

**TRAGIC VISION IN OLA ROTIMI'S THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME
AND WOLE SOYINKA'S DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN**

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**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY**

NOVEMBER, 2023

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**A PROJECT WORK IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A)
DEGREE IN THEATRE ARTS, FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, EDO STATE.**

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DECLARATION

This project is based on a study undertaken by me, in the Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts under the supervision of Dr. Israel. M. Wekpe. All ideas are the products of my personal research where the views of others were used, they were duly acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work was written and submitted by Imhontu Odion Anthonia, Matriculation number: ART1802148 to the Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State.

Dr Israel M. Wekpe
Project Supervisor

Date

Dr V. O. Diakpomere
Head of Department

Date

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God, who has been there for me. My wonderful parents, siblings and the Irabor family who have contributed to the success of my years in school.

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I would like to extend my heartfelt acknowledgments to God Almighty for His unwavering support, guidance, and grace throughout the challenging journey of the past four years. His continued blessings of good health and a sound mind have been the foundation of my accomplishments and meaning in life.

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ABSTRACT

The traditional view of human tragedy which existed several centuries back in the ancient Greek religious myths was transposed not only to Western Europe but also to the African context in the literary representation of reality in tragedy. This project aims at examining the role of fate in tragedy. It is an evaluation of selected plays by two outstanding playwrights; Ola Rotimi and Wole Soyinka. The research can be used to examine how fate plays a major role in the life of man from the Yoruba point of view. It explored the universal theme of predestination and how it is emphasized in the Yoruba tradition. It also explored how oppressive political regimes, such as dictatorships can shape the fate of individuals and communities. Coming into the world in the West African Nigerian Yoruba metaphysical universe, the tragic personage holds his fate in his own hands. The gods and supernatural beings in the invisible realms claim foreknowledge of the fate which the tragic hero brings into the world, yet does not influence the fate-holder in the winding trail of life to the fulfillment of tragic fate. This research concludes that tragedy occurs as a product of the constant working of fate in the tragic hero which fulfills itself in a tragic conflict through the hero's free-will, according to the prophecy of the gods in Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to blame*. This is more so in the Aristotelian concept of catharsis in tragedy due to the interplay between prehistoric fate and historic fate, the latter being the product of the former.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Fate, a recurring motif in tragedy, serves as a captivating element that prompts profound philosophical reflections in the minds of readers or audiences, compelling them to explore realms beyond their existing knowledge and inciting further research. This research explores tragic vision of two prominent playwrights in the texts; *The gods are not to blame* (1968) by Ola Rotimi and *Death and the king's horseman* (1975) by Wole Soyinka. Through a comparative examination of these plays. My aim of this research is to shed light on the portrayal and implications of fate in tragic narratives within an African context

Fate can be defined as an event or situation that is inevitable. According to Takad Ahmed Chowdhury from the University of Asia Pacific in the year 2020, he defined fate as a central component in tragedy. The significant role of fate is recognized when, despite a character's heroic acts and good intentions, they face death simply because they are doomed to die. But studies confirm that fate does not play a similarly critical role in tragic denouement of each play (Takad, 29).

It can be reasonably argued that fate is a critical ingredient and a major contributor to the evolution of tragedy. Some dramatists have continually explored the interface between fate and tragedy, and in many cases, fate is shown to play a great role in tragedy. Notable examples are *Death and the King's Horseman*, *Strong Breed*

by Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are Not to Blame*. This study attempts to highlight the role of fate in selected African tragic dramas.

The methodology will basically be premised on literary and textual analysis.

Some individuals in Africa hold the belief that predestination is inevitable, and regardless of how hardworking or accomplished someone becomes, their predetermined fate will ultimately lead to their downfall. I concur with this perspective, acknowledging that while predestination plays a role, our life choices and actions serve as a confirmation of our destiny. The path our future takes is shaped by the decisions and actions we make as individuals. Fate is sometimes perceived as an external imposition, serving as the destination of our life's journey, wherein the choices we make along the way define our destiny.

The role of fate in tragedy is a common theme in African literature, and two examples of this can be seen in the Nigerian plays *The Gods Are Not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi and *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka.

In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, fate plays a central role in the tragic story of Odewale, who is destined to kill his father and marry his mother according to a prophecy. Despite his efforts to avoid this fate, he unknowingly fulfills the prophecy and brings about his own downfall. The play explores the idea that fate is not simply a predetermined outcome, but is also shaped by the actions and choices of the characters.

As Williston writes:

"Fate is not our master, but a companion on our journey. It comes along with us wherever we go, but it does not lead us by the hand." (Williston, 189). Similarly, in "Death and the King's Horseman," fate plays a key role in the tragic story of Elesin, who is the king's horseman and is expected to commit suicide to accompany the king on his journey to the afterlife. When Elesin fails to carry out this duty, it is seen as a violation of fate and he is held responsible for the consequences. The play explores the idea that fate is not simply a matter of destiny or predestination, but is also shaped by the actions and choices of the characters. As Soyinka writes:

"Fate is not in the stars. Fate is in our hands. Fate is not a matter of chance, but a matter of choice. It is not something to be waited for, but something to be achieved" (Dorris, 13)

"Fate" is a complex and multifaceted concept in African literature, and is often used as a means of exploring the relationship between individuals and their environment. In many African works, fate is depicted as a force that is beyond the control of the individual, but that is also influenced by their actions and choices. Fate is not a force that works in isolation from human beings. It is not some arbitrary, supernatural power that determines the destiny of individuals without regard for their actions or character. Rather, fate is intimately bound up with the lives of human beings, and is shaped by their choices, their values, and their aspirations. (Internet source)

Furthermore, fate is often portrayed as a complex concept that can be both a source of comfort and a source of terror. As Osofisan writes, "Fate can be a source of

comfort, offering the hope of a better future or the promise of divine justice. But it can also be a source of terror, casting individuals into a hopeless, predetermined fate that they are powerless to change." (Dorris,13)

This implies that fate isn't solely determined by destiny or predestination but is also influenced by the decisions and actions of individuals. In African literature, fate serves as a vehicle for delving into the intricate interplay between individuals and their surroundings, showcasing how individuals are both influenced by and possess the capacity to mold their own future. In chapter 2 of my research, we will explore the impact of our environment on fate and destiny.

