

SYMBOLISM IN OKOT P' BITEK'S SONG OF LAWINO AND SONG OF OCOL

BY

EFEMINI OGHENEOCHUKO

ART1800502

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this study was carried out by Efemini Ogheneochuko in the Department of English and Literature, faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

Prof. Kola Eke

Project Supervisor

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God almighty whose inspiration and divine insight I enjoyed throughout the course of writing this work. Also, I dedicate this work to every true African out there, who is in the serious business of teaching and preserving the African culture; those I'd love to refer to as "the Lawinos of our time."

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ABSTRACT

In the poem “Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol” by Okot p’Bitek, there are three important characters who show how different cultures clash and change after colonization in Africa.

Lawino represents African culture. She lives in the traditional African way, doing things the Acoli people do, and she really loves African traditions. She strongly believes in keeping African culture alive and doesn’t like Western influences. Through her character, we see how African traditions can stay strong even when other cultures try to change them.

Ocol, on the other hand, symbolizes Western culture. He rejects his African identity and prefers Western values. He even changes his name to a European one and abandons African beliefs and customs. Ocol doesn’t like African traditions like dances and food; he wants Africa to be more like the West. This creates a conflict between African ways and Western ideas.

Clementine is a character who represents the loss of African identity. She chooses a European name and prefers to speak English instead of her African language. She tries to look like a white woman by using things like skin bleaching and hair straightening. This shows us how African identity can fade away because of Western influences.

All three characters in the poem help us understand how African and Western cultures mix and sometimes clash after colonization. They show us the challenges people face when they want to preserve their culture but also get influenced by the West.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATION	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
CHAPTER 1	3
Introduction	3
Purpose of Study	4
Scope of Study	5
Methodology	5
Theoretical Background	6
Review of Related Scholarships	7
Thesis Statement	12
CHAPTER 2	13
LAWINO AS A SYMBOL OF THE AFRICAN CULTURE AND VALUES	13
Who is Lawino?	13
The African culture	17
How does Lawino symbolize the African culture?	20
CHAPTER 3	30
OCOL AS A SYMBOL OF THE WESTERN CULTURE	30

Who is Ocol?	30
The Western culture and Westernization in Africa	33
How does Ocol represent the Western culture?	36
CHAPTER 4	42
CLEMENTINE (TINA) AS A SYMBOL OF LOST AFRICAN IDENTITY	42
Who is Clementine?	42
The African Identity and the implication of its loss.	45
How does Clementine Symbolize the loss of African identity?	46
CHAPTER 5	52
Conclusion	52
WORKS CITED LIST	56

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This research paper explores the use of symbolism in Okot p' Bitek's "Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol." This exploration is done by critically analyzing the symbolic aspects of three main characters in the poem. These characters are Lawino, a dutiful African wife and mother; Ocol, who, due to his education abroad, has fallen in love with European culture and religion; and Clementine, an African woman, who aspires above all else to be white, and acts accordingly. These characters represent the different groups of people found in postcolonial African societies, which are usually a mixture of Africans who are truly Africans in acts and beliefs, and Africans who have lost their African values and identity in their pursuit to be white. It is this division between African and Western ways in the minds of most Africans, as well as its negative effects on the African society after colonisation, that Bitek's seeks to address in his poem, and what forms the core of this research paper. Note that although we are looking at both "Songs" in this paper, our main focus is on that of Lawino. This is because it is mainly in the Song of Lawino that the characters are largely discussed. Also, it is from studying the Song of Lawino that we are able to fully understand the symbolic representations of all three characters—all of which are of massive interest to us here.

The term 'symbolism' has been defined In several ways, three of which we shall consider here. First, it has been defined as "the use of words or images to symbolize specific concepts, people, objects, or events" (Kramer). Kramer goes on to explain that symbols are not "literal representations, but figurative or implied ones". Secondly, symbolism has been defined as "a literary device that uses symbols, be they words, people, marks, locations, or abstract ideas to represent something beyond the literal

meaning” (MasterClass). Thirdly, and most simply put, symbolism is “the idea that things represent other things” (Elbom). This is simply what Lawino, Ocol and Clementine function as in the poem: things representing other things. On the surface level, they are just ordinary people going about their lives, business as usual, but in truth, they are actually representatives of the different social groups found in postcolonial African societies as I said earlier, and this is how we shall be examining them throughout the course of this essay.

Note that this research shall give more focus to Song of Lawino than to Song of Ocol, because it is this “Song of the woman”, as Ocol refers to it in the first part of his “Song”, that contains much of what is important to our study. We shall start this study by examining how Lawino and Ocol symbolically represent the conflicting African and Western cultures and the consequences of this conflict. Then, we shall go on to examine the characters of Ocol and Clementine as symbols for lost African values and lost African identity, respectively. Conclusively, we shall look at Lawino as a tool with which Bitek calls westernized Africans back to their roots, for them to stop obsessing over the Western culture, but rather uphold their own African cultural heritage with pride.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to evaluate the use of symbolism in Okot p’ Bitek’s “Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol,” using the three main characters in the poem: Lawino, Ocol and Clementine. At this juncture, symbolism will be generally defined as an instance where one thing refers to something else which is distinct from itself. And the poems being evaluated here are two long epic-like poems, the second of which is a reply to the first, which are monologues by two individuals.

Scope of Study

Whilst the subject matter of Bitek's "Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol," which is the conflict between a couple due to cultural differences, is deducible from the very start of the poem, the significance of that conflict, and by extension, the poem itself, to the African society in post-independence period, is not so obvious at first glance, even after the first reading of the entire poem. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine this conflict and show just how much it reflects on the African society in post independence period.

The scope of this study is limited to the African society, mostly Nigeria, examining how colonization has affected and influenced it in postcolonial times. This examination will be based solely on Bitek's "Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol" as the primary text, although other online sources and articles might be cited. That being said, we can instantly understand that the scope of the study has placed a constraint on the area to be covered and/or the period to be considered, which is post independence. It has also limited us to just one aspect of the book, which is its symbolic representations. This may be a necessary factor when interpreting the results of this study—the evaluation of the influence of colonization on the post independence African society.

Methodology

The method of this study is qualitative, as data were gotten from the primary text: Okot p' Bitek's "Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol," as well as other online sources and articles. Most data from the primary text were from the first poem: "Song of Lawino," as it contains most of the necessary information required for this study. As per secondary text, almost all are from online sources, as very little offline sources are within reach.

Theoretical Background

Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory “is a school of thought that acknowledges and critically examines the political, economic, social, and historical impact of European colonization through literature” (Postcolonial Literary Theory). In other words, postcolonial literary theory is a theoretical approach to literature, which studies the influence of European colonization on Africa. This is essentially what we see in Bitek’s “Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol,” especially when we look closely at the characters of Ocol and Clementine (a.k.a., the “modern man” and the “modern woman” respectively) and how they have become more inclined to the European culture—a product of colonization—so much so that they want nothing to do with their African heritage anymore.

Both Ocol and Clementine are so bent on doing away with the African ways of doing things, as they have fallen head over heels with the European culture. Ocol is particularly aggressive about it as he, not only wants to do away with the African culture, but also to do everything within his power to dissolve it. This is seen in Song of Ocol (3), where Ocol threatens to “smash/ The taboos/ One by one,/ Explode the basis/ Of every superstition” and also to “uproot/ Every sacred tree/ And demolish every ancestral/ shrine” (p. 137).

So basically, by using this theoretical approach, we shall be able to critically examine the impact of colonization on people like Ocol in this poem (and the society as a whole) and fully understand why “the son of a Chief”, like many Africans in postcolonial era, would want the extinction of a culture they should be protecting and upholding.

Review of Related Scholarships

As explained by Ogo Ofuani, Bitek's poems are deeply connected to his love for Acoli oral traditions. To put it simply, he gets ideas for his poems from the stories and tales that have been spoken in his Acoli culture for a long time. These stories have been passed down by talking to each other instead of writing them down.

Ofuani explains further that scholars like Heron, Mbise, and Moore have recognized how two significant influences shaped Bitek's creative development. Moore, for instance, noted that even when educated Acoli individuals, including Bitek, received an English education, they didn't give up their native language and culture. This highlights Bitek's dedication to preserving his Acoli heritage alongside embracing Western knowledge.

