

Representations Of Ghanaian Tradition In Sutherland's *The Marriage Of Anansewaa* And Fiawoo's *The Fifth Landing Stage*

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ABSTRACT: Culture identifies people in a society, and a society without culture lacks focus and direction in the upbringing and nurturing of its youth. This paper seeks to explore Ghanaian tradition in two drama texts: *The Marriage of Anansewaa* and *The Fifth Landing Stage* written by Efua Sutherland and Kwesi Fiawoo respectively. It will juxtapose Ghanaian perspective of African culture as presented in the plays. The playwrights couch their languages beautifully so as to present the tradition of Ghana to the admiration of the outside world. Aspects of culture to be discussed include: traditional marriage, patriarchal system, storytelling/songs, funerals, puberty rites, chieftaincy, etc and their relevance in modern Ghana. It will conclude by discussing the influence of foreign cultures on Ghanaians and the way forward.

Key words: Tradition, culture, *Mboguo*, appellation, patriarchy,

1. INTRODUCTION

Tradition is perceived as an inherited pattern or thought thus they are customs and beliefs that are passed on from generation to generation. This gives a clear indication that Ghanaian traditions are the ways of life of the people. It is therefore evident that tradition and culture are two sides of the same coin hence the two terms will be used interchangeably in the discussion of this paper. Culture is defined by Sarpong (1974: viii) as

The integral sum-total of behaviour traits that have been learned, and have not only been manifested and shared by members of the society but have been passed on from one generation to another in an uninterrupted succession. It is important to note that culture is learned and that it does not depend on inborn instincts or reflexes or any other biological inherited forms...

According to Sarpong, culture is the attitudes and common practices of people living together in a society who consciously or unconsciously pass on such behaviours to the unborn generation. Ghanaian customs (habitual practices) and beliefs (way of life) form the bases of our culture and traditions. Arnold also outlines the essence of culture and its relevance to human kind:

A pursuit of total perfection by means of getting to know, on all matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world and this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock of nations and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically (1932:6)

Arnold emphatically states that culture is adored by people living with it and that it is a matter which is of much concern to all and sundry. It therefore influences our way of life to the extent that its tenets are followed strictly to the latter. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines culture 'as the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group.' Culture can also be defined as the way of life depicted by a group of people. Several things identify people of the same culture and these include the food they eat; dresses they wear; behaviour they put up etc. The traditions of Ghana are not farfetched; this is because they are given a lot of recognition and adherence in spite of the influence of other foreign cultures. There are laid down rules and principles governing as well as deepening the traditions of the natives of Ghana. In spite of the fact that there are several tribes within the Ghanaian community, there are fundamental practices and customs that cut across all the tribes. In this work we will be discussing some of the traditions which are cherished and have since time immemorial suffice and continue to persist. Literature and culture can be placed and discussed under the same umbrella. While literature talks about the expression of life, culture exposes the way of life of people. Arnold (1932) defines literature as 'a criticism of life' and Agyekum (2007) asserts that literature is 'a representation of life experience and reality of the world through linguistic creativity and imagination.' Bressler defines literature as the concretization of the array of human values, emotions, actions and ideas in a

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story form. It is this concretization that allows readers/humans to experience vicariously the stories of a host of characters. Through these characters we observe people in action, making decisions, struggling to maintain their humanity in often inhumane circumstances, and embodying for us a variety of values and human characteristics that we may embrace, discard, enjoy or detest. (2003: 11) Ngugi perceives culture to be dynamic hence it is likely to change in the course of time:

Culture in its broadest sense is a way of life fashioned by people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment. It is the sum of their art, their sciences and all their social institutions, including their system of beliefs and rituals...(1970:4)

In Ngugi's opinion the change in culture is as result of human beings way of life which is influenced by the total environment including the exposure, attitudes and mind set. Human beings should be able to accept and adjust to the changes that are likely to immerge in their cultural practices. The correlation between culture and literature is evident in the sense that they all address issues about human life experience.