Fate is inevitable and predestination is defined as the theory or belief that whatever happens in life has already been decided by God; which human beings cannot even change. Destiny is defined as the power believed to control events, which people simply call fate. Destiny is about the future, the spiritual will of a person. It is usually affected by time, date of birth and the environment. Like in the play *The death and the kings horseman*, according to the Yoruba custom, when the chief of the community dies, *Elesin Oba*, the Kings horseman, must commit ritual suicide to ensure the chiefs spirit makes its way to the afterlife and the *Elesin* considers himself a man of great honor. Otherwise, the chiefs spirit will travel about Earth and wreak havoc upon the community. It shows how the environment can affect the destiny of a man because it is the tradition of Yoruba culture (Dopamu, 37)

1.1.1 Tragedy in Traditional Yoruba Drama

Tragedy occurs as a product of the constant working of fate in the tragic hero which fulfills itself in a tragic conflict through the hero's freewill. According to the prophecy in Ola Rotimi's play *The Gods are Not to Blame* (Japheth Mokani, 1). Arthur Miller theorized the "Tragedy of the common man" as an economic problem which occurs when an individual neglects the well-being of the society in the pursuit of personal gain. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, the Elesin was more focused on societal benefit and things of the world and neglecting his duty. This action caused him the death of his son. If we neglect our duties or try to turn from our destinies, there is always an aftermath (Chris Agide, 116).

Soyinka, the first African to conceptualize Yoruba tragedy, has presented us with the dramatic structure of Yoruba ritual theater. In Yoruba traditional drama, as demonstrated by Soyinka, the concept of tragedy goes beyond Western interpretations, as the tragic hero moves beyond the physical realm into the cosmic, where they engage with the gods (who play central roles in Yoruba ritual drama). In contrast, Western tragedy primarily unfolds on the fleeting stage.

The origin of the Yoruba ritual drama lies in the myth and legends of Ogun who happens to be the first actor in the Yoruba belief. A renowned scholar, Maduakor .O. notes that Soyinka is fascinated with myth as a phenomenon with unlimited appeal for the imagination, manifesting himself in the literature, culture, folklore and the worldview of the people (Madakor. O, 285). Soyinka in his "Fourth Stage" compares the Greek god of drama Dionysus to Ogun the Yoruba god of creativity. Like

Dionysus, Ogun is worshiped by sacrificing animals and drinking wine. His worship entails a lot of revelry. Ogun, like Dionysus, is also believed to be very fearsome and terrible in his revenge. As the god of iron, Ogun combines creativity and destruction. According to Soyinka, Yoruba believe that once upon a time, the gods Ogun, Obatala and Shango withdrew from the earth to the upper region of ether. This created estrangements from man which is symbolized in metaphysical terms as a thick undergrowth of matter and no matter which Soyinka calls the chthonic realm(Chris Agide, 121).

Troubled by their lack of completeness occasioned by this separation, the gods sought to be reunited with man. Ogun took it upon himself to bridge the gulf between the gods and man. He charted his course through primordial chaos across the barrier of mortality and death, to the world of the living. Ogun himself experienced disintegration and death previously in order to reemerge as a whole, thus renewing the connection between man and the gods(Chris Agide, 121).

1.2 Scope of Study

This work focuses mainly on the tragic vision in Ola Rotimi's *The God's are not to Blame* and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. It concentrates on fate as a central theme, and how it interacts with individual choices, cultural norms, and external influences. Furthermore, how Rotimi and Soyinka uses these elements to create complex narratives that challenge traditional Western notions of tragedy and explore how fate is shaped by cultural and societal contexts.

1.3 Objective of the Research

This study takes a critical look at the portrayals or representations of the tragic vision of Ola Rotimi and Wole Soyinka in their plays *The God's are not to Play* and *Death and the King's Horsemen*. Furthermore, the role of fate in exposing humanity to self ruin.

1.4 Research Questions

1. As depicted in both plays, how does society affect the fate of a man and the consequences of running from fate?
2. Can fate be interrupted?
3. What is the African philosophy of fate?

1.5 Methodology

This literary work employs content analysis and descriptive method to investigate the tragic vision in the selected plays. Also, library, internet, dictionary abstract from journals, and class room notes are used source of materials.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for a number of reasons. First, it presents other researchers in this area, the researchers' knowledge on the tragic views of Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi, in the selected texts. Secondly, it will add to existing literature on similar topics and also serve as reference for other researchers.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Much as one would have loved to explore this topic even more extensively, one is however constrained by some factors. Chief among these is the paucity of local/international publications on similar topic.

Inspite of this limitation however, one strongly believes that this study will be a worthwhile experience which would be useful, not only to this generation but also to subsequent ones.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Tragic

A situation characterized by extreme distress or sorrow.

Vision

How something is seen or perceived and becomes an experience.

Tragic Vision

A subject's psychology, view and version of reality (tragedy).

CHAPTER TWO

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is Fate?

Fate can be described as a supernatural influence or energy that dictates the unfolding of events in human lives. The tragedy of Ogun serves as an illustration of African tragedy and serves as the foundation of Yoruba ritual drama. Hanna M. Roisman (1), in “The Encyclopedia of Greek Tragedy”, views fate as an “English word that roughly approximates the semantic range of the Greek term, *Moira*, which is strictly apportionment or lot or apportioning agent.” *Moira* refers to “a divine agent that apportions destinies, sometimes in co-operation with other deities or principles”.

Morgens Brondsted (172) in “The Transformations of the Concept of Fate in Literature” defines fate as, “an unalterable universal order, more or less moral in its basic character, with or without the co-operation of the gods. ... External power which decisively controls human life; an arbitrary spiritual will behind all events; fixed destiny, perhaps even superior to the gods”.

Paolo Gaibazz and Marco Godin (62) in “The Work of Fate and Fortune in Africa: Critical African Studies”, define fate as “a scheme of things designed at a higher, non-human cosmic level (by gods, ancestors, etc.) thought to partly or wholly determine the course of human existence and worldly events.”

In simpler terms, the essence of Fate is that individuals do not have the option to influence something that has already been preordained by a higher authority. It represents a supernatural influence that directs the flow of events beyond human manipulation. This force is considered so potent that it governs all occurrences,

impervious to human intervention. It can lead to either tragedy or an alternative outcome.