Ofuani asserts that although Bitek's four Songs (Lawino, Ocol, Prisoner, and Malaya) are all in written form, they still retain elements of oral art, insisting that in societies without a writing system, poems are often recited, like memorized performances where the poet says the verses from memory.

Ofuani also tells us that Bitek's poetry is special because it combines speaking and writing together. Neither one is more important; they work together to make his poetry unique. This idea makes us think differently about poetry, like a mix of talking and writing that makes it beautiful and deep.

Besides Ofuani, other scholars have criticized Bitek's poetry. One of such scholars is Ayo Osisanwo. According to Osisanwo, Okot p'Bitek was a poet who wrote about important issues facing Africa after it gained independence from colonial rule. Osisanwo informs us that Bitek's most famous works, "Song of Lawino" and "Song of

Ocol,” delve into these matters. In “Song of Lawino,” the main character, Lawino, criticizes African leaders and intellectuals who seem to still be controlled by foreign influences. She defends African traditions and beliefs from being labeled as backward or primitive. This poem satirically highlights the struggle between retaining African identity and embracing Western ways.

Continuing, Osisanwo elaborates that in “Song of Ocol,” Okot Bitek delves into the lives of educated Africans who fully embrace Western values and ways of life after receiving a Western education. The poem vividly depicts Ocol’s journey from his rural upbringing to a more urban, materialistic lifestyle, going to the extent of altering his appearance to align with Western standards. Lawino, his wife, strongly opposes Ocol’s choices and proudly upholds her traditional values and cultural symbols. Through this poem, Okot p’ Bitek provides a multifaceted view of East African life, covering various aspects such as dance, clothing, food, religion, education, social interactions, culture, and politics.

Osisanwo also makes us understand that Lawino’s perspective is not against Western culture per se, but rather against individuals who abandon their African heritage and blindly mimic European ways. Lawino believes that all cultures have value in their own contexts and criticizes those who reject their African roots. Osisanwo goes on to explain that “Song of Lawino” played a pivotal role in Okot p’ Bitek’s literary fame because it unapologetically celebrated “Africanness,” claiming that Lawino’s character represents the voice of many who grapple with the challenge of balancing modern and traditional cultures in post-colonial Africa. Osisanwo insists that in “Song of Ocol,” the term “Ocol” is derived from the Acholi language, symbolizing a resurgence of black consciousness among the Acholi people.

Osisanwo draws our attention to a very significant theme present in Bitek's works, which is the experience of oppression and the accompanying psychological pain. "Song of Ocol" serves as a response to "Song of Lawino," offering Ocol's perspective that a new Africa must break free from its history of ignorance, blackness, and inferiority, embracing a new world order. Ocol's cultural shift alienates him from traditional practices, making him feel like a cultural outsider.

Osisanwo says that besides "Song of Lawino" and "Song of Ocol," Bitek's two other poems: "Song of Prisoner" and "Song of Malaya" explores the problems Africa deals with after gaining independence, like corruption and oppression, and looks at prostitution in cities and how foreign values like casual sex affect African culture, respectively.

According to Osisanwo, Okot's writing style combines traditional elements like dance and songs with a friendly tone. He uses vivid pictures from African culture to make his poems easy to understand and enjoyable. He also includes Acholi language to make his work feel authentic.

Reacting to Heinemann's reissuing of Okot p'Bitek's "Song of Lawino" (1966) and its companion piece, "Song of Ocol" (1967), Charlotte H. Bruner asserts that both poems explore the conflict between tradition and modernity in African society. After describing the reissued volume of both poems as having an introduction about Okot's life, a short biography, and a scholarly analysis by George A. Heron, Bruner hailed Bitek as a versatile artist who embraced performing arts and later promoted folk art in Uganda.

According to Bruner, "Song of Lawino" was a milestone, a lament by Lawino about her husband's Western influences. The poem is known for its humor, satire, and rich African culture. "Song of Ocol," on the other hand, complements Lawino's lament,

focusing on disillusionment with African independence. It questions the accolades given to the educated elite influenced by the West. Despite controversy, Okot's poems are acclaimed for blending humor, satire, and social commentary. They shed light on African identity and the struggle to preserve culture in a changing world.

Another scholar who has criticized Bitek's poetry is Monica N. Wanambisi. According to her, Okot explores various aspects of African cultural traditions such as dancing, singing, storytelling, proverbs, and myths in his literary works. Okot also offers scholarly analyses of these cultural elements. One of his primary focuses is on traditional songs, which hold great significance in African oral literature. These songs are sung on various occasions, including funerals, weddings, dances, and initiation ceremonies, and they contribute to the richness and meaning of these events. Bitek's original poems are all titled "songs," such as "Song of Lawino," "Song of Ocol," "Song of A Prisoner," and "Song of Malaya."

Wanambisi informs us that Okot's literary journey began with his novel "Lak Tar" (1953), written in the Acoli language when he was just twenty-two years old. The title, when translated, means "Are Your Teeth White? If so, Laugh." During this time, Okot also pursued a career in professional football. The novel tells the story of an Acoli boy who loses his father at a young age and later falls in love with a girl but cannot afford the high bride-price required for marriage. His stepfather and uncles refuse to help him, and his journey to earn the bride-price in Kampala leads to a series of misfortunes, ultimately leaving him miserable and penniless upon his return home. The novel's plot highlights Okot's recurrent theme of the clash between traditional life and Western influence, particularly evident in the struggles faced by the protagonist in a modern city. This theme

underscores the impact of Western colonization on African societies, where young people must navigate the demands of both worlds.

According to Wanambisi, Bitek made significant literary contributions in the 1970s. He criticized Western scholars in “African Religions in Western Scholarship” and urged African scholars to redefine terms and present African religions accurately. In “Religion of the Central Luo,” he explored Luo religious practices using oral literature like songs. His later books, “Horn of My Love” and “Hare and Hornbill,” continued to emphasize oral traditions. “Horn of My Love” showcased Acoli poetry with English translations, while “Hare and Hornbill” collected folktales, highlighting the importance of storytelling in passing down cultural values.

Wanambisi established that overall, Okot’s work is rooted in African oral traditions, preserving culture, challenging Eurocentric views, and enriching African literature with deeper insights into African traditions and values.

In the abstract to his “Oedipal Identity and the Freudian Construction of Orality in Okot p’Bitek’s Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol,” Paul K. Oakley claims that in Okot p’ Bitek’s “Song of Lawino” and “Song of Ocol,” the apparent marital conflict between Ocol and Lawino masks a deeper psychological struggle. While they debate traditional versus Westernized life, a Freudian interpretation suggests that Lawino symbolizes Ocol’s repressed Oedipal fixation. Lawino is, in fact, Ocol’s mother, and Europe represents his father, challenging Lawino’s identity as an authentic oral villager.

Oakley also adds that Lawino’s style of expression, despite drawing from Acholi oral traditions, reflects a literate consciousness, casting further doubt on her role as an oral villager. She also defies traditional Acholi gender norms by not obeying and

respecting her husband. In contrast, Ocol is portrayed as psychologically afflicted, fixated in the Oedipal stage, desiring his mother Lawino but repressing this desire. He projects it onto a fictionalized image of Lawino as his “wife,” resulting in a complex interplay of psychological conflicts throughout the poems.

This study is important because not many people have looked closely at how symbols are used in Okot p’ Bitek’s “Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol.” Even the few papers that did didn’t talk much about the character of Clementine (Tina). So, our paper adds to what’s already been written about Okot p’ Bitek’s “Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol,” especially in the aspect of symbolism.

Thesis Statement

This paper demonstrates that Lawino, Ocol and Clementine (Tina) represents the African culture, the Western culture, and a loss of African identity, respectively.

CHAPTER 2

LAWINO AS A SYMBOL OF THE AFRICAN CULTURE AND VALUES

Who is Lawino?