2. DISCUSSION

i. The Role of Traditional Rulers

The role of chiefs or traditional rulers in Ghanaian society is very significant to the extent that they are given recognition in all spheres of our society. They perform roles such as settling disputes, maintaining law and order, ensuring safety and security, developing the community etc. In the play, *The Marriage of Anansewaa*, Sutherland presents the Ghanaian tradition to outsiders by using appellations for the four chiefs in his letters to them. The four chiefs were given different allocates by the protagonist to indicate that they are highly revered in our society. Witness Chief of Sapa's appellation:

*O Mighty-Tree-of-Ancient-Origin!
Mighty-Tree-of-Ancient-Origin,
Rooted in the shrine of deity!
Countless branches in which
Benighted wandering birds
Are welcome to shelter. (p.6)*

Chief of Akate, Tobge Klu VI:

*Prickly- Pear!
Cactus keeping guard
On your territory's border,
To your left your territory,
To your right the sea;
Tough and vigilant one,
Thanks to your prickles
The enemy bleeds,
Thanks to your capacious leaves,
Those whom you love*

Will always find within them
Water to refresh them. (p.7)

Considering the examples above, the chiefs serve as protective guide to their people. It is also believed that they act as a link between the ancestors and the people, hence their importance cannot be underestimated in the traditional society.

ii. Storytelling/Songs

The act of storytelling portrays the Ghanaian culture to outsiders because it is narrated in the Ghanaian context to depict the cultural values of the people. A story in local parlance 'Anasesem' (Ananse's story) usually has musical performances called 'mboguo'. They are songs craftily composed and sung in the course of the storytelling which are performed as the play unfolds. Sutherland employs 'mboguo' in *The Marriage of Anansewaa* so as to get the maximum attention and participation of the audience; the 'mboguo' also excite the interest of the audience and usher in subsequent scenes as well as enlighten the audience about plight of the protagonist. Sutherland presents them in the form of poems and makes them tell stories within the play. Consider the following:

*Am I not Odum's child?
Am I not Odum's child?
Oh I hate the sun!
Abena e,
I'd rather be dead.*

*Oh, delicate one
Abena e,
Abena e,
I'd rather be dead.*

*I never did toil
Abena e,
Abena e,
I'd rather be dead.*

*Unseasoned one,
Abena e,
Abena e,
I'd rather be dead.*

*Oh pitiful one,
Abena e
Abena e
I'd rather be dead.*

The above 'mboguo' talks about the story of Abena, the daughter of a chief called Odum, who suffers in her marriage and rejects her situation. Even though intratextually, this 'mboguo' foregrounds the theme of suffering which is the central theme of the play, it is not directly linked to the unfolding of the story. Another 'mboguo' which also tells a story within the play is the story of Akwesi and Akosua. This story talks about the relationship between them which Akwesi considers as a marriage of a sort while Akosua has a contrary view about it because Akwesi has not performed the marriage rites. This

Mboguo is meant to admonish the youth and to correct the erroneous impressions created about traditional marriages which accept showering gifts on ladies as part of marriage rites performed in the Ghanaian society. This type of marriage is commonly known as betrothal in local parlance as 'asewa' especially where the parents are aware of the relationship.

Akwesi: I will not let you go.
I will not let you go.
You cannot spend my dough
And treat me so.
Akosua: You funny man,
Don't you know you are?
I'm not your wife?
Am I your wife?
Akwesi: Don't you know you are!
Akosua: What law says that? (p.17)

iii. Role of Traditional Marriage

Moreover, Sutherland discusses the theme of *The Marriage of Anansewaa* as given by the precepts of the Ghanaian culture. This is based on traditional marriage. One important aspect of Ghanaian marriage is that, according to traditions of the culture, both families must make enquiries into the backgrounds of the two families before the marriage is contracted. The investigation takes diverse forms, for instance they have to find out if there is no madness in the family or no chronic and contagious illness. In the Ghanaian culture, a prospective husband should be potent, hardworking, well respected in the community and of good character. In the play, Ananse tries to get a good husband for his only daughter, Anansewaa and enriches himself in the process. At the end, he was able to get a suitable husband for his daughter. Ananse said;