The selected plays highlights how tragedy occurs as a result of the existence of fate in the life of the tragic hero which comes to fulfillment through a tragic conflict as a result of the hero's freewill. In the play *The Gods are Not to Blame*, Odewale was destined to kill his father and marry his mother, and it was advised that he should be killed to avoid the prophecy made at his birth but he wasn't. Unfortunately for him, the prophecy was fulfilled as a result of his freewill and flaws.

2.2 History of Fate

Fates were celestial entities that embodied the inception, existence, and demise of humanity. While every action we undertake in life may be predetermined, it doesn't impede or restrict our free will. Fate is aware of the decisions we make as human beings. Ultimately, as our earthly lives conclude, we are assessed not just based on our actions but also on how we responded to and managed the challenges life presented. In Greek mythology, the trio of Fates comprised Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, each assigned a distinct role in shaping human destiny and allocating portions thereof.

First was Clotho, the Spinner. When a human was in the womb, Clotho had the duty of weaving the threads of their life. Each thread represented one soul's life. This thread would follow the path of a human's life, including their future choices and

actions, and the consequences that could be created. Clotho would begin spinning the thread while the human was in the womb, and so she is often referred to during pregnancies or during the birth of human beings. He must look to meet whatever events his own fate and the stern Klothos (Clotho) twisted into his thread of destiny when he entered the world and his mother bore him. The choices of mankind were not absolute. Instead, there was freedom in choice, and the fate of a human depended on conditional choices. The Fates would take all decisions and outcomes into account when they wove the thread. (Homer, *Odyssey*, 193)

Lachesis was the second of the Moirai, or Fates, and her role was to measure the thread of a human's life. Her name translates as the Allotter which fits her role as the one who allots a portion of mortal life to each soul. Lachesis would determine how long a human would live, and hence how many trials they would face in their life. Within the thread lay the fate of each soul. This is the word of Lachesis, the maiden daughter of Ananke (Necessity), souls that live for a day, now is the beginning of another cycle of mortal generation where birth is the beacon of death. (Plato, 617)

The third sister was Atropos, whose name translates as the un-turnable or she who cannot be turned. Her name refers to her unshakeable position as the most stubborn of the Fates. Atropos was the one to cut the thread of fate, and at the point of the cut, the mortal life would end. Thus, Atropos resembles the death of a human. After the cut, a soul would then be sent to the Underworld for judgment, after which, it would be sent to Elysium, the Fields of Punishment, or the Fields of Asphodel. Comes

the blind Fury with the abhorred shears, And slits the thin spun life.(John Milton, Lycida, 75)

Atropos was vital, she chose how each person would die. She decided on the circumstances of their death — whether that was nobly or ignobly, was up to her. The Fates were often depicted as old women and sometimes as young goddesses, so it majorly depends on artistic preference. Many representations show Atropos as an old woman — as she chose when people would die — and Clotho as a young woman — as she was often present when women gave birth. (John Milton, Lycida, 75).

2.3 The Yoruba Art of Child Destiny Reading

Akosejaiye, which loosely translates to the feet in life, also known as *Esetaye* and *Ikosedaiye*, is a traditional Yoruba religious ceremony done three days after the birth of the child. This process is a way of looking forward to the future of the child to see what their destiny would look like.

It is believed that each child was given an *ayanmo*, a purpose, and chose a path before leaving *Orun*, Heaven, for the earth and that the *Akosejaiye* had to be performed early to prevent a child from forgetting and the purpose from being lost. The parent of the child would consult *Ifa*, the Yoruba god of wisdom and knowledge, to know their expectations from the child. They are usually the only ones, apart from the *Ifa Priest* present, as sensitive information vital to the child's future and wellbeing would be shared during the course of the rite. (Oluwatumininu, 18)

Akosejaiye cannot be done in absentia; the child itself has to be present as the feet of the child must be placed on the priest's sacred tool known as the *oponifa*. The name of the child was sometimes revealed in the course of the *Akosejaiye* reading. The reading enabled the child's parents to know how best to raise their child so as to fulfill its full potential. The ambition of the child, as well as their future profession, was often stated during the *akosejaiye* and this prevented the child from wasting time self-discovery and going after irrelevant endeavors. The Yorubas, who strongly believe in the act of incarnation, also used this as an opportunity to check if the child is just one of their ancestors coming back in another form. *Akosejaiye* is still being practiced in some parts of the world to date, and many are returning to this ancient practice. (Oluwatumininu, 19).

2.4 Destiny and Personality:

The human being is made up of body and spirit. The body (*ara*) which is the combination of flesh, blood and bones in the handiwork of the arch-divinity (Orisanla). The being of a man is made possible by the breathing-spirit or life-breath (*emi*), an immaterial element given by the Deity himself to the body. Thus, when a person dies, the Yoruba say his *emi* is gone, meaning he has ceased breathing or he no longer has the breathing spirit in him. The body does not breathe, it is the *emi* that breathes and the being of a man ceases when it disappears (Idowu, 113).

The Yoruba concept of personality embraces more than a combination of body and breath. There is a third element called *Ori*, it is the spiritual component of the human personality. It is believed to be the determinant of one's success or failure in life. Through the *ori* makes the choice which is sealed by the Deity, it is possible for evildoers to cross the path of the human person in the process of carrying out his destiny. For they may be too powerful for the human agent, who therefore needs the continued support of his spiritual personality component. It is believed that once his support is guaranteed, no force can succeed in changing one's good destiny. But one can lose the support of one's Ori because of one's character. Good destiny may be spoiled by a person's character. An impatient person will run faster than his Ori, thereby alienating it and losing its support. The Yoruba warn against inordinate ambition, the kind that leads to destruction. (Idowu, 113-114).