*Husband, now you despise me
 Now you treat me with spite
 And say I have inherited the
 Stupidity of my aunt;
 Son of the Chief,
 Now you compare me
 With the rubbish in the rubbish
 Pit,
 You say you no longer want me
 Because I am like the things left
 Behind
 In the deserted homestead.
 You insult me
 You laugh at me
 You say I do not know the letter
 A
 Because I have not been to school
 And I have not been baptized
 (SOL 1, p. 34)*

Thus begins “Song of Lawino,” giving us a clear understanding of who our speaker, the titular character, is. From the above quoted lines, we understand that Lawino is a wife to a yet unnamed man, whom she simply refers to as “Son of the Chief”. We also understand that she has no formal education, and is not a Christian, and because of these, her husband no longer wants her in his house. By implication, Lawino is presented to us

from the outset as a woman whose lack of formal education and Christian religious beliefs are used to judge and ultimately victimize her.

In ‘SOL 2’, Lawino tells us about Clementine’s desire and efforts to look like a white woman, and gives her own assessment of it. From what she says here, we realize two things: Lawino is a co-wife with Clementine to Ocol, and also, she has nothing against polygamy. As odd as it may seem to readers, especially to those of this present-day African society, Lawino welcomes the practice of polygamy with wide open hands, and does not try to fight against it even when it starts to threaten her place in her matrimonial home. This is confirmed in her statement: “When I have another woman/ With whom I share my husband,/ I am glad” (p. 40).

As Lawino compares the dances of the Acoli with those of the white people, insisting that the former is lively and moral, but the latter is dull and immoral in ‘SOL 3’, the focus shifts from her domestic life to her social life, which proves to be a very active one as we see in the poem. She is a very actively social individual, who knows how to sing and dance well in the Acoli fashion. Her social life feels more like a sociopolitical one though as we enter ‘SOL 4’, when she talks about being made “chief of girls” as a maiden. The Chief of the girls is usually a position of authority and leadership in the Acoli society.

The social aspect of Lawino’s life is reinforced in ‘SOL 5’, where she compares the hairstyling patterns of the Acoli to those of the whites, using herself and Clementine as a case study. In this, she uses fashion to project not just her own social life, but also that of the entire Acoli community. She tells us of the different hairstyles of the Acoli based on the occasion or situation. Lawino concludes ‘SOL 5’ by telling us about her preference for the fashion of the Acoli over that of the Western world by saying, “I am

proud of the hair/ With which I was born/ And as no white woman/ Wishes to do her hair/
Like mine/ Because she is proud/ Of the hair with which she was/ born,/ I have no wish/
To look like a white woman” (p. 56).

Lawino goes further to tell us about her preference for the ways of the Acoli over those of the whites that her husband preaches in ‘SOL 6’, when she compares the dishes and meals of the Acoli to those of the white man, arguing that the former is better than the latter. She continues this in ‘SOL 7’, when she talks about time-telling and how differently it is done by the Acoli and the white people. She explains that the white people follow time strictly like it’s their master, having a fixed time for everything. She goes on to explain that unlike the white people, the Acoli doesn’t need a wall clock to tell time, and they do things based on circumstance and situation, not because an object (the wall clock) says so.

Lawino soon tells us about the religious aspect of her life in ‘SOL 8’, when she says, “My husband/ Looks down on me;/ He says/ I am a mere pagan,/ I do not know/
The way of God./ He says/ I am ignorant/ Of the good word/ In the Clean Book/ And I do not have/
A Christian name./ Ocol dislikes me/ Because, he says,/ Jok is in my head/ And I like visiting/
The diviner-priest/ Like my mother” (p. 73). In other words, she is not a Christian, but a pagan, who neither knows the ways of the Christian God, nor knows what the Holy Bible contains, nor has a Christian name. But rather, she is devoted to Jok, and constantly visit the diviner-priest.

“The concept of jok (god) essentially covers a whole spiritual class of spirits and the word is never used alone. It is always used attributively. The jogi (gods) were really powers or oracles belonging to a clan, chiefdom or inhabiting a river, a person or anything. And the number of these jogi always increases according to new events and

situations. There is now, for example, jok muno (god of the white man). A person who is possessed by this spirit suddenly bursts out speaking a language of the white man. He forgets the language the moment the spirit leaves him. JokBar Dege (God of the Airport) hovers around the Airport! The Jok (god) of the clan or chiefdom was worshipped, placated when angered and consulted before any major activity the people concerned were about to embark on” (Ocaya). By implication, “Jok” is the god of the Acoli people, and in Bitek’s “Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol,” Lawino is a devout worshipper of it.

After establishing her religious stance, Lawino concludes ‘SOL 8’ by talking about the religion of the white man, which she perceives to be mysterious and hypocritical (hypocritical, due to the perverseness of the priests), as well as the importance of names, be they Jok or Christian. And in ‘SOL 9’, she questions the white man’s perception on the creation of the world, and laments having no one to give her the answers and clarity she seeks.

When Lawino talks about the difference between how the Acoli diagnose and treat the sick and the ways the white man do it in ‘SOL 10’, we realize that she prefers the ways of the Acoli, not entirely because she believes that those of the white man are ineffective, but mainly because it is the ways of the Acoli that she knows, as taught her by her mother. She does point out that unlike the Acoli diviner priests though, the white man’s hospital has no cure for curses, and this suggests that she believes that the ways of the Acoli are superior to those of the white man. As she draws close to the end of ‘SOL 10’, she expresses her belief in the futility of medicines when it is a person’s time to die, saying, “The sick gets cured/ Because his time has not yet/ come:/ But when the day has dawned/ For the journey to Pagak/ No one can stop you,/ White man’s medicines,/ Acoli medicines/ Crucifixes, rosaries,/ Toes of edible rats,/ The horn of the rhinoceros/ None of

them can block the/ path/ That goes to Pagak!” (pp. 101-102). In simpler terms, once it is a person’s time to journey to Pagak (to die), nothing (be it white man’s medicine, be it Acoli medicines, be it the religious objects of either religion) can save him.

The African culture

“African” is an adjective used to qualify the people who are native to Africa, descendants of natives of Africa, or individuals who trace their ancestry to indigenous inhabitants of Africa, as well as the continent itself, which is said to be the world’s second-largest and second-most populous continent, after Asia in both aspects. Africa is made up of 54 fully recognized sovereign states, eight cities and islands that are part of non-African states, and two de facto independent states with limited or no recognition (Wikipedia). Wikipedia also defines culture as an umbrella term which encompasses the social behavior, institutions, and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in these groups.

Another definition of culture is that it “is what marks them out distinctively from other human societies in the family of humanity. ... [It] entails a totality of traits and characters that are peculiar to a people to the extent that it marks them out from other peoples or societies. These peculiar traits go on to include the people’s language, dressing, music, work, arts, religion, dancing and so on. It also goes on to include a people’s social norms, taboos and values. Values here are to be understood as beliefs that are held about what is right and wrong and what is important in life” (Idang). This emphasizes the point already made above about “culture” being both the core and covering of any people. By implication, there can’t be a people without a culture as it is what defines them.

According to Idang, culture has been classified into its material and non-material aspects. While material culture refers to the visible tactile objects which man is able to manufacture for the purposes of human survival; non-material culture comprises of the norms and mores of the people. While material culture is concrete and takes the form of artefacts and crafts, non-material culture is abstract but has a very pervasive influence on the lives of the people of a particular culture. Hence beliefs about what is good and what is bad, together with norms and taboos, are all good examples of non-material culture (African Culture and Values).

Having established what both words—“African” and “culture”—mean, it won’t be illogical to conclude that the African culture simply refers to both the material and non-material aspects of the daily lives of the African people. By extension, it covers the social, moral, religious and aesthetic aspects of their lives, which can also be referred to as the cultural values of the African society. For a fuller understanding of what these values mean in the African culture, let’s examine Idang’s comments on them in his article entitled African Culture and Values.

According to Idang, social values include those beliefs and practices such as festivals, games, sports and dances that are practiced by a particular society. Backed by customary laws, these practices are necessary, as they often have religious, moral, and political undertones, especially in African societies. These practices usually involve sacrifices that are offered to certain deities on special days in order to attract their goodwill on the members of the society.

Regarding moral values, Idang says, “African culture is embedded in strong moral considerations. It has a system of various beliefs and customs which every individual ought to keep in order to live long and to avoid bringing curses on them and others.

Adultery, stealing and other forms of immoral behaviour are strongly discouraged and whenever a suspected offender denies a charge brought against him, he would be taken to a soothsayer or made to take an oath for proof of innocence”. This says a lot about how strict the moral codes of the African society are, and how much it checked their behaviours.

Idang believes that religion is at the middle of the African culture and every one of its activities. He explains that the African religion is based on the concept of a Supreme Being which is invisible and indigenous. He asserts that the African religion holds a belief in the existence of the human soul and the soul does not die with the body, a belief that good and bad spirits do exist and that these spirits are what make communication with the Supreme Being possible, and above all, a moral sense of justice and truth and the knowledge of the existence of good and evil. To him, the African religious values seem to permeate every facet of the life of the African and the African believes that anything can be imbued with spiritual significance. He also talked about the roles of diviners and sorcerers in the African society as mediators between God and the people, as well as interpreters of God’s wishes to the people. He adds that the diviners, sorcerers and soothsayers help to streamline human behaviour in the society and people are afraid to commit offences because of the fear of being exposed by the diviners and sorcerers.

According to Idang, “The African concept of aesthetics is predicated on the fundamental traditional belief system which gave vent to the production of the art. Now art is usually seen as human enterprise concerned with the production of aesthetic objects. ... Aesthetic value is what informs a people’s arts and crafts as it affects their

sense of what is beautiful as opposed to that which is ugly. The aesthetic value of a society influences the artist in his endeavours to produce aesthetic objects that are acceptable to the society in which he lives”. The aesthetic values of the African society goes beyond just their crafts though. It also involves their fashion and beautification, their ornaments, their adornment.

How does Lawino symbolize the African culture?

Bitek uses Lawino to represent the African culture in “Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol through three ways: through her actions, through her advocacy for the preservation of the African culture, and through her attitude towards westernization and the Western culture. I’d love to give a quick reminder that the focus here is solely on Song of Lawino, for it is in it that Bitek actually portrays Lawino as a symbol for the African society.

When we say that Lawino represents the African culture through her “actions”, we mean she does it through her participation in cultural activities, through her preferred pattern of domestic life, and also through her preferred pattern of fashion and beautification. In other words, Lawino is depicted as a true African in Bitek’s poem, as the social, domestic and aesthetic aspects of her life boldly reflects the values of the Acoli (African) culture.

Socially, Lawino is depicted as a very active character in the poem. In SOL 3, she tells us about how lively the dances of the Acoli are, and how she enjoys the activity. She says:

I cannot dance the rumba

*My mother taught me
 The beautiful dances of the Acoli.
 I do not know the dances of
 White people.
 I will not deceive you,
 I cannot dance the Samba!
 You once saw me at the orak
 Dance
 The dance for youth
 The dance of our People.*

*When the drums are throbbing
 And the black youths
 Have raised much dust
 You dance with vigour and
 Health
 You dance naughtily with pride
 You dance with spirit,
 You compete, you insult, you
 Provoke
 You challenge all!
 And the eyes of the young men
 Become red!
 (SOL 3, p. 42)*

The passion with which she speaks in those lines above reflect two things: one, her love for the dances of the Acoli, as well as most other activities of the Acoli people, and two, the physicality and liveliness of the social values of the Acoli. One thing that stands out in those lines above is the way she describes the dances of the Acoli. She speaks of them as though they were a competition, which people are challenged to participate in, and the losers end up with eyes that have “become red”. This idea of the dances of the Acoli being like a competition is reinforced by Lawino’s later comments on it: “You do not come to the arena drunk,/ But when another youth hits you/ You take up the challenge/ As

a man,/ And when a girl knocks you/ You strike back,/ A man's manliness is seen in the arena,/ No one touches another's testicles" (SOL 3, pp. 42-43).

One very important aspect of society is its healthcare services, and Lawino embodies those of the Acoli (African) culture. In SOL 10, Lawino tells us about how diagnosis is done in the Acoli culture, saying:

*When my child is unwell
I see it from his watering nose,
The hair of his body stands up
And his lips are parched,
I see that he is not bright
I do not read the names of
Diseases from books.*

*I hear him cry
And his eyes water,
I hear the noise from his
Stomach
The worms complaining;*

*He is pale
As if he has been playing in
Ashes,
You hear his chest crackling,
He has no appetite,
And he is aggressive but tired
And weak;
He is troublesome,
He wants this thing and that thing,
Then he does not want this
Thing
And he does not want that thing.
His body feels hot like fire,
And he sits by the fire*

*In the middle of the hot afternoon
(SOL 10, pp. 95-96)*

In the same manner, Lawino tells us how the Acoli take care of the sick, telling us about the different medicines of the Acoli and how they are administered. She says:

*When my child is ill
I try the various Acoli herbs,
I try the medicines
My mother showed me:*

*The roots of bomo
For stomach aches
It kills poisons
As well as worms.*

*The roots of omwombye
Is chewed for bad throats,
A drop in the eye
Kills the pains
And removes the Evil Eye's
Sting.
When the eyes are bursting with
Pain
Put some akeyo in a pot.
Cook it for some time,
Then expose the eyes
To the steam from the pot;
This burns up the spears
That were in the eye.*

*The shoots of lapena
For coughs and sore throats—
You put some salt in it
And chew it!*

*The shoots of lapena and olim
Are chewed when they have
Removed the blockage in the
Throat.*

*Fresh wounds are treated
With ogali or pobo,
The sticky juices
Gum up the broken skins
And the bitter poison
Keep the house-flies at bay.
(SOL 10, p. 96)*

By so doing, Lawino stresses the fact that the Acoli (and African) people have social values that help them survive and thrive, and also the need to maintain these social values, rather than give them up in favour of the white man's.

Moving on, Lawino's preferred pattern of domestic life is African in every sense of the word. This is evident in her preference for African meals (millet bread, etc.), African dishes (like the half-gourd and earthen dishes), and the African cooking place, which she describes saying: "The fireplace in my mother's/ house/ Is dug into the earth. ... Three mounds of clay/ Shaped like youthful breasts full/ of milk/ Stand together like/ Three loving sisters:" (SOL 6, p. 61). Understand that firewood are placed strategically between the mounds to set fire with, while the mounds are there to steady the earthen vegetable pot used for making millet bread and other African dishes.

Still on Lawino's domestic life, as a way in which she represents the African society, let's look at the concept of time-telling. In her home, there is a large wallclock, which her husband Ocol tells time by. This mystifies Lawino, who has a different idea on how to tell time, just like the rest of the Acoli (and African) people. The African's method

of telling time is not based on the dictates of an object (the clock), but rather, on the present situation or a natural phenomenon (like the look of the sun or the crows of a cook). No wonder Lawino says:

*If my husband insists
 What exact time
 He should have morning tea
 And breakfast,
 When exactly to have coffee
 And the exact time
 For taking the family
 Photograph—
 Lunch-time, tea time,
 And supper time—
 I must first look at the sun,
 The cock must crow
 To remind me.*

...

*When the sun has grown up
 And the poisoned tips
 Of its arrows painfully bite
 The backs of the men hoeing
 And of the men weeding or
 Harvesting.
 This is when
 You take drinking water
 To the workers.*

*Foods are taken to the fields
 When the men are exhausted.
 (SOL 7, pp. 64-66)*

Lawino's preference when it comes to aesthetics (fashion and beauty) is in line with the dictates of the African culture, and this reinforces the belief that Bitek uses her to

symbolize the African culture in the poem. The following quote from the fifth part of Song of Lawino gives more credit to the point just made. And it reads:

*Ask me what beauty is
To the Acoli
And I will tell you;
I will show it to you
If you give me a chance!*

*You once saw me,
You saw my hair style
And you admired it.
At the arena
Boys surrounded me
And fought for me.*

*My mother taught me
Acoli hair fashions;
Which fits the kind
Of hair of the Acoli,
And the occasion.
(SOL 5, p. 51)*

In subsequent lines, Lawino tells us about the different hairstyles of the Acoli, as well as the hair creams (oils) used to care for them by the Acoli. She also talks about how the Acoli people treat their hair: it's a ritual where they put hot porridge on the girl's head, and sing and dance under the sausage tree (SOL 5, p. 52).