Certainly, I covered miles. I travelled the country by bus, by train, by ferry boat. I lobbied for introduction into palace after palace. I listened with ears alert. I observed with keen eyes. I assessed everything before I selected the four chiefs to whom I could show your photographs with advantage. (p.11)

Furthermore, Sutherland emphasizes the essence of a polygamous marriage which is accepted and not frowned upon in the Ghanaian society. It is the tradition for chiefs to be given wives regardless of their marital status. Sutherland also portrays the negative aspect of polygamy, which is rivalry among wives. According to the two messengers from the chief of Sapaase palace, the chief wanted to marry Anansewaa so that her presence in the chief's palace will be for the purpose of putting to shame, a certain bitchy ugly somebody who is there in the Sapaase palace. This refers to the chief's wife. This also accounts for the numerous reasons why most people marry to satisfy their egoistic interest and not necessarily based on love. Also, Togbe Klu's messengers reveal their master's intentions of marrying Anansewaa. The chief was looking forward to have a real helper at least, to assist him in building up a

substantial business. A helper, who would not ruin him, as some of his own relatives did. He was ready to order giant trucks for bringing cattle from Mali. He had ordered a trawler for fishing documents, for which all these would have been entrusted to his own wife's administration. This type of marriage is quite ideal as the wife will not be regarded as a 'non significant other' (Bresseler, 2003). The woman is not devalued or devalued but rather given recognition by husband. As part of traditional marriage, Sutherland uses bride price to portray Ghanaian culture. 'Bride price' (dowry) is a sum of money or goods given to the bride's family by the groom. The bride price takes various forms, this includes the 'head drink', pieces of clothes, ornaments etc. and they vary depending on the tribe. From the story, Togbe Klu declares his intentions of marriage to Ananse by presenting the head drink of Anansewaa. Chief-Who-Is-Chief also portrays the Ghanaian culture by presenting a ring, a bag of money, Dumas, white kente and velvet to Anansewaa. Fiawo also discusses the traditional marriage in *The Fifth Landing Stage*. The definition of marriage varies from culture to culture, but it is principally an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually intimate and sexual are acknowledged. In some cultures, marriage is recommended or compulsory before pursuing any sexual activity. In a typical African context, parents are responsible for the choosing of partners for their children when they are of age, and the children have no right to object. Any form of objection by the child is deemed disrespectful and an immediate decision on how to deal with that child is made. In *The Fifth Landing Stage*, an instance is seen where Dzakupatsu asks for Fudzikumele's hand in marriage for his son Kumasi. (p.61) Amedza makes a similar request for Dzikunya on behalf of his son Dra. Fudzikumele, however faces expulsion from her family because she refuses to marry her first suitor. (pp.16-20). There is also the part where Amaglo and his wife wanted to give their children out for marriage but sought the opinions of their family members first. Fiakponu made a statement to back the point that families influence their children's marriages (p.60). Fiawo presents marriage to be a decision of the whole family members which leads to a happy marriage. Consider the following:

Amaglo: *Thank you good brother-in-law. I have always trusted you and I am glad of your counsel. May I address the whole family through you? Dzakupasu asks for the hand of Fuzikumele for his son Kumasi. Amedza makes a similar request for Dzikunya on behalf of his son, Dra; the third application comes from Kpegla on behalf of his son, Letra, praying for the hand of Sefenya; besides these, De has asked Dzikunya for his son, Efui.*

*These are the families
which wish our girls.*

*Fiakponu: Lawaya, pass the matter to
Gakpada. He is the head
of the family. Let him
speak. (p.61)*

The family then investigate the background of the suitors to make sure that their daughter will not encounter any problems after the marriage has been contracted. In the case of Amaglo's family, after the investigation was done, Kumasi's proposal was approved; however, De's son, Efui's proposal was rejected by the family based on the following claim:

*Fuamawo: De's son has a bad
satin on his
character. People
talk of witchcraft in
the mother's family.*

*Ewi: Is not Efui the
grandson of
Abuya? She is a
regular old witch...
(p.62)*

In Europe, the reverse is practised. "in Europe, ... if a man and a woman love one another, all they need do is to go to a clergyman or to a marriage office. Parents may or may not agree. Their consent is not necessary" stated the slaver (p. 37).

iv. Family System

In Ghana we practice the extended family system. The extended family system operates with other blood relations in addition to the unclear family. These include the in-laws, grandparents etc. Sutherland highlights the essence of this type of family especially in the outdooring of Anansewa, Aya(grandmother) and Ekuwa (Ananse's aunt) play significant roles in the ceremony. Ekuwa does not see anything wrong with Anansewa being outdoored while she is already a woman and also the fact that she is getting married to a chief:

*Ah, Aya, I've been trying very
hard to explain it to you. If this
granddaughter of yours is going
to marry a chief, then it is our
duty to prepare her in every way
we can for the position she will
be occupying in a palace. (p.35)*

Considering families influence in their children's marriages in a positive direction, Fiawo also cites another instance in the play where Amaglo and his wife want to give their children out into marriage but now seek opinions from their family members. Even Fiakponu makes a statement to back up the point that, families influence in their children's marriage is important and this can be seen in the text when he said, 'So you realize now that questions of this kind are not handled by the father alone. You are wiser now than

you were, my son' (p.60). This statement can be seen when all the family members of Amaglo were called upon to deliberate and choose a good husband for their children and to some of them their grandchildren. Here, they all deliberated upon it and chose men they thought were good for their children and grandchildren but for this time the men were not just imposed on the ladies as husbands but ladies were also called upon to give their opinions about the type of guys the family has chosen for them and his time the ladies agreed to their opinions. This family influence is seen as good since the people involved in this marriage lived happily ever after. Still with culture, he portrayed how Ghanaians believe in life after death. In the text, it can be seen when the executioners to be sent to "The Fifth Landing Stage" to be killed captured Agbegbada, the first executioner said to him "You have no thoughts for a future life, poor fool! You will be punished for this life in the next world. You have a far journey to make. You will find these mighty rivers which you must cross, and the question of toll arises. That is why, when a man dies, his companions give him cowries shells in a purse at his burial, so that they can pay the ferryman his due. Else, he will not be taken. Now you will go on your way empty-handed with the result that you will be stranded between two rivers tormented by hunger and thirst, even as you tormented your neighbours in his life"(pp.71-72)..In real life also, Ghanaians put money on a dead person before he or she is buried to pay for tolls they will have to pay for in their next life.

v. Ceremonies Performed

Funerals are important ceremonies performed for the death. Like Shakespeare's Hero in his play *Much Ado About Nothing*, who fakes death because she is disgraced by her suitor Claudio, Anansewa also falsifies death and is laid in state for her suitors to file past the body. Funeral rites begin with celebration of the one week following the death and a day for the performance of the final funeral rites is fixed on that day. On the final day, the body is laid in state for people to file past amidst wailing and mourning. In the case of Anansewaa, all the four chiefs attended and each of them presented gifts. Traditionally, if the deceased is married the husband or wife is made to present important items which will be used for the preparation of the burial. Anansewaa was only betrothed to the chiefs and Chief-Who-Is-Chief had to marry her before the burial and therefore presented the items needed for the marriage. Puberty rite is a cultural practice performed to usher a girl into adulthood. It is an important ceremony which prepares a girl for marriage. Before girls are initiated into it, they are well groomed and prepared for marriage. Sarpong (1974) discloses the relevance of the rites as the preparatory stage before marriage. In the case of Anansewaa, Aya, the grandmother was unhappy about the fact that time has already elapsed for Anansewaa to be outdoored.

*I can't understand my son Ananse at all. Why does
he want an outdooring for Anansewaa all of a
sudden? You school people say u have thrown
these things aside. Very well, throw them aside.
But to wait until five (5) years after the girl has
become a woman, and then say, 'outdoor her'!
That is not good custom keeping in anybody's
world.(p.35)*

Another important ceremony performed is festivals. In the past, celebration of festivals was very important to the people to the extent of scarifying human heads. This type of culture is witnessed when Fudzikomele and Dzikunya were travelling to Krobo Odumase to their uncle. *"Besides we want men`s head, not women`s to decorate our drum at the festival dance"* (p.25). Drumming and singing also accompany the celebration of festivals. Mostly in the villages, drumming is used to announce important events or grace an occasion. The use of drumming was also depicted in the text where Agbegbada was going to be buried alive (p.72).

vi. Patriarchal System

This is a society which is male dominated. In African society, men are highly recognised as compared to their female counterparts. Beauvoir (1949) is of the opinion that Western societies are generally, patriarchal which means that the societies are dominated by men; women do not have any say in the day to day activities/affairs. (Bresseler, 2003) According to Little (1980:6), women in male African novels tend to fall into a specific category of female stereotypes. They are "girlfriends or good time girls, workers such as secretaries or clerks, wives and other male appendages, and prostitutes or courtesans" Sutherland also portrays men as domineering, especially the role the protagonist plays is an indication of a domineering character. He manipulates the daughter, Anansewa by choosing suitors for her. Under normal circumstance, Anansewa should have the right and liberty to object to the arranged marriage but was compelled to accept his father's choice. This is a clear example of suppression by men. Another instance includes the relationship between Ananse and Christie where she is made to do all the 'donkey jobs' for Ananse just to capture his attention and love, yet Ananse only uses her to satisfy his whims and caprices. Also, the way Ananse succeeds in manipulating his mother, Aya and the sister Ekuwa confirms the societal norm. The fact that the chiefs are allowed to engage in the polygamous marry also buttress this type of society. All the four chiefs are already married and they reveal the various reasons why they want to marry Anansewaa. In the same vein, Fiawo also portrays an aspect of patriarchal society in Ghanaian culture. In his play *The Fifth Landing Stage*, when Kumasi, Agbegbada, Dzikunya, Fuzikumele were moving on the path to the woods, the four engaged in a conversation and whenever the females talk, Agbegbada will remind them about their status as ladies hence they should be mindful of the way they speak to men. This invariably confirms that women and men are not given equal opportunities in their community and this can be seen in the text when Agbegbada said this to Fuzikomele and Dzikunya *"You do not seem to be aware that many women call their husbands 'father'"* (p.5). Agbegbada again retorts *'Kumasi, our girls today have sharp tongue but no wits. Tell me, please, what is wisdom? Answer me, girls of our land. No, they are silent. The few crumbs of knowledge gathered from the kitchen are soon exhausted'* (p.6) Another instance is when Amaglo disowns his children, the wife could have intervened for his children but because women in the community do not have equal rights as the men, she

could not object but rather remarks *"Foolish child. Why will you not listen to your father and let this matter be"* (p.19).

vii. Traditional Worship/Beliefs

Traditional African worshippers offer prayers to the Supreme Being and gods by offering libation. Libation is the ritual pouring of liquid as an offering to gods or ancestors in memory of those who have died. It is common in many religions and continues to be offered in various cultures today. In the African society, libation is offered to show appreciation and to seek protection from the ancestors or to curse someone for an offense. Fiawo's character, Gakpada offers libation to ask his ancestors to assist and protect his daughters, Amaglo and Senofe in their marriages to their new husbands.

All you sons of God accept your offering. I give this wine in the name of the entire family to you the gods of our fathers and to you the ancestral spirit of our household... Invoke your presence once more, you guardians of our family, to accept from us water, having no hurt in it but only peace. Take, it is a token that what we give today, we give today, we will not ask back, as water when poured on the ground returns no more. Grant that what we do now may be what you wish. (p.63)

Africans also believe in life after death which means that human beings continue to lead their lives after death. The youth is admonished to desist from deadly crimes such as lying, stealing etc. It is believed by some typical African societies that good deeds are rewarded, thus living a good life on earth has a blissful end while living a bad life has bad implications which is received either before or after death. Fiawo portrays this belief through his character, the first executioner who makes it clear to Agbegbada that he has no future life awaiting him:

...you will be punished for this life in the next world. You have a far journey to make. You will find there mighty rivers to and the question of tolls arises. That is why, when a man dies, his companions and friends give him cowries in a purse at his burial, so that they can pay the ferryman his due. ...now you will go empty handed with the result that will be stranded between two rivers tormented by hunger and thirst...(p.71)

Africans believe in instilling discipline in the citizenry and this goes with rewards and punishment. While morally upright and decent people are rewarded, indecent and

recalcitrant behaviours are punished. Punishment is the authoritative imposition of something undesirable or unpleasant upon an individual or group, in response to behaviour that the authority deems unacceptable or a violation of some norm. The unpleasant imposition may include a fine, penalty, confinement, or the removal or denial of something pleasant or desirable. The individual may be a person or even an animal. While positive and negative reinforcement are used to increase behaviours, punishment focuses on the elimination of unwanted behaviours. In the *The Fifth Landing Stage*, it is revealed that the people of Anlo use several ways in dealing with people who fall victim to bad attitude. An instance is where Fudzikomele faces expulsion from her family after refusing to marry Agbegada (pp. 17-20). Another instance is where Agbegada is buried alive as a result of his evil ways. (pp. 69-71) Fiawo again discusses the relevance of obedience as part of Ghanaian culture. In the play, Fudzikomele rejects Agbegada's proposal of marriage and this is considered as disobedience and disrespect to the parents who play very significant role in the traditional marriage. This action made the mother comment "She will not act against our wishes. All she pleads for is time to investigate the changes which rumour has against Agbegada. If the young man is innocent, we have the more reason to allow her to satisfy herself. If he is guilty, we do not wish our daughter to marry a rouge"(p.18). Again, women in Africa are subservient to their husbands because of how they address them. Fiawo's women address their husbands as 'father'(p.5). Sonefe also refers to her husband as "My lord, be it far from me to advise your daughter wrongly." (p.18) Sutherland also emphasises obedience as one of the canons of Ghanaian culture. Anansewaa obeys her father and allows him to choose a husband for her.

viii. Names and their Significance

Fiawoo in his play, *The Fifth Landing Stage* uses typical Ghanaian names and towns to depict the culture and the origin of the people, for example, Agbegada, Fudzikomele, Kumasi, Dzikunya, Odumase, Accra, Prampram, etc. Keledome signifies 'Evil-string that binds great things at Dahomey. A string that binds what cannot be bound by iron chains'.(p.12) Fudzikomele's name signifies grief: 'My mother gave my name because after my conception war broke out between the Anlos and the Agoes, and I was born in the midst of battle...'(p.36) Sutherland also uses Ghanaian names in *The Marriage of Anansewaa* such as Ananse, Anansewaa, Aya etc. Ananse is the local name of the spider which is perceived as wise, cunning and intelligent. Anansewaa is named after females and it signifies the daughter of Ananse.

3. CONCLUSION

In recent times, most youth do not adhere to the traditions of their society and the effects on their lives are overwhelming. A critical investigation into the traditions and culture of Africa reveals that while some of the customs such as human sacrifice and female genital mutilation are outmoded and should be discarded, other customs should be upheld by all and sundry. Umorem (1995) tries to disabuse the minds of African women who live in a patriarchal society and reveals that the African woman can be liberated to develop the culture's latent potential towards

the human development of the woman, created like her male counter-part in the image and likeness of God. He again suggests that a well articulated programme to teach the positive values, attitudes and beliefs about womanhood should be taught to the African from infancy to death. Most modern marriages fall on rocks because couples downplay on the ethics of traditional marriages. Some youth do not involve their parents and family in their preparation towards marriages and the consequence of such actions is deeply contributing to the high rate of divorce. The influx of foreign cultures has caused havoc on our lifestyles. Fiawo admonishes Africans to go back to their roots to imbibe the traditions and customs that contribute in moulding and shaping us Africans. A case in point is the role of traditional rulers who in the past were judicial heads, political heads and also managed the day-to-day administration. In recent times, corruption has engulfed the system to the extent that there is a clarion call on the traditional rulers to intervene and admonish government of the day. Africans by nature tell stories to educate and entertain audience. The act of storytelling, currently perceived by the youth as outmoded, has been replaced by other activities such as computer/video games, television and the like. Most parents do not make time for their children, let alone tell them stories. There is no gain saying that some of our cultural values are obnoxious and are to be eradicated with time.

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