, makes to bite the yam, changes his mind, and runs away with it. In Scene Three, Amadi narrates to his father the encounter he had with a girl he desires and the scornful response from her. His father advises him not to take seriously what a girl tells him because their tongues are sharp and the words sour. He further questions why he didn't get a wife abroad. While they discuss, a boy runs in and asks to be saved because his pursuers are after his manhood. On realizing who is before him, the boy declines his help, saying that he is on the run too. Amadi is surprised and recounts what happened during the New Yam outing ceremony at the village square. He remembers the boy to be the one that ate raw yam at the village square. Ujowundu explains that the boy defiled the land and will continue to wanderer until he dies on the third day. Ujowundu further explains the event that happened on the Ahiajoku day; arguing that the masquerades represent the two villages and that why the masquerades did not take the yam is because the two youths slept together which is an abomination. He notices the amulet on Amadi's body and tells him that it's put on children of special births; and that with it, he would be hearing calls and a danger unto himself. Scene Four sees Amadi in a trance.

It is Janet's birthday and she craves the touch of her man. Refusing, Amadi explains that he has a sickness that can only be cured in his country, and narrates his disastrous love encounter in the aircraft. Janet opts to accompany him home and he agrees. Soon after, Janet begins to itch and scratch violently. Back to the present, Amadi tells his father about the experience he had with the girl at the Ahiajoku festival, who scornfully told him that she can not bear the itches of a raw yam. He seeks to know what that means but his father parries the question. Their discussion is interrupted by the entrance of two elders who

advise Ujowundu to let Amadi perform his sacred function. In Scene Five, Amadi seeks to know the origin of Ahiajoku festival and Ujowundu takes him through memory lane. He explains that it is a celebration that is anchored on the victory over the Whiteman. A woman and a child died in the hands of a Whiteman in his maternity and seeing this as sabotage and an apparent ploy to wipe out the community, the villagers pounce on the Whiteman and buried him alongside the mother and child. Since then, the ceremony has become a ritual festival, and each time, a young man must go with it. In Scene Six, Amadi visits Ugochi and asks if she has given a thought to his proposal. Ugochi replies that he should be every woman's dream but that he does not exist. This infuriates Amadi. They discuss further and Amadi leaves in anger. Obinna tells her that she has been hard on him and that nobody denies the lamb his chosen one. Ugochi faints. Udemba walks in, learns of what has happened, and dashes out with a cutlass.

In Scene Seven, Okpoka and Udenba bully Ujowunda along a bush path. Envisaging their bad intention, Ujowundu tactfully follows them. They remind Ujowundu that this year is their title-taking year and that his actions should not be seen to be impeding that. In the argument that ensued, Okpoka slashes through Ujowundu's gourd of palm wine, leading to a duel. In a desperate attempt to cut Ujowundu down, Udemba falls into the final strike of Okpoka. Okpoka runs away shouting that Ujowundu has killed a kinsman. In Scene Eight, Amadi's spirit is invoked, and ritual sacrifices are made on him. In the end, he is castrated. In Scene Nine, the villagers approach Ujowundu's house with cutlasses, sticks, clubs, and canes. Their advancement is paralyzed through the intervention of Obodo. Uzokwe comes in and urges the people on. Again, the Police halt them. In the process of interrogating them, Ujowundu points to Okpoka as the real murderer. In Scene Ten, the Eze questions the events leading to the festival. He sees Uzokwe's approach toward the festival as callous and a betrayal of the secret oath. He demands a new blueprint from Uzokwe. Uzokwe asks that they act fast and free their men from detention so that they would not start singing. In Scene eleven, the effect of Amadi's castrations begins to tell on him. Ujowundu tells him of the telegram from Janet announcing her desire to come to his country. Amadi seeks to know his parentage. As father and son discuss, Amadi remembers it is time for the festival and opts to get dressed. In Scene Twelve, the festival is ongoing. Amadi mounts the podium to speak and is beheaded in the process. The police, in the company of Janet, arrest the elders and urge Janet to press charges over the murder of her husband.

Interrogating the caste system in the plays

Caste denotes classification and stratification; a system where rankings, statuses, and social standings are pursued and maintained. Loosely, it means that in some societies, the opportunities one has access to depend on the family he happened to be born into. Unarguably, there are caste systems all over the world, where people are born into a position and social mobility, and who through the use of their positions, determine and influence the lifestyle and acceptability of others. For instance, in the Osu caste system predominantly practiced in the Eastern part of Nigeria, human beings are dedicated to deities and serve different purposes. They are regarded as outcasts and are not

permitted to marry or associate with the freeborn. However, the plays *The Strong Breed* and *The Village Lamb* present a somewhat different scenario from two different cultural backgrounds though with some elements of similarities. Indeed, the rigid caste system carving the roots of the once colonized continent is evident in the plays.

Amadi in *The Village Lamb* was not rejected by the gods during his dedication as abnormal birth, but the powers that be in the community typified by the likes of Uzokwe, Ikekwe Maduako, Okpoka and Udemba tagged him as one and manipulated every social and cultural means to destroy him. When Ujowundu questioned the rationale behind tagging Amadi lowborn having understood that the accusations leveled against his father were sketchy and not proven, Uzokwe boasts that he decides whose blood is next (p.13). Uzokwe strongly believes that those tagged *Osu* or lowborn have a responsibility to perform to the gods and must not evade it. Responding to the queries of Eze, he retorts that "I'm prepared to sacrifice myself to uphold the fact that they're the best meat for the gods; it's their fate and they can't change it. Time and wealth can't make a farce of truth. They are dedicated to the gods (89-90). With this position of his, he devised every conceivable means to consolidate his position including blackmail, arson and murder. A similar scenario played out in the case of Eman and Ifada in *The Strong Breed*, who were regarded as pawns in the hands of Oroge and Jaguna for manipulation. Eman questions why Ifada should be used when he appears not willing and Oroge arrogantly intones that he prepares them and that when he is through with him, he will be willing and joyous (20). What it implies is that one doesn't have to be willing before he is conscripted as long as it serves the purpose. Just as it is rumoured that the two deaths in the hands of the Whiteman in *The Village Lamb*, who established a clinic to save child mortality may have been sabotaged for personal gains, it may not be out of place to argue that the issues surrounding Amadi and his travails in the play are manipulations of the favoured few for personal gains. This accounts for why Ujowundu argues that, "...societies with high capacity for evil seek the least opportunity to introduce celebrations and make festivals out of them; a thousand gods, a thousand festivals and a thousand souls..." (Iwuh 57). Again, while some relish the opportunity to showcase their class status and power as can be seen from the boisterousness of Uzokwe in *The Village Lamb* and Oroge in *The Strong Breed* respectively, others humble themselves and seek equal opportunity and harmonization of roles. Ujowundu was born into a noble family but decided to remain a commoner because of the injustice and lopsidedness on critical issues in the community. He believes that those with authority now dictate the wishes of the gods:

Ujowundu: There is no justice because truth is suppressed. One with power becomes the opinion leader, his ideas are best and so his word is law. The mouthpiece of the oracle now utters personal dictation. There lies the confusion. Each time we are told the gods have spoken. The chief priest has a secret agenda (31).

He, therefore, believes that if he did not have a hand in the making of Amadi, why then should he have a hand in his destruction (13). He is also of the firm

belief that there is a need for reorientation as time no longer supports their cause. Indeed, he could not understand why a "community chooses the best of her manpower for slaughter?...why would the people levy themselves, add up revenue from palm produce to train one worthy son only to put him in such use? (50). Sunma in *The Strong Breed* also feels that there could be another way of washing the sins of the village away instead of engaging in the sacrifice of humans. She did everything within her powers as well to sabotage the process. She became a deviant and worked against her father. She argues in the play that she has renounced the ritual and that she is Jaguna's daughter only in name (11). She really wonders if she comes from that community because from the oldest to the smallest are nourished in evil and unwholesomeness for which she is not part (8). Because of her conviction that the process isn't right, she confronted her father, clawing and causing him some pain.

The travails of Amadi and Eman started from birth. For no obvious mistakes of theirs, they are tagged lowborn who are expected to carry the sins of their community and free them from the wrath of the gods. Firstly, Amadi was sent away for studies so that he would not get to know of his mandate and work to thwart it as Ocheze did (19). While he was Oversea, he was restless, remote-controlled and given a false sense of insecurity each time he meets a lady. Secondly, they manipulated his psyche with all sorts of contrived information to the point of willingly accepting to be the village lamb. On the part of Eman in *The Strong Breed*, he passed through similar circumstances and rejected the proposal immediately he gets wind of it and ran away to avert his fate. While the foster father of Amadi advises him to fight and avert his fate; that of Eman encourages him to accept the challenge. He believes that running away will not solve his problem and will only make him give to others what rightly belongs to them. They argue thus:

Old Man: Other men would rot and die doing this task each year after year. It is strong medicine which only we can take. Our blood is strong like no other...

Eman: There are other tasks in life father. This one is not for me...

Old Man: I am very sad. You only go to give to others what rightly belongs to us. You will use your strength among thieves. They are thieves because they take what is ours; they have no claim of blood to it. They will even lack the knowledge to use it wisely.... (26)

From that moment, Eman became a lone ranger, a wanderer, and a fugitive in another land. Similarly, when Amadi came home to the warm embrace of the elders, and misconstrued it to be a sign of love and affection. His father, Ujowundu admonishes him that he assesses himself wrongly as well as the society because an escaped prisoner does not walk back into the camp of the enemy (27). He further tells him that he would have been much safer if he had married a white lady and remained over there with her. Sunma in *The Strong Breed* also advises Eman not to be deceived into believing that her people love him because he is not wanted and they do not care at all what anybody does for them (8).

Eman, the Girl, Ifada and Amadi represent the rejected, vilified, stigmatized and despised group in society. For instance, because of Amadi's position, he was scornfully rejected and embarrassed by Ugochi even in the very presence of her brother, Obinna. She boldly told him that he should be every woman's dream but that he does not exist and that seeing him is a bad omen which of course, limits her chances of ever getting married (63). She eventually committed suicide when she was forced on Amadi. To her, it is better to take her own life by herself rather than do so during the time of delivery. By so doing, she not only cuts short the continuous propagation of the caste system since her offspring is expected to continue the circle but also showcases her total rejection of Amadi. Amadi was even more surprised when she told him that "rats of different colours do not cohabit" (26). Conversely, the Girl that came to Eman's house told him that she cannot come nearer because her mother would be angry with her if she sees her mingle with him. The girl that was to offer him water changed her mind and called the elders because of his position. Similarly, the woman who mistakenly poured dirty water on him, and hissed when she realized who he was did so because of the tag on him. Amadi was blatantly told to his face by the Boy who ran into their house in search of safety that he cannot help him because he himself is also on the run too (28). Of course, the Boy being of the same lineage with Amadi felt he could find help from his kind and suddenly realized it was impossible because "people at the same spiritual level read each other" (29). It was only those in the case of Eman who share the same fate with him that freely associate. For instance, Ifada knows that he shares similar fate with Eman and keeps coming around even when Sunma was hostile to him. As a matter of fact, Ifada's constant visit makes Sunma worried and apprehensive because she understands the implications of his association. Ifada and the Girl were vilified and embarrassed by Sunma but because they do not have options, they stayed put. The word which Sunma uses to address ifada "horrible insect" (2) goes to show his unacceptability and cancerous nature. She wished that he had gone into the bush when he was being pursued instead of following them with his own disaster (16).

Caste system engenders traumatic stress and psychological instability to its victims and those related to them. Amadi complains of having sleepless nights and feels secured only when he has his amulet on while Eman remains a wanderer in a place he was hitherto welcomed and presumably loved. The trauma Eman passed through while trying to evade capture can only be imagined than described. Fear was written all over Ifada when he was captured and was desperately looking for a savior. Sunma became physically disturbed and emotionally unstable because of the imminent threat on Eman's life. She got a hot slap from her father that sent her on her knees (28) in her bid to challenge him. Ujowundu was traumatized by the elders of his village to the point of forcefully drinking his wine and breaking his tapping gourd in the process. He cried like a baby and even made supplications to the gods to reverse his son's fate. He became more of a deviant to the extent that he no longer believes in the ways of his people. He became rebellious, refused to prep his son on his role in the forthcoming festival and eventually sought ways of preventing his involvement. Tension was palpable and the elders knew no rest. Oroge and Jaguna were restless and believe the year's exercise has been fractured. Even

after the deed had been done, they still remained unhappy. On the other hand, Okpoka and Udenba were worried over the antics of Ujowundu and seek ways to prod him into action. Uzokwe feels distressed because his authority is being questioned. All these culminate to the attack and violence on Ujowundu by the duo of Udenba and Okpoka. In the words of **Izsák-Ndiaye**:

Caste-based discrimination and violence goes against the basic principles of universal human dignity and equality, as it differentiates between 'inferior' and 'superior' categories of individuals which is unacceptable." Unfortunately, in many cases, attempts to challenge these prohibitions or the unlawful consequences derived from caste systems, which are hereditary by nature, result in violence against caste-affected individuals and retaliation against their communities.

Furthermore, Udenba never considers Amadi worthy as a potential son-in-law because of the lamb tag on him. To him, he should be avoided and having the gut to make advances on his daughter is a sign of connivance and conspiracy with his enemies to bring him down. He was willing to kill for it and if not for the intervention of Uzokwe and Okpoka, a different story would have been told. He sees Amadi as a vessel to achieve his long time ambition of becoming a titled man and connived with Okpoka to kill Ujowundu. Indeed, they regard Ujowundu as an outcaste, an *Osu* who should have respect for *Nwadiala* and ensure their happiness. The confusion that ensued soon after Okpoka killed Udenba and framed it on Ujowundu was as a result of his caste position and a ploy to have him destroyed by the community. It is an abomination for an *Osu* to kill *Nwadiala* and when the reverse becomes the case, it becomes a celebration. Often times, those with the caste tag are dehumanized in ways that appear barbaric and nihilistic. Amadi was castrated and offered to the gods because he is not *Nwadiala*. While carrying out this barbaric act, they made a caricature of his balls; how warm and large they are (77).

Victims of caste system suffer deprivation and stigmatization. Amadi had emotional needs as a man but because of the amulet which is designed to protect him from injuries and against enemies, he could not allow free reign to his desires. If not that he must present his bride before the festival, he would have kissed his desire to mate Ugochi goodbye. He was denied water and shelter when he so much needed them. Ifada was despised and loathed. Furthermore, as a stranger, Eman is not permitted to interfere in the affairs of the village and should as a matter of principle; disassociate himself from things that are capable of pitching him with the authorities. He should be uncompassionate, unaccommodating and self-centered. That he mingles with Sunma is viewed as an affront by Jaguna and that was why he called his daughter a harlot. Unfortunately, those who perpetrate this heinous crime on society in their subconscious minds know that they are doing the wrong thing. That accounts to why the Eze in *The Village Lamb* advises Uzokwe to sell all the animals in his possession and raise enough money to bribe and gag the police. To show their deceptive antics, they presented different effigies at different

time in the course of the celebration to deceive the unsuspecting public. Of course, they were caught up by the long arm of the law and humiliatingly taken away. Even after the sacrifice of Eman and Amadi, the confusion and the hypocritical attitude of people, still continues in the society. The readers are bewildered by the words of Jagunain *The Strong Breed* that "there are those who will pay for this night's work" (42).

Rituals, Trance and hypnotism as precursors of social stratification in the plays

The Strong Breed and *The Village Lamb* are partly all about the ritual and superstitious beliefs prevailing in the African societies. Communities and societies in Africa today religiously partake in ancient rituals that some may consider extreme, such as cannibalism and self-mutilation. In *The Strong Breed* and *The Village Lamb*, the extent to which individuals will go in order to rid a community of its sins and faults is tested by the sadistic annual sacrificial killing of innocent individuals for communal benefit. Wole Soyinka and John Iwuh introduce ritualistic human societies that expose the ferocity of human beings and emphasize the cruel nature of their members. The moral disgust that permeates the community prior and subsequent to the ritual, the uncommon traits seen in characters triggered by a ritualistic society, and dialogue that highlights increasing ferocity of human beings, brings into question the validity of whether or not ritualistic sacrifice is ultimately beneficial to a community. One might be forced to argue, from the community angle that it cleanses the society and frees it from damnation and wrath of the gods. However, the opposite is the case when judged by the caliber of individuals consumed in terms of their personality, pedigree and potentials. Both characters in the two plays are Medical Doctors with high expectations and the energy to improve the wellbeing of their communities. These expectations and dreams were cut short by their sacrificially bloodthirsty communities, who "do not value good trees" and thus "engage in bush burning." (Iwuh 52)

Ritual has special powers; it carries the magic or mystery of a meaningful, almost holy act. Its special powers manifested in the actions and inactions of Oroge and the Priest in *The Strong Breed* and Uzokwe in *The Village Lamb*. With these ritualistic powers, they are able to subdue their victims into becoming willing carriers. From birth, Amadi was ritually prepared to meet the demands of the community. When he was abroad, he was ritualistically manipulated and his amulet became a point of contact between him and his community. Ujowundu tells him that with the amulet, he is just a living robot and a danger unto himself (35). This Amadi indirectly affirms when he tells Janet that something always eats him up and that the voice keeps calling (39). While discussing with Odome in *The Village Lamb*, Nwaogu says to him:

Nwaogu: Do you think Amadi returned of his own accord? You talk as if the chief priest has lost his craft and ruthlessness (20).

Similarly, when Udemba confronted Uzokwe and tries to lift a finger on him having known that he knows the hidden intentions of Amadi to marry his

daughter, Uzokwe used his ritualistic powers to cast a spell on him. Emma's family bearing the title the "strong breed" undertakes the task of bearing the evil of the village in a vessel across the river annually in a ritually prepared manner otherwise, the process will not be accepted by the gods. Indeed, "...those performing a ritual assume that by carrying out a ceremony faithfully, they will be blessed or their wishes will be granted. Conversely, they assume that a failure to follow the ritual to the letter will lead to punishment" (Wilson 195-196). Therefore, the success of each year's outing in both plays hinges on the efficacy of some ritual sacrifices.

Trance and hypnotism is a ritual phenomenon. Trance is an altered state of consciousness, of relaxation, in which you feel as if you are letting go of the wheel of your life and letting something else take over. Your mind is extremely susceptible to suggestion in this state. You are conscious, but you are more of an observer. Similarly, Campbell Alistair writes that:

When most people think of a hypnotic trance, they imagine a situation in which someone forces them into a different state of mind and then makes them do things that they wouldn't normally do, against their will. This popular...(belief) is based on the idea that a hypnotic trance is something that can be imposed on a person, and that their behaviour when they are in a trance is in the control of the hypnotist – and outside of their ability to resist.

From the above inferences, it can be understood that one who is experiencing trance state does not seem to have a firm grip of himself/herself. That is why Raymond firth as quoted by Horn (187) argues that "...a person's actions are believed to be dictated by an extra human entity which has entered his body or otherwise affected....this may be regarded as instances of multiple personality...". This was the state of Amadi in *The Village Lamb* and partly that of Eman in *The Strong Breed*. In *The Village Lamb*, Amadi is described as a lamb with dual personality whose actions are dictated by the mythical belief in the scratch that makes him a monster each time he comes in contact with people of his age (56). The illusion of reality in this circumstance is that he usually becomes uncomfortable and develops a sense of guilt and apprehension; feelings that make him believe he has killed a soul. Very often in the play Amadi fell into trance in reconnection with his past experiences. Through this trance and hypnotism, he was able to answer the call of the elders in preparation for his castration and journey of no return. He hears voices and presumes those voices to be that of his father (76). At a point, he could not recognize himself. On the other hand, Eman's dual personality was heightened when he encounters his past. His trance state enables him to mutate with his father on the desirability for him to continue the family tradition. What is striking about their states in both plays is the unrecognizability of their identities and willingness to submit themselves to superior powers. Amadi was seeing heads at a point but through the use of hypnotism, he no longer sees any while Eman could only regain consciousness when he was whipped by Jaguna.

Conclusion

An examination of caste system as it is practiced in two cultural societies has been done and opinions formed in relation to the dangers it portends in the society. Suffice it to say that caste system, whether in the plays as analyzed or in societies that nourish it, negates the principles of fairness, justice, equity and inclusiveness. The fact that one has an abnormal birth or parentage does not make him lesser a person or individual. Conversely, segregation, discrimination and rejection of individuals based on their culturally imposed status are counterproductive and have retarded development in most communities. Dehumanizing individuals all in the name of maintaining an almost moribund culture should be discontinued. Why practice something one knows he would not be bold to defend in public? No doubt, the Osu caste system has been down played in most communities, yet its practice still permeates most communities in Nigeria, especially, the South East. Most persons hide under the toga of traditionalism and religiosity to commit murder; even when such practices are no longer sustainable.

Unfortunately, those in positions of authority who are expected to live above board and protect the sanctity of the human person are now the ones fueling the crisis. Government has done its best by promulgating laws banning such practices and it beholds on our leaders of thought to cement these laws to ensure full compliance. Of a truth, such practices in modern times have never solved our religious problems because the gods are insatiable and will keep asking for more. As can be gleaned from the two plays, even after the sacrifices, the much anticipated peace and decorous atmosphere did not materialize as we see people grumbling and making threats. Indeed, the use of rituals in modern times has "failed and is in need of reconstruction to make it serve the human person better....the throes and woes in the society are loud testimonies of the inadequacy of our way of life to provide satisfaction and comfort in the system (Ukutsemuya, 57-58). The lessons learnt here therefore, should be enough to reposition our thoughts towards avoiding acts that tend to divide us and promote unity of purpose, brotherliness and empathy.

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