Another way through which Lawino is depicted as a symbol of the African culture is her advocacy for its preservation, which she fights for throughout the poem. The first instance of this is when she speaks to Ocol saying, "I do not know/ The ways of foreigners/ But I do not despise their/ customs/ Why should you despise yours?/ Listen, my husband,/ You are the son of a Chief./ The pumpkin in the old/ homestead/ Must not

be uprooted!” (SOL 2, p. 41). By “the pumpkin in the old homestead” she means the African culture, and to “uproot” it would mean to forsake it long enough until it becomes extinct. Before making that statement, she gives Ocol a good reason why it is necessary to preserve the African culture, which is that “The ways of your ancestors/ Are good,/ Their customs are solid/ And not hollow/ They are not thin, not easily/ breakable/ They cannot be blown away/ By the winds/ Because their roots reach deep into the soil” (SOL 2, p. 41). Lawino totally believes that the Acoli (African) culture is better than the Western culture, and so it must be preserved by any means possible.

Understand that although Lawino tells us that Ocol wants her to drop the African culture for the Western one throughout her “Song”, it is actually the same thing she tries to do to Ocol: convince him to ditch his Western values and return to upholding those of the Acoli (African). She makes this abundantly clear in the last part of her “Song”. The only difference between them is the approach: while Ocol’s approach is forceful and imposing, Lawino’s is calm and persuasive. One instance when Lawino gets very vocal in her advocacy for the preservation of the Acoli (African) culture is when she addresses westernized Africans like Ocol saying:

*Like beggars
You take up white man’s
Adornments,
Like slaves or war captives
You take up white man’s ways.
Didn’t the Acoli have
Adornments?
Didn’t Black People have their
Ways?*

Like drunken men

*You stagger to white man's
Games,
You stagger to white man's
Amusements.*

*Is lawala not a game?
Is cooro not a game?
Didn't your people have
Amusements?
Like halfwits
You turn to white man's dances,
You turn to musical instruments
Of foreigners
As if you have no dances;
As if you have no instruments!
(SOL 4, pp. 49-50)*

In the above quoted lines of Lawino's "Song", we see her calling the people of Acoliland to recognize that they too have cultural values like the white people, and that it is wrong to neglect their cultural values and uphold those of foreigners. From her statement, it is deducible that she finds it very embarrassing and shameful that the people of Acoliland (Africa) ditch their cultural heritage for those of the white man (western world).

The last way through which Bitek depicts Lawino as a symbol of the African culture is through her attitude towards the Western culture, which, if I'm right to observe, is quite indifferent. Unlike Ocol and Clementine, Lawino sees nothing appealing in the Western culture, and sincerely wonders why her husband has decided to do away with the Acoli (African) culture in favour of it. This state of wonder for Lawino is seen when she asks "Why should you despise yours?" (SOL 2, p. 41). To her, the Western culture is dull and immoral unlike the Acoli culture, which is lively and moral. This is seen in her description of one similar aspect of both cultures in the third part of her "Song", which is

the social aspect (their dances). She also finds the religious aspect of the Western culture very boring and unattractive, but merely mysterious and hypocritical (hypocritical, largely due to the perverseness of the priests).

It is also due to this her attitude towards the Western culture that makes Lawino to decline Ocol's request that she does certain things such as to plait her hair and use cosmetics like a white woman, to use white men's stoves or cook white men's meals, to dance like white people, to convert to Christianity and pick up a Christian name, amongst other things. In this, she not only revolts against the Western culture and westernization in Africa, but also advocates for the preservation of the Acoli (African) cultural values.

In conclusion, Bitek successfully uses the character of Lawino to portray the beauty and essence of the African culture, as well as to successfully remind his African audience that Africans lived just fine by upholding their customs and traditions before the coming of the white man, and that it is very needful to return to the old ways of doing things, rather than continue in the newly founded Western ways and risk the extinction of their cultural heritage.

CHAPTER 3

OCOL AS A SYMBOL OF THE WESTERN CULTURE

Who is Ocol?

The personality of Ocol is exposed by Lawino in her “Song”, long before we even hear from Ocol himself. According to Lawino, her husband Ocol, is insulting and rude, and although he is an African, he has no regards for the African culture, simply because of his exposure to Western education and culture. As Lawino puts it, “He says Black People are/ primitive/ And their ways are utterly harmful,/ Their dances are mortal sins/ They are ignorant, poor and/ diseased!/ Ocol says he is a modern man,/ A progressive and civilised man,/ He says he has read extensively/ and widely/ And he can no longer live with/ a thing like me/ Who cannot distinguish between/ good and bad” (SOL 1, p. 36). And although we might want to dismiss Lawino’s claims as those of a bitter wife, believing that Ocol, if given a chance to respond, would refute them, we eventually realize that everything Lawino tells us about him is true, as he doesn’t refute them.

One would expect Ocol to use his “Song” to present himself as a more positive figure than what Lawino has done, and maybe even claim that Lawino has misunderstood his words and actions. However, all Ocol does is to confirm Lawino’s claims. The very first thing he does in response to Lawino’s “Song” is to shut her up and send her packing from his house, saying: “Woman,/ Shut up!/ Pack your things/ Go!” (SOO 1, p. 121). This confirms what Lawino says in the first part of her “Song”, which is: “You say you no longer want me/ Because I am like the things left behind/ In the deserted homestead” (SOL 1, p. 34).

After angrily chasing Lawino out of his house, and dismissing her “Song” as meaningless blabbing in “SOO 1”, Ocol turns his anger towards the continent of Africa, condemning it as a place of deep blackness, poverty and taboos, with people who are very superstitious, diabolic, inferior, timid and unadventurous in “SOO 2”. He says:

*What is Africa
To me?*

*Blackness,
Deep, deep fathomless
Darkness;*

*Africa,
Idle giant basking in the sun,
Sleeping, snoring,
Twitching in dreams;*

*Diseased with a chronic illness,
Choking in black ignorance,
Chained to the rock
Of poverty,*

*And yet laughing,
Always laughing and dancing,
The chains on his legs
Jangling;*

*Displaying his white teeth
In bright pink gum,
Loose white teeth
That cannot bite,
Joking, giggling, dancing...
(SOO 2, p. 125)*

The above lines not only confirm Lawino's claims that Ocol has completely lost regards for the African society, but also emphasizes how much he now loathes it. His exposure to Western education and culture has left a mark on him so much so that he now wants nothing to do with his cultural heritage, which is African. This is reinforced by his lamentation over his African origin at the end of the second part of "Song of Ocol" where he asks: "Mother, mother,/ Why,/ Why was I born/ Black?" (p. 126).

Ocol's hatred for the African culture is also seen in the third part of his "Song" where he threatens to destroy everything African in his attempt to force the Western culture on the African society in which he finds himself. He says, "We will smash/ The taboos/ One by one,/ Explode the basis/ Of every superstition,/ We will uproot/ Every sacred tree/ And demolish every ancestral/ shrine" (SOO 3, p. 126). Ocol's use of the word "taboos" to refer to the cultural practices of the African society shows how much contempt he has towards it. Unlike Lawino who feels the African culture is "good" and should be preserved, Ocol thinks it is sinful, and so, he makes effort to get the people to do away with it and pick up the Western culture which he feels is better. His efforts, as earlier said, are somewhat forceful and aggressive, as perceivable in the third part of his "Song" where he says: "We will round up/ All these priests/ And priestesses of/ darkness,/ All the rainmakers/ And herbalists,/ The men and women/ Who sacrifice at chiefdom/ Or clan shrines, ... To the gallows/ With all the Professors/ Of Anthropology/ And teachers of African/ History,/ A bonfire/ We'll make of all their works/ We'll destroy all the anthologies/ Of African literature/ And close down all the schools/ Of African studies" (pp. 127-129). This plan of Ocol's is born out of his understanding that for a culture to be preserved, it has to be practiced over time and transmitted through studies, and that it

would become extinct otherwise. He believes that the only way he could destroy the African culture was if he put an end to its studies and practice, and decides to put just that.

The Western culture and Westernization in Africa

According to Wikipedia, Western culture, also known as Western civilization, Occidental culture, or Western society, refers to the diverse heritage of social norms, ethical values, traditional customs, belief systems, political systems, artifacts and technologies of the Western world. It is the way of life of the people of the Western world, which, also known as the West, primarily refers to various nations and states in the regions of Australasia, Europe, and the Americas, and this culture is most strongly influenced by Greco-Roman culture, Christian culture, and, to some extent, Germanic culture.

According to Smith, the Western culture is “the culture of the modern West, which is characterized by a dominant set of values, beliefs, and practices that have their roots in the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and the expansion of European imperialism” (qtd in Yadav).

The Western Culture is “the cultural traditions, societal norms, and values of the Western world, which generally encompasses Europe, the United States, and like-minded regions” (Yadav) It has its roots in ancient Greece and Rome, and has individualism, consumerism, democracy as some of its central values. Yadav insists that “the term “Western” generally refers to Europe and parts of the world heavily shaped by its inhabitants through immigration, colonization, or influence. But it is not a clearly defined geographical area. Instead, a state’s ideology is what usually makes it Western”.

Yadav explains that there are several examples of the Western culture, such as rationalism (which emphasizes the importance of reason and logic in understanding the world), Christianity (which is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, and plays a defining role in the moral & ethical values of Western culture), individualism (which emphasizes the importance of the individual and their freedoms), democracy (which involves the public's participation in decision-making and protects the rights of individuals), capitalism (which is an economic system based on private ownership and the pursuit of profit), natural rights (a concept which intends to preserve the fundamental individual freedoms of individuals, irrespective of nationality, race, religion, etc.), consumerism (which encourages the acquisition of goods/services with an emphasis on consumer choice), education (a value that highlights the importance of acquiring knowledge for both personal & professional development), mass media (a means through which information is disseminated to the public using media outlets like TV, radio, and the internet), and lastly, syncretism (a value that encourages incorporating and blending diverse cultural influences).

The above examples of Western culture as given by Yadav touch on every aspect of the culture of the West, and form the core of the personality of the Western people. These examples of Western culture given by Yadav are essentially the various aspects of it, and what forms the core of the personality of its people. However, many non-Western countries of the world have adopted these aspects of the Western culture in recent years, making them look and feel more like the Western people, and this has given birth to the concept of westernization.

Westernization is a process by which a society or culture adopts aspects of the dominant culture (The Pros and Cons of Westernization on Global Culture). A good

example of westernization in Nigeria is the practice of white wedding, which belongs to the European culture. The most obvious form of westernization in Nigeria today though, is the practice of Christianity as a religion. The traditional form of religion in Nigeria is purely African (see explanations on the African religion in chapter 2) and it doesn't recognize Jesus Christ or anything Christianity. As explained in "The Pros and Cons of Westernization on Global Culture," westernization has its benefits and drawbacks. While it causes increased economic prosperity, improved healthcare, education, social mobility and freedom of citizens, it also comes with the potential to cause a loss of cultural identity, traditional values, social customs and increased stress for the people as they try to adapt to the new culture.

Westernization has also been defined as "the act of bringing ideas or ways of life that are typical of Western Europe and North America to other countries" (Sibani). Sibani explains that this concept is in existence in the African society, and has certain consequences, such as deviation from the traditional politics, a challenge of worship, communication barrier, high rate of divorce, indecent sexual behaviour, and the challenge of education and technology.

It is worth mentioning here that 'colonization,' which Wikipedia defines as a process of establishing foreign control over target territories or peoples for the purpose of cultivation, often by establishing colonies and possibly by settling them, as well as 'Atlantic slave trade,' which Wikipedia also defines as the transportation by slave traders of enslaved African people, mainly to the Americas, are two major factors that gave rise to the issue of westernization in Africa. This is because it is through these media that Africans first came in contact with the European culture. Laying emphasis on the point just made, Settles and McGaskey wrote that, "The imposition of colonialism on Africa

altered its history forever. African modes of thought, patterns of cultural development, and ways of life were forever impacted by the change in political structure brought about by colonialism. The African economy was significantly changed by the Atlantic slave trade through the process of imperialism and the economic policies that accompanied colonization”.

How does Ocol represent the Western culture?

Ocol, the most prominent male figure in Bitek’s “Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol,” is on one of the flip sides of the coin of “clash of culture” which Bitek seems to be tossing about in his poem. On the opposite side of it is Lawino. By implication, Ocol represents a culture that seems to be in conflict with the African culture which Lawino represents in the poem. The culture in question is the Western culture. Beyond the culture itself, Ocol represents the concept of westernization, which, as explained earlier on, largely has to do with the adoption of Western values in Africa. Ocol serves as Bitek’s instrument for the depiction of the concept of westernization in Africa, as well as its effects on the African society. Ocol’s representation of the Western culture and westernization is seen in his lifestyle, his perception and his attitude towards the African culture. In order to understand how Ocol symbolizes the Western culture, we have to consider his disregard for and condemnation of the African culture, his preference for the Western “ways” of doing things, and his advocacy for the adoption of Western ways.

Ocol’s disregard for and condemnation of the African culture is first seen in the first part of Song of Lawino, where Lawino reports that:

*My husband pours scorn
On Black People,*

*He behaves like a hen
 That eats his own eggs
 A hen that should be imprisoned
 Under a basket.
 His eyes grow large
 Deep black eyes
 Ocol's eyes resemble those of
 The Nile Perch!
 He becomes fierce
 Like a lioness with cub,
 He begins to behave like a
 Mad hyena.*

*He says Black People are
 Primitive
 And their ways are utterly
 Harmful,
 Their dances are mortal sins
 They are ignorant, poor and
 Diseased!
 (SOL 1, pp. 35-36)*

The above quoted lines don't just confirm Ocol's disregards for the African culture, but also how aggressive and animated he can be in his condemnation of it. As shall be explained later in 'Chapter 4' of this article, note that the "Black People" talked about in lines quoted above are Africans. As though to confirm what Lawino has just said about his hatred for the African culture, Ocol revisits the matter in the second part his "Song", lamenting his African origin, saying:

*Africa
 This rich granary
 Of taboos, customs,
 Traditions ...*

*Mother, mother,
Why,
Why was I born
Black?
(SOO 2, p. 126)*

Note that this is after he has mocked Africa as a place of darkness, disease, ignorance and poverty. His choice of words for mocking Africa emphasizes his hatred for Africa and the culture of its people. Ocol's hatred for the African culture is arguably the reason why he prefers Western values to African values, and ultimately advocates for their adoption and the dropping of African values by Africans.

In 'SOL 2', we see Ocol rejecting his wife for another woman called Clementine, who is said to be a "modern woman" and one who speaks English. This description of Ocol's new love interest shows that the main reason why Ocol wants to use her to replace Lawino is simply because she upholds Western values like himself, unlike Lawino who doesn't. Note that although both women are Africans, Ocol prefers to be with Clementine instead of Lawino, and this is simply because Clementine lives by or tries to live by the dictates of Western culture while Lawino is rather devout to her African culture.

Another instance where Ocol's preference for Western culture is depicted in the poem is in 'SOL 3' where Lawino brings up the issue of dancing. In this part of the poem, we see Ocol mocking Lawino because she cannot do the dances of white people, and this highlights his preference for Western dances over Acoli (and African) ones, which he believes are simply sinful. According to Lawino:

*My husband laughs at me
Because I cannot dance white
Men's dances;
He despises Acoli dances*

*He nurses stupid ideas
That the dances of his People
Are sinful
That they are mortal sins.
(SOL 3, p. 47)*

In ‘SOL 4’, we see another depiction of Ocol’s preference for Western values to African ones, where Ocol rejects Lawino because she doesn’t fancy white men’s music and dance. Lawino laments:

*Ocol says
He does not love me anymore
Because I cannot play the guitar
And I do not like their stupid
Dance.
Because I despise the songs
They play at the ballroom
Dance
And I do not follow the steps
Of foreign songs
On the gramophone records.
(SOL 4, p. 49)*

Ocol’s preference for Western values to African ones also extends to matters of beauty and fashion, as seen in ‘SOL 5’ where hairstyling patterns is brought into question.

*My husband tells me
I have no ideas
Of modern beauty.
He says
I have stuck
To old fashioned hair styles.*

*He says
I am stupid and very backward,
That my hair style
Makes him sick
Because I am dirty.
(SOL 5, p. 50)*

Ocol's decision to use such phrases as "modern" and "old fashioned" to refer to Western and African fashions respectively highlights his love for the former and disregard for the latter, and also portrays his preference for the former.

In 'SOL 8', we see that even in terms of religion, Ocol prefers the ways of the Western world. He has stopped worshipping Jok, the god of his people, but has taken on the Christian faith. This is evident in his mockery of Lawino and her service to Jok. Lawino reports:

*My husband
Looks down upon me;
He says
I am a mere pagan,
I do not know
The way of God.
He says
I am ignorant
Of the good word
In the Clean Book
And I do not have
A Christian name.
Ocol dislikes me
Because, he says,
Jok is in my head
And I like visiting
The diviner-priest*

Like my mother!

*He says
He is ashamed of me
Because when the Jok
In my head
Has been provoked
It throws me down
As if I have fits.
(SOL 8, p. 73-74).*

Other instances where Ocol's preference for Western ways is depicted is in terms of meals, dishes and cooking utensils as seen in 'SOL 6', in terms of time-telling patterns as seen in 'SOL 7', and also in terms of diagnosis and treatment of the sick as seen in 'SOL 10'.

Furthermore, Ocol represents the Western culture in Bitek's "Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol" through his advocacy for the adoption of Western values. This is exactly what he does throughout the poem. His disregard for and condemnation of the African culture, as well as his preference for the Western "ways" of doing things, are both geared towards his aim of advocating for the adoption of Western values at the expense of African values.

In conclusion, Bitek uses Ocol to portray the concept of westernization, and how it's gradually encroaching on African values, resulting in the gradual neglect of the African culture in favour of Western values.

CHAPTER 4

CLEMENTINE (TINA) AS A SYMBOL OF LOST AFRICAN IDENTITY

Who is Clementine?

Everything we are told about Clementine is from a third party—Lawino, and this casts some doubts on the veracity of it. The doubts are reasonable, given the fact that she has offended Lawino to some extent by “stealing” her husband and matrimonial home, and so Lawino might be speaking merely out of anger and frustration, especially as she doesn’t even praise Clementine, but mocks her efforts to attain what she believes to be true beauty throughout. However, when we consider the fact that Lawino doesn’t lie about her husband Ocol whom she is also having issues with in the poem while mocking him, we can’t help but give her the benefit of doubt, and accept her claims about Clementine as considerably factual.

The first thing Lawino tells us about Clementine is that she is a “modern woman”, “a beautiful girl who speaks English”, and the reason why her husband Ocol no longer wants her. By “modern”, Lawino means that Clementine doesn’t look or live like the traditional African woman, but tries to look and live like a woman from the Western world. She goes on to explain this by describing Clementine’s efforts in that regard, which we shall talk about later. Lawino’s claims that Clementine is the reason why Ocol wants to do away with her suggests that Clementine is just his concubine or side chic. However, Lawino would go on to correct this notion later by calling Clementine Ocol’s “new wife” while trying to insist that she isn’t jealous of Clementine, she says:

*I do not block my husband's path
 From his new wife.
 If he likes, let him build for her
 An iron roofed house on the hill!
 I do not complain,
 My grass thatched house is
 Enough for me.
 (SOL 2, p. 41)*

The next thing Lawino tells us almost immediately about Clementine is that the latter is acting as a dividing force between her and her husband. She says:

*But only recently
 We would sit close together,
 Touching each other!
 Only recently I would play
 On my bow-harp
 Singing praises to my beloved.
 Only recently he promised
 That he trusted me completely.
 I used to admire him speaking
 In English.*

*Ocol is no longer in love with
 The old type;
 He is in love with a modern girl.
 The name of the beautiful one
 Is Clementine.
 (SOL 2, p. 36)*

Lawino's claim that Clementine is the reason why her husband Ocol no longer wants her portrays Clementine as a dividing force between Lawino and Ocol, much like

colonization and westernization being the dividing force between most African people and their culture.

Before looking at Clementine's efforts to look and live like a white woman, I'd like to first point out that Clementine is the only character in the poem who doesn't have an Acoli (African) name. She has two names, and both of them are Western names. Her first name, Clementine, is of French origin, and her second name, Tina, is of Latin origin. While the former means "merciful" the latter, "follower of Christ". In this, Clementine is comparable to Lawino, whom, as we explained in 'Chapter 2' of this article, doesn't have a Western name, and declines her husband's proposal to give her one. As we pointed out then, Lawino's decision on the issue of name is founded on her goal to remain true to her African culture, and the same can be said of Clementine here, who believes that one of the many steps to looking and living like a white woman is by having a white woman's name.

Besides having a white woman's name, another effort of Clementine's to look and live like a white woman is her choice of language, which, in this case, is English. To look like a white woman, one must sound like a white woman, and to sound like a white woman, one must speak the language of a white woman. This is probably Clementine's belief, and why she speaks English language, which is one of the many white woman's (European) languages. Other efforts of Clementine's to look and live like a white woman include: her use of bleaching creams and cosmetics to make her skin as fair as that of a white woman, her refusal to eat much in a bid to maintain a slim shape, her hairstyling patterns, and participation in white peoples' dances.

Lawino doesn't just talk about Clementine's efforts to look like a white woman, but also what she feels are the negative effects of them. On Clementine's use of bleaching creams for instance, Lawino says:

*Some medicine has eaten up
Tina's face;
The skin on her face is gone
And it is all raw and red,
The face of the beautiful one
Is tender like the skin of a newly
Born baby!*

*And she believes
That this is beautiful
Because it resembles the face of
A white woman!
Her body resembles
The ugly coat of the hyena;
Her neck and arms
Have real human skins!
She looks as if she has been
Struck
By lightening;*

*Or burnt like the kongoni
In a fire hunt.
(SOL 2, p. 37)*

And while it may seem that Lawino is merely making a mockery of Clementine's efforts to look like a white woman, we can not overlook the fact that there is some truth in it.

The African Identity and the implication of its loss.

The issue of identity is one of utmost importance to any people, this is because it is what defines them, as well as distinguishes them from others. According to Wikipedia,

the term “identity” refers to those qualities, beliefs, personality traits, appearance, and/or expressions that characterize a person or group. What this implies is that the identity of a person or group is defined by their characteristics, belief system, attitudes and appearance. Cambridge Dictionary defines it as a person’s [or group’s] name and other facts about who they are. These other facts includes their race, culture, religion, beliefs, attitudes, and perception. That being said, the African identity can be described as those elements such as their appearance (skin colour), qualities, belief system, traditional values, culture, etc., that characterize the people of Africa. Of all these elements, our focus in this chapter is on the skin colour of the Africans which is mostly dark (or black), something, which Atem considers the main element of the African identity.

To lose something generally means to no longer possess it for whatever reason. This suggests that something must first be possessed or had before it can be lost. Therefore, when we talk about the loss of the African identity, what comes to mind is Africans, and how they no longer possess or have those features of elements that defines and distinguishes them from others. And by those features we mean their appearance, cultural values, belief system, etc. Since our focus in this chapter is mainly on the loss of the African identity from the angle of physical appearance, especially skin colour, we shall be examining a particular cause of this, which is the Eurocentric ideals of beauty; skin whitening and hair straightening, as depicted through Clementine in the poem.

How does Clementine Symbolize the loss of African identity?

Clementine symbolizes the loss of African identity in “Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol.” This is first seen in her choice of name and language. As pointed out earlier on in this chapter, Clementine is the only character without an Acoli (or African) name; both of her names—Clementine and Tina—are of European origins. Plus, the only language

she is reported speaking in the poem is not Acoli (or another African one) but a European one—English. If you didn't know any other thing about Clementine, especially the fact that she is an Acoli (African) woman, you'd think she was European. In other words, her name and language choices doesn't portray her true identity as an Acoli (or African), and this is a case of lost identity. Through her very own conscious efforts, Clementine loses her African identity. In her aspiration to be a white woman, she completely loses her real identity as a black woman, an African woman. In this regard, Clementine is the direct opposite of Lawino, who portrays the African identity in every way perceivable, especially in terms of her decisions with regards to names.

The second way in which Clementine is seen as a symbol of the loss of African Identity is her efforts to look like a white woman, which includes bleaching her skin, straightening her hair and trying to maintain a slim shape. As Lawino puts it:

*Some medicine has eaten up
Tina's face;
The skin on her face is gone
And it is all raw and red,
The face of the beautiful one
Is tender like the skin of a newly
Born baby!
(SOL 2, p. 37)*

By “some medicine” Lawino is referring to the bleaching creams used by Tina to turn her dark skin to a fair one like the skin of a white woman, which actually works. Lawino's verdict on it though suggests that it has some adverse effects. Such creams are still used by a lot of Africans today, who prefer a fair skin to their God-given dark skins. This is a

statement of dissatisfaction at one's own identity as a black person, and one of the various issues Bitek seeks to address in his poem.

Moving on, many Africans are fascinated by the way the white peoples' hair looks, and some even feel it is the best. And for someone like Clementine who aspires to look like a white woman, it is just what should be had. As Lawino puts it:

*When the beautiful one
With whom I share my husband
Returns from cooking her hair
She resembles
A chicken
That has fallen into a pond;
Her hair looks
Like the python's discarded skin.*

*They cook their hair
With hot iron
And pull it hard
So that it may grow long.
Then they rope the hair
On wooden pens
Like a billy goat
Brought for the sacrifice
Struggling to free itself.*

*They fry their hair
In boiling oil
As if it were locusts,
And the hair sizzles
It cries aloud in sharp pain
As it is pulled and stretched.
And the vigorous and healthy
Hair
Curly, springy and thick*

*That glistens in the sunshine
 Is left listless and dead
 Like the elephant grass
 Scorched brown by the fierce
 February sun.
 It lies listless
 Like the sad and dying banana
 Leaves
 On a hot and windless
 Afternoon.
 (SOL 5, p. 55)*

The above quoted lines shows us the extent to which Clementine is ready to go just to attain the identity of a white woman. First her skin colour, now her hair texture.

The third way in which Clementine is seen as a symbol of the loss of African identity is her use of cosmetics to enhance her beauty. Lawino talks about how Clementine uses cosmetics to enhance her beauty, something that is associated with the Europeans. She says:

*Brother, when you see
 Clementine!
 The beautiful one aspires
 To look like a white woman;*

*Her lips are red-hot
 Like glowing charcoal,
 She resembles the wild cat
 That has dipped it's mouth in
 Blood,
 Her mouth is like raw yaws
 It looks like an open ulcer,
 Like the mouth of a field!
 Tina dusts powder on her face*

*And it looks so pale;
 She resembles the wizard
 Getting ready for the midnight
 Dance.
 (SOL 2, p. 37)*

In the above lines, Lawino describes Clementine's use of a red lip gloss and face powder to enhance her beauty as white women do. Note that everything pertaining to Clementine in terms of appearance, beauty and fashion is European in nature, and therefore, in contrast to those of traditional African women like Lawino as earlier described in 'Chapter 2'. The following quote should serve as a good reminder to this, and consequentially clarify the point being made here. Lawino speaking:

*Ask me what beauty is
 To the Acoli
 And I will tell you;
 I will show it to you
 If you give me a chance!*

*You once saw me,
 You saw my hair style
 And you admired it.
 At the arena
 Boys surrounded me
 And fought for me.*

*My mother taught me
 Acoli hair fashions;
 Which fits the kind
 Of hair of the Acoli,
 And the occasion.
 (SOL 5, p. 51)*

On a concluding note, Bitek successfully uses the character of Clementine to satirically discuss the issue of lost African identity in his poem as a negative aspect of the post-independence African society, most likely hoping to prompt his African audience to do away with it and regain pride in their identity as Africans.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

In our exploration of “Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol,” we’ve ventured deep into the characters of Lawino, Ocol, and Clementine, each representing something unique about cultures. Lawino isn’t just a character; she embodies the richness of African culture, especially the Acoli culture in Uganda. Ocol, on the other hand, stands as a symbol of Western culture, and through him, we’ve unraveled the clash and interaction of different cultures. Finally, Clementine, despite her limited presence in the poem, shines a spotlight on how external influences are reshaping African identity. This journey has illuminated the complexities of culture and identity within the context of the narrative.

Our thorough look at Lawino’s character representing African culture in ‘Chapter 2’, has been like a deep journey into the poem’s core. Lawino isn’t just a character on paper; she’s like a real example of Africa’s many cultures, especially the Acoli culture in Uganda. We didn’t just look at the surface of Lawino’s character. We took a deep dive into her feelings and strong arguments. When we read her monologue, it felt like we were truly experiencing African culture. She’s more than just a character; she’s like a guardian of her culture, and her voice carries the history and traditions of her people. Our look into Lawino’s life went beyond just her character. We explored many parts of her life that showed different aspects of African society. We looked at her home life, which revealed family ties, long-standing customs, and the roles that men and women have. We also saw how she interacts with others and follows the rules of her community. Her beliefs and spirituality gave us a glimpse into the important spiritual side of African culture.

Looking beyond just Lawino, her talking helped us understand Acoli culture better. We looked at the things they do, like their traditions and customs, as explained by Lawino.

These practices aren't just old habits; they actively show how the Acoli people keep their culture alive and strong. Objects in the poem were super important for our study. They were like real symbols of culture, not just lifeless things. Each object had its own essence, and they made Lawino's representation of African culture even more interesting and meaningful.

Turning our attention to Ocol in 'Chapter 3,' we established that it represents Western culture in "Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol," and this led us on a big journey to understand different cultures and how they interact. Ocol is like a key character in showing us the clash between cultures and how they mix together. Our exploration of Ocol's character was also like an adventure in the world of literature. Unlike the earlier chapter, we had to look at both "Songs" because Ocol's part was important. It was like being judges in a courtroom, where Lawino was like the person complaining, and Ocol was like the person being accused.

Looking closely at the "Song" of Ocol, we explored what makes Ocol tick. We checked out why he does what he does and how he reacts when Lawino accuses him. This way, we didn't just see Ocol as a bad guy; we saw him as someone showing how Western culture clashes with African ways. Also, we saw a repeated idea about how Westernization, or the influence of Western ways, changed African culture after they gained independence. Ocol's character is like a lens that helps us understand this. He strongly supports Western customs, as we hear through Lawino's storytelling, which highlights the cultural conflicts in the poem.

Concluding 'Chapter 3,' we looked deep into the fundamental parts of Western culture. We examined the ideas, principles, and things that Ocol really believed in. These things showed how Western ways were affecting African societies. These weren't just

dull ideas; they were lively parts of who Ocol was, and they showed us what Western culture is like in the poem. Alongside studying the words in the poem, we looked closely at things mentioned in the poem that showed Western culture and how it's spreading. These things weren't just there to fill space; they were like real examples of how culture was changing. Each of them had its own essence, adding to our understanding of Ocol's character and his connection to Western culture.

Finally, in 'Chapter 4,' we looked closely at Clementine, a character who represents the changing African identity because of outside influences. Even though she doesn't appear much in the poem, her character is like a powerful symbol of how Africa is changing. We did this by focusing on certain parts of the poem, especially on the second part of "Song of Lawino" and a bit on the fifth part, as Clementine's character is a bit complex, so we needed to focus on these specific parts to understand her better.

Clementine's looks are a big part of what makes her a symbol. She looks more like what the Western culture thinks is beautiful, which is very different from what Lawino believes. We dug deep into why Clementine wants to be what she sees as "truly" beautiful, and this helped us understand what drives her actions in the poem. It gave us a deep look into her thoughts and feelings. As we looked closely at things, we often noticed how African and Western ideas about beauty were different. We saw this a lot when Clementine and Lawino talked to each other. These conversations helped us understand how culture and the way people see beauty are changing in today's Africa.

We also took a close look at how hard Clementine tried to achieve what she thought was the "real" beauty. This helped us see how much Western ideas about beauty

affect how Africans see themselves. Clementine's character shows us how African identity and outside influences mix and create a complex picture.

At the same time we looked at the characters, we also checked out things in the poem that were about making things look nice. These things were more than just decorations; they were like symbols showing how African culture was changing. Each of these things added to our understanding of Clementine's role in the poem, and how it connects to the bigger idea of African identity slipping away.

In summary, Lawino stands out as a symbol of African identity and culture, representing the lasting strength, toughness, and pride of African traditions and values. Ocol, on the other hand, isn't just a bad guy in the poem, but also a tool that helps us understand how different cultures clash, and through his character, p'Bitek encourages us to think about the complicated mix of old ways and new ideas, local traditions, and outside influences. Finally, Clementine is a character who holds great importance in the poem, representing the complicated ideas about who we are, what's considered beautiful, and how our cultures change in modern African societies.

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