The Yoruba are against idleness. Woke is the cure for poverty, they say, and an idle person will ultimately find himself to blame. The point of this is that one has to help one's ori to make its good destiny a reality. Just as an otherwise good destiny may be spoiled by one's character, so may an otherwise prosperous destiny be spoiled by a person's idleness. (Idowu, 1962)

2.5 Social Existence

Individual existence is intricately intertwined with one's personal deity. Destiny, as understood by humans, is the reason for an individual's existence, chosen by their inner self and affirmed by their deity. The purpose of individual life is closely connected to the purpose of communal life and cannot be fully comprehended in isolation. Personality gains significance when one considers destiny and its connection to the community. This is because the individual is nurtured by the community, and the idea of destiny itself emanates from communal experience. It is a community concept. A person whose existence and personality is dependent on the community is expected in turn to contribute his own quota to the continued existence of the community which nurtures him and partakes in his destiny. This is the ultimate meaning of human existence. The question: what is your existence for? (*Kiniowafun* in Yoruba) Is not always (ordinarily) posed. It is posed when a person has been judged to be useless to his community. It is a challenge, a call to serve. The people of the world (*araye*) may conspire with the malevolent gods to intercept a favorable destiny. Again, to avoid such an unfortunate development, man needs to come to terms with the community and be a part of its activities. In a sense, then, community is real as *Ori*, individuality is influenced by both forces. (*Idowu, 1962*)

2.6 The Limits of Desire

As we have seen, predestination suggests that life has a mission and purpose. Individuals come to deliver a message. I am sent here for a purpose. I did not send myself: authority belongs to the one who sent me. The expectation of man, then, should be to deliver the message in accordance with the will of the creator.

Human desires, according to this perspective, are limited by human destiny. It is the unfortunate aspect of the human condition that sometimes some men want to acquire everything including, if possible, the world. (Idowu, 1962)

2.7 Christian Doctrine on Predestination

We are looking into predestination in Yoruba culture and African plays but there are some doctrines that agree with this study, and which we are going to be looking at. The term election is often used synonymously with predestination to refer to God's process of choosing which souls will and will not be saved. According to the doctrine of predestination, salvation is predetermined by God's eternal will. This doesn't necessarily void the concept of free will, which is the belief that all individuals have the capacity to make their own choices independently of a higher power because under this broad definition of predestination individuals can still make their own choices day to day. However, it does put limitations on free will and for some renders it meaningless due to the implication that no matter what any individual does, their fate is already sealed. (*Patricia, Nate, 41*).

CHAPTER THREE

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

3.1 Methodology

The tragic vision in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* provides a rich material to explore the concept of fate and its impact on tragic events. It talks about how fate has a huge impact in some African tragic plays like. But this research is going to focus on the plays *The Gods are not to blame* by Ola Rotimi and *Death and the Kings Horseman* by Wole Soyinka.

In both plays, fate plays a prominent role and plays a part in the unfolding tragic events. Fate is depicted as a force that transcends human influence, molding the destinies of the characters and guiding them toward their tragic conclusions. In 'Death and the King's Horseman,' the interruption of Elesin's ritual duty by the Europeans was a predestined event that resulted in cosmic disruption. Olunde's return to the land was also part of fulfilling his destiny.

3.2 Biography of Ola Rotimi

Ola Rotimi was a Nigerian playwright and theatre director who was born on April 13, 1938 in Sapele, Delta state and died on August 18, 2000 in Ile Ife. He was

known for his plays that explored Nigerian history, culture, and politics. Some of his notable works include:

To Stir the God of Iron (produced 1963) and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (produced 1966; published 1977) were staged at the drama schools of Boston University and Yale, respectively. His later dramas include *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (produced 1968; published 1971), a retelling of the Oedipus myth in imagistic blank verse; *Kurunmi and the Prodigal* (produced 1969; published as *Kurunmi*, 1971), written for the second Ife Festival of Arts; *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (produced 1971; published 1974), about the last ruler of the Benin empire; and *Holding Talks* (1979). Later plays, such as *If: A Tragedy of the Ruled* (1983) and *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988), premiered at the University of Port Harcourt. The radio play *Everyone His/Her Own Problem* was broadcast in 1987. His book *African Dramatic Literature: To Be or to Become?* was published in 1991.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Ola Rotimi". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14 Aug. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/>.

Alongside his playwriting, he took on roles as a director and actor in theater productions. His works found stages both in Nigeria and internationally, earning praise from critics. Ola Rotimi was also active in the political arena, holding membership in the Social Democratic Party of Nigeria.

Ola Rotimi held a significant position in Nigerian literature and theater. He played a pioneering role in shaping modern Nigerian theater and played a key part in

setting up the Theatre Arts Department at the University of Port Harcourt. Additionally, he co-founded the Association of Nigerian Authors and held the position of its president from 1986 to 1991. In acknowledgment of his substantial contributions to Nigerian literature and culture, he received the Nigerian National Order of Merit in 1988. Ola Rotimi's plays remain actively staged today and constitute a vital component of Nigerian and African theatrical heritage.

Rotimi's works were known for their social and political commentary, as well as their exploration of Nigerian and African culture and tradition. He was also a strong advocate for the development of theatre in Nigeria and played a key role in the establishment of the National Theatre in Lagos.

3.3 Background of Study

Ola Rotimi was inspired to write *The Gods Are Not to Blame* by the ancient Greek play *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles. In an interview with The Guardian in 1997, Rotimi said that he was struck by the similarities between the story of Oedipus and the Yoruba myth of Oedipus, which he had heard as a child. He said, "I saw that the myth of Oedipus was not just a Greek myth but a universal myth that could be transposed to any culture." (Martin Banham, *"Ola Rotimi: A Pioneer of Nigerian Theatre."* *The Guardian*, 24 Aug. 2000,

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/aug/24/guardianobituaries1>)

Rotimi's version of the story is set in Nigeria and draws on elements of Yoruba mythology and culture. In the same interview, Rotimi explained that he wanted to create a play that would resonate with African audiences and address issues that were relevant to them. He said, "I wanted to write a play that would speak to Africans about their own condition, about their own history, about their own culture."

"The Gods Are Not to Blame" was first performed in 1968 and has since become one of the most widely produced plays in Nigeria and Africa. It has been translated into several languages and has been performed in many countries around the world. (Martin Banham, 2000)

3.4 Synopsis of the Play "The Gods are Not to Blame":

Within Yoruba mythology, fate is perceived as shaped by an individual's personal decisions and conduct. It does not override our capacity for free will, and the surroundings also play a role in shaping destiny. There's a belief that individuals possess the ability to modify their fate through the choices they make and the actions they undertake, but there are also certain life events predestined and unalterable.

In the play *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, Odewale's fate was revealed to him at birth when he was taken to the shrine of Ogun (god of war, iron and doctor of all male children) to meet the oracle of the god Orunmila. Baba Fakunle (Ifa priest), a purblind old man, led by a small boy sits on the ground, and begins to cast his Opele, stringed objects of divination. He predicted that Odewale would kill his father and marry his mother. Orunmila is the Yoruba god of divination and wisdom, Orunmila interprets

the divine message and guards the characters in understanding their fate through the help of the Ifa priests who reveals this destiny to them. Due to fear of this prophecy coming to fulfillment and for them to avoid this fate, his parents, King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola, tried to prevent this fate from coming true by abandoning Odewale as a baby by giving him to the king's special messenger (Gbonka) to kill in the bush but he keeps him in the bush and was found by a man (Alaka) who came farming and hunting with his master . But their efforts were ultimately unsuccessful when Alaka gave Odewale to Ogundele, his master and his wife Mobike, who raised him as their own son. Odewale grows up into a virtuous and noble man. Despite being unaware of his royal lineage, he embodies admirable qualities, demonstrating his leadership potential and compassion for others. His virtues make him a likable and sympathetic character and struggling with questions of his identity, not knowing his true heritage or the weight of the prophecy (that was revealed to him by a voice) hanging over him. Odewale is horrified and vows to avoid his fate. He tries to escape the fate that awaits him. He resists his destiny, believing that he can make his own choices and avoid the tragic path laid out for him. Despite his efforts to evade the prophecy, fate intervenes, and Odewale unknowingly kills King Adetusa with a hoe after calling on Ogun (49) in self-defense over a land dispute in Ede where three footpaths met. Ogun is the Yoruba god of iron, war and technology. Odewale calling on Ogun has brought him to the fulfillment of his fate. However, the major roles of Ogun, the god of war and iron; Obatala, the God of creation and Orunmila, the all-seeing and all-knowing. Each of

these three gods or supernatural beings was found to have played dominant roles in piloting the affairs of Human beings in the dramatic cosmos of the text. Ogun was usually invoked by the protagonist, Odewale, anytime he got upset. (Hassan Gbelekale, 2021)

This deed led to the realization of the initial segment of the prophecy. While trying to escape the tragic incident, he ends up in the territory of Kutuje, ascending to the role of the new king and marrying the widowed queen, Ojuola, thus accomplishing the subsequent part of the prophecy.

Odewale and Queen Ojuola rule the new kingdom together, and they had children. 11 years later, a plague befalls the land, causing widespread suffering and death. This made the villagers question the king but Odewale with his wisdom gave hope to the people. Odewale sends Aderopo to Ile-ife to consult Orumila concerning the plague in the land. On hearing the news Aderopo has brought (the cause of the plague is because the land has been cursed due to the sin of one man who still lives among them because he killed the late king (21), Odewale requested the presence of Baba Fakunle. The oracle is consulted once more, and the oracle reveals that the cause of the plague that befalls the land is the existence of the rightful heir to the throne, who is still alive and living amongst the people. The oracle makes this revelation when the villagers seek counsel to understand why their land is suffering from the devastating plague. He called Odewale a bedsharer which provoked Odewale and the first chief ordered the bodyguards to throw Baba Fakunle out of the palace (27).

Odewale accused Aderopo of conspiring with Baba Fakunle to blackmail him of killing the late king and sharing a bed with his mother, the Queen. Textual evidence from the text has shown that Ogun's anger has a characteristic fierceness that comes with, reason for which Aderopo was cautioned against swearing with Ogun's name to avoid his wrath when Odewale banishes him from the land.

Odewale: May my eyes not see Aderopo again till I die (he bites the sword, then drops swords and goes into his bedroom (35).

Alaka (son of Odediran, son of Ijekun-Yemoja who spent his childhood hunting and farming under Ólówè Ogundele, father of Odewale (42) who has been in search of Odewale for three months after the death of Ogundele(who died two years ago), finally meets with him. He introduced himself to Ojuola and the guards as Alaka: *the farmer wants to see the scorpion (42).*

Seeing his presence, Odewale became excited and convinced Alaka that he didn't deceive him by telling the story of how he killed an old man who insulted his (Odewale) tribe during an argument on land ownership while working and digging his sweats with his bodyguards in his (Odewale) farm at the place where three footpaths meet near Ede. The land was sold to him (Odewale) by Kakalu the son of Atiki (45-9). This act made Odewale to call on Ogun

Odewale: This is... Ogun and Ogun says: flow! flow... let your blood flow flow ... flow ... f-l-o-w (49).

He Lurches forward and strikes the old man down with a single blow of his hoe; suddenly realizing the fatal result he backs away overcome with fright.

*Odewale: The whole world ceased to be, Ogun, Ogun . . . I
have used your weapon, and I have killed a man Ogun (49)*

and runs away finding a place and in the process he found himself in the land of Kutuje.

In Ojuola's quest to find out what transpired between Odewale and Aderopo led her to telling the story of how Baba Fakunle made herself and her late husband kill their first child 9 days after his birth due to the prophecy (that the boy will kill his father and marry his mother) . This made Odewale anxious as to finding out how the king was killed since everyone calms he was killed by the road where three footpaths meet. He sent his guards to bring the guard that reported the king's death from Ilorin (55).

Alaka reported the news of the death of Ogundele to Odewale who died two years ago. This made Odewale excited and requested the presence of his chiefs to listen to how his father died and not pay attention to gods who lie and accuse people but rather believe in themselves (59). He tells them the story of how a voice told him of a prophecy which made him run away to avoid him fulfilling such fate (60-1). Alaka tells him that his real parents are not Ogundele and Mobike. And how he was wrapped up in white cloth like a sacrifice to the gods. With arms and feet tied with strings of cowries and brought to Ipetu bush by a man named Gbonka and found while

he was hunting with his master Ogundele. Gbonka handed over the baby to Ogundele to take care of.

Eshu is the trickster of Orisha and a messenger of Ifa. He drives joy in causing confusion in the midst of people. This could be seen when Odewala was confused after hearing what Alaka said about his birth. Odewale becomes very angry, and he sends for Gbonka who confirms what Alaka had just said and that the Ogun priest ordered the death of baby Odewale and the king entrusted him (Gbonka) with the task of disposing the baby at the forest to die alone and to prevent the fulfillment of the prophecy. But he could not bring himself to commit such a cruel act that was why he spared the life of the child.

Filled with remorse and a sense of his destiny, Queen Ojuola takes her own life out of guilt and grief by stabbing herself with dagger

First chief: Gods! I have seen deaths before. As a warrior in this land of Kutuje, I have seen deaths, at home, in battle. I have seen deaths. But the death of a woman with a knife pushed deep by her own hands to reach her very womb . Gods (69).

While Odewale blinds himself and apologizes to Aderopo for the false accusation, he confessed on how he killed an old man for insulting the tribe he claimed was his:

Odewale: No, no! Do not blame the Gods. Let no one blame the powers. My people, learn from my fall. The powers would have failed if I did not let them use me. They knew my weakness: the weakness of a man easily moved to

the defence of his tribe against others. I once slew a man on my farm in Ede. I could have spared him. But he spat on my tribe. He spat on the tribe I thought was my own tribe. The man laughed, and laughing, he called me a man from the bush tribe of Ijekun'. And I lost my reason. Now I find out that that very man was my. . . Own father, the King who ruled this land before me. It was my run from the blood I spilled to calm the hurt of my tribe, that brought me to this land to do more horrors. Pray, my people (71).

Odewale implored his council of leaders to grant his wife/mother a dignified burial. He then chose to go into exile along with his children. Despite the chiefs' attempts to prevent their departure, Odewale dissuaded them by invoking the threat of a curse. The play concludes with a poignant reflection on the dire outcomes of attempting to escape one's destiny.

The Gods Are Not To Blame explores themes of fate, destiny, freewill, the consequences of our actions and the struggle against forces beyond human control. It also delves into the complexities of human emotions, the impact of decisions, and the inescapable nature of prophecies. Through the fusion of African culture and Greek tragedy, Ola Rotimi creates a powerful and thought-provoking work that speaks to the universality of human experiences.

3.5 How does Fate Play a Major Role in the Play

Fate assumes a significant and pivotal role within the drama "The Gods Are Not To Blame." It serves as the primary impetus guiding the unfolding events and molding the fates of the characters. The play delves into the idea of destiny and how

the lives of the characters are irrevocably linked to the foretelling of an age-old prophecy. Tragedy occurs as a result of the existence of fate in the life of the tragic hero which comes to fulfillment through tragic conflict as a result of the hero's freewill. I'm going to buttress my point by dividing them into six sections:

1. **Prophecy:** Prophecy: At the very beginning of the play, a prophecy is revealed that predicts Odewale will kill his father and marry his mother. This prophecy sets the course of the narrative and becomes the underlying theme that governs the characters' actions.
2. **Attempted Avoidance:** King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola initially dismisses the prophecy and believes that he can prevent it from coming true and try's to avoid the fulfillment of the prophecy by ordering the baby Odewale to be abandoned in the forest. However, despite their efforts, fate intervenes, and the baby is saved and raised by a different family (Ogundele and Mobike). Queen Ojuola, Odewale's mother and King Adetusa's wife, holds a fatalistic view of fate. She believes that fate is inescapable and that one's actions cannot change the predetermined outcomes. She resigns herself to her fate and accepts her tragic destiny.
3. **Unintentional Fulfillment:** As the play progresses, Odewale unknowingly fulfills the prophecy. In a chance encounter, he kills King Adetusa with a hoe in self-defense during a land dispute at the road where three footpaths meet in Ede. And later, through a series of events, he becomes the new king in a

neighboring village (Kutuje) and marries Queen Ojuola (his mother). Thus, fate leads him to fulfill the two main aspects of the prophecy.

4. **Revelation:** Eshu, represented by the character Alaka, reveals the truth of Adetoro's identity and his unintentional fulfillment of the prophecy. The revelation and insight into the workings of fate serve to heighten the sense of inevitability in the story. Eshu is the trickster of Orisha and a messenger of Ifa. He drives joy in causing confusion in the midst of people. This could be seen when Odewala was confused after hearing what Alaka said about his birth.
5. **Tragic Consequences:** Fate's influence results in tragic consequences for the characters. Odewale is left to grapple with the knowledge that he has fulfilled the prophecy and unknowingly committed the abominable acts foretold. The revelation of the prophecy and its realization bring immense guilt and suffering to the characters involved. However, as the play progresses, Aderopo witnesses the tragic consequences of the prophecy, his attitude shifts. He becomes more critical of fate and questions its fairness and the role it plays in shaping their lives. This act showed Shango, the god of lightning, thunder and vengeance. This led to Odewale banishing Aderopo from the land, the death of Ojuola and Odewale going into exile with his children after plucking out his eyes.
6. **Lessons and Acceptance:** The play, through its exploration of fate, also conveys the idea that some things in life are beyond human control. The

characters must come to terms with their destinies and accept the consequences of their actions. (Martin Banham)

3.6 Biography of Wole Soyinka

Soyinka was born on July 13, 1934, in Abeokuta, Nigeria. Soyinka's literary career took off in the early 1960s when he gained recognition as a playwright, poet, and essayist. His early works, such as *A Dance of the Forests* (1960) and *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (1972), reflected socio-political themes and criticized corruption and abuse of power in Nigeria. He founded the "Orisun Theatre Company" in 1965, which aimed to promote African traditions and modernize Nigeria.

In 1967, amidst the Nigerian Civil War, Soyinka was detained and held in custody for a duration of 27 months on suspicion of endorsing the separatist Biafra movement. Following his release in 1969, he opted for voluntary exile later in the 1990s due to his opposition to General Sani's Nigerian military regime. Notably, in 1986, Wole Soyinka received the Nobel Prize in Literature, becoming the inaugural African recipient of this honor. As dramatist, Soyinka has been influenced by, among others, the Irish writer, J.M. Synge, but links up with the traditional popular African theatre with its combination of dance, music, and action. He bases his writing on the mythology of his own tribe-the Yoruba-with Ogun, the god of iron and war, at the centre. He wrote his first plays during his time in London,

The Swamp Dwellers and The Lion and the Jewel (a light comedy), which were performed at Ibadan in 1958 and 1959 and were published in 1963. Later, satirical

comedies are *The Trial of Brother Jero* (performed in 1960, publ. 1963) with its sequel, *Jero's Metamorphosis* (performed 1974, publ. 1973), *A Dance of the Forests* (performed 1960, publ. 1963), *Kongi's Harvest* (performed 1965, publ. 1967) and *Madmen and Specialists* (performed 1970, publ. 1971). Among Soyinka's serious philosophic plays are (apart from "The Swamp Dwellers") *The Strong Breed* (performed 1966, publ. 1963), *The Road* (1965) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (performed 1976, publ. 1975). In *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973), he has rewritten the *Bacchae* for the African stage and in *Opera Wonyosi* (performed 1977, publ. 1981), bases himself on John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* and Brecht's *The Three penny Opera*. Soyinka's latest dramatic works are *A Play of Giants* (1984) and *Requiem for a Futurologist* (1985).

(Chris Agide, 45)

3.7 Background of the Play

The Death and the King's Horseman is a play written by Wole Soyinka, first published in 1975. The play is based on a real-life historical event that occurred in Nigeria during British colonial rule. Soyinka is concerned with more than just a 'clash of cultures', however devastating. His triumph in this play is in evoking the mystery and ritual of Yoruba life, a world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and in giving it palpable and breath-taking theatrical form, in striking contrast to the desiccated life-

style of the colonials. The play is considered one of Soyinka's masterpieces and has been widely acclaimed for its powerful portrayal of complex human dilemmas.

The play is inspired by a 1946 incident in the town of Oyo, Nigeria, which Soyinka came across while researching Yoruba history and culture. The incident involved the British colonial authorities intervening in a ritual called "Egungun," where the King's Horseman is expected to commit ritual suicide after the death of the king to accompany him to the afterlife. The colonial authorities considered the ritual barbaric and sought to prevent it from happening, leading to a clash of cultural values and misunderstandings.

In "The Death and the King's Horseman," Soyinka examines the clash between traditional Yoruba beliefs and British colonial influence. He delves into the complexities of cultural imperialism and questions the legitimacy of imposing one's values and beliefs on another culture. Soyinka's works often deal with issues of identity, culture, and colonialism. He is known for his use of Yoruba mythology and folklore in his writing, and his works often explore the relationship between traditional African culture and modernity. Soyinka has been a vocal critic of authoritarian regimes in Africa, and has been involved in efforts to promote democracy and human rights on the continent.

The play comprises three acts. Act one serves as an introduction to the characters and the backdrop. Act two marks the climax of the clash between African and Western cultures, with Elesin thwarted from fulfilling his task due to colonial

interference. The third act delves into the aftermath of Elesin's inability to fulfill his duty, concluding the play with a melancholic tone. The play is regarded as a masterpiece of African literature and has been performed around the world. *Death and the King's Horseman* is widely considered to be one of Soyinka's most important works, and has been performed in theaters around the world. The play has been praised for its powerful writing, complex characters, and thought-provoking themes.

3.8 Synopsis of the Play *Death and The King's Horseman*

Similar to numerous African cultures, the Yoruba people hold a core belief that life is an unbroken sequence. Deceased individuals are not left behind but rather remembered, with ancestors revered and valued as mentors and companions. Additionally, the not-yet-born are held in high regard, with newborns often considered as ancestors returning to corporeal existence. The most emotionally charged junctures in the life cycle revolve around transitions from one form of existence to another, specifically the transition from the spiritual to the physical realm at birth and the transition into death. Elesin's responsibility as king's horseman is to enact the transition from life into death in a ritual manner, to remind the entire community through his death that life is a continuum.

The play begins with the preparations for the ritual suicide of Elesin, the King's Horseman of the Yoruba people. It is the tradition of the Yoruba people that once a king dies, a ritual is performed to accompany the spirit of the king into the abyss. This

is done by killing of a dog that will escort the Elesin Oba to meet the late king. Elesin executes a brief, half-taunting dance while the drummers are moving and drawing rhythm out of his steps. He dances towards the market place as he chants the story of the Not-I-bird. The women began dressing him in rich clothes and in the process of carrying out his duty, he is been distracted by a young lady who entered Iyaloja's stall (19). Iyaloja tells him that the lady has been betrothed to her son and he should focus on his journey because one foot has been unlocked already but needs to complete the ritual since he is still in the world of the living. Elesin refuses and orders the presence of the girl, Iyaloja has no choice than to obey his wish just to fulfill his desires by preparing for the wedding between Elesin and the young lady.

Amusa (a police officer in the service of his majesty's government) goes to report an issue to Mr Pilkings but on reaching there, he sees Mr Pilkings and his wife Jane wearing the costume of a dead cult not for humans. He advises them to change the costume if they want him to tell them the reason he came (25). Mrs. Jane questions him about the arrest of the cult leaders who arrived with the egungun performers to stir trouble, highlighting that the charm didn't have an impact on him (Amusa). She inquires why he's feeling fearful now. Amusa responds by explaining that he arrested only the leaders and maintained a sense of reverence toward the egungun, refraining from any interference with it. This made Mr Pilkings angry and tells Amusa to write his report and leave. Report got to Mr Pilkings that a prominent man was to commit suicide as a result of the native custom. Mr Pilkings promises to arrest everyone

involve in this ritual murder. He confronts his native guard (Joseph) who tells him there is no power attached to the costume he is wearing as Amusa claims. And the drum sound could be the wedding of a prominent chief (30)

Amusa encountered a group of women while en route to execute Pilkings' directive. Frustrated by the interruption, he warned that he might return with weapons on his next visit. The women had requested him to leave and return later due to an ongoing marriage ceremony, which he found difficult to believe, expecting a ritual instead. This incited the daughters of the women, who seized the whites' possessions, including their guns and hats, and mimicked them. Iyaloja intervened to plead for their release.

A ball was to take place and prince was to be present. Mr Pilkings and his wife wore the egungun costume and demonstrated the dance steps of the egungun and the appearance. (The clothing that the Pilkingses wear to the ball has been taken away from a group performing the egungun celebration, a ritual in which men dress as the ancestors and mingle with the living. The masqueraders take the ritual seriously, as a reminder that the ancestors are always present.). A liveried footman comes in with a note and hands it to the Resident who gives it to Pilkings. Pilkings informs him of the content in the letter. Resident tells Pilkings to submit his report to him the next day. Olunde (son of Elesin who flew into the country to bury his father) bumps into Mrs Pilkings, asking her about the whereabouts of her husband. He pleads with her to convince her husband not to stop the rite of passage of the Elesin Oba. She pleads with

Olunde to continue his doctorate degree and not focus on traditions that tell's its people to commit suicide. Olunde tries to make her understand and tells her how the white think highly of themselves "you believe that everything which appears to make sense was learnt from you.... Your white race know how to survive and I have seen proof of that. But at least have the humility to let others survive in their own way even if it's through ritual suicide" (53). She tells Aide-De-Camp who ran into question Olunde's identity, how his father (Elesin) disowned Olunde because Mr Pilkings took him abroad to study law in other to avoid Olunde from fulfilling his duty to his tradition.

Pilkings finally distorted the ritual exercise by capturing Elesin and locks him in a wide iron barred gate, binding his wrist in thick iron bracelets chained together while interrogating him. The Yoruba people are outraged by this interference and see it as an affront to their traditions. The tension between the British and the Yoruba people reaches a boiling point. Iyaloja walks in questioning Elesin on his reason for leaving a seed behind when he has not opened the door of a new existence

Iyaloja: I warned you, if you must leave a seed behind, be sure it is not tainted with the curses of the world. Who are you to open a new life when you dared not open the door to a new existence? I say who are you to make it so bold? Who are you to bring abomination to us(67-8).

Elesin and Iyaloja pleaded with Pilkings to allow Elesin fulfill his oath to the king and promises peace

Iyaloja: They have slain the favorite horse of the king and slain his dog. They have borne them from pulse to pulse centre of the land receiving prayers for their king. But the rider has chosen to stay behind. Is it too much to ask that he speak his heart to heart of the waiting courier” (74).

The praise singers blame him for the abomination placed on the land.

Praise singers: Elesin, we placed the reins of the world in your hands yet you watched it plunge over the edge of the bitter precipice. You sat with folded arms while evil strangers tilted the world from its course and crashed it beyond the edge of emptiness - you muttered, there is little that one man can do, you left us floundering in a blind future(75).

They inform Elesin that his son Olunde has committed suicide in his place in order to fulfill his father's duty. Olunde sacrifices his life to affirm the tradition of his people against the power of colonial rule. Through this act of Olunde, Soyinka represents a significant and uncompromising affirmation of Yoruba cultural tradition.

On hearing this news, Elesin commits suicide by strangling himself with the chains. While looking at his son's corpse, he flings one arm around his neck once and with the loop of the chain, strangles himself in a swift, decisive pull. The guards rush forward to stop him but they are only in time to let his body down. Pilkings has leapt to the door at the same time and struggles with the lock. He rushes within, fumbles with the handcuffs and unlocks them, raises the body to a sitting position while he tries to give resuscitation. Iyaloja laments and questions his corpse "Why do you strain yourself? Why do you labor at tasks for which no one, not even the man lying there

would give you thanks? He is gone at last into the passage but oh, how late it all is. His son will feast on the meat and throw him bones. The passage is clogged with droppings from the King's stallion; he will arrive all stained in dung". She refuses Pilkings from covering his (Elesin) staring eyes and tells him that the stain of death will cling to him. Elesin's bride takes up a little earth, walks calmly into the cell and closes Elesin's eyes. She then pours some earth over each eyelid and comes out again. Iyaloja tells her to forget about the dead and face the unborn (76). Pilkings is haunted by the spirits of the Yoruba people, who seem to be seeking revenge for his interference. The play ends with the British officer being tormented by the spirits, while the Yoruba people celebrate their victory.

3.9 How does Fate Play a Major Role in the Play

Fate plays a significant and central role in the life of Elesin Oba, the king's horseman, in *The Death and the King's Horseman*. The concept of fate is intricately woven into the play, influencing Elesin's actions, choices, and ultimately determining his tragic destiny. Here's how fate affects Elesin's life in the play:

1. **Chosen Role as the King's Horseman:** Elesin is not an ordinary man; he holds a sacred and revered position in Yoruba culture as the king's horseman. According to tradition, it is his duty to perform the "Iyaloja" ritual, where he accompanies the deceased king's soul to the afterlife. This role is

predetermined by his birth, making him the chosen one to carry out this essential task.

2. **The Prophecy of Death:** Before the play begins, there is a sense of inevitability surrounding Elesin's fate. The death of the king's is prophesied to occur, and this prophecy is tied to Elesin's own destiny. The prophecy predicts that Elesin will take his own life to fulfill the ritual suicide after the king's passing. They will also be killing of a dog that will escort the Elesin to the other world.
3. **Failure to Fulfill the Ritual:** Despite being chosen for this sacred role, Elesin's inability to perform the ritual becomes the central conflict of the play. The intervention of the British colonial officer, Pilkings, prevents him from fulfilling his duty and embracing his fate. This interruption disrupts the natural order and leads to tragic consequences.
4. **Guilt and Responsibility:** Elesin feels a profound sense of guilt and responsibility for not fulfilling his role as the king's horseman. He believes that his failure has brought dishonor upon his family and the Yoruba people. This guilt shapes his subsequent actions and decisions.
5. **Olunde's Sacrifice:** In the play, Elesin's son, Olunde, takes matters into his own hands and sacrifices himself by assuming his father's role in the ritual. Olunde's sacrifice is an attempt to restore honor to his family and fulfill the destiny that his father was unable to achieve.

6. **Fatalistic Perspective:** Throughout the play, Elesin exhibits a fatalistic perspective, accepting his fate as an inevitable outcome. He believes that he must follow the path set before him and that it is his destiny to perform

3.10 Impact of these Deities in *Gods are Not to Blame* and *Death and the King's Horseman!*

In Yoruba culture, there is a significant focus on divination traditions, particularly Ifa divination. These ceremonies are employed to request counsel from the Orisha (deities) and to acquire a deeper understanding of one's fate. Through consultations with Ifa diviners, people can make well-informed choices to harmonize their actions with their predetermined destiny.

In Yoruba culture, divination plays a crucial role in seeking guidance, making decisions, and understanding one's destiny. Ifa holds a central and crucial role as the Orisha of divination and wisdom. Ifa is considered the custodian of knowledge and the mediator between the divine and human realms. Ifa is often referred to as "Orunmila" or "Orula" when associated with divination. Ifa divination is a complex system of seeking guidance, understanding destiny, and solving problems by consulting the Orisha Orunmila. Ifa priests or Babalawos use divination tools, such as the divination board (Opon Ifa) and divination verses (Odu Ifa), to communicate with Orunmila and interpret the messages received. The guidance provided through Ifa divination helps individuals navigate life's challenges and make informed decisions. There are several

different divination systems and methods employed in both plays but I will start with “the gods are not to blame” and they are listed below:

1. **Orunmila:** The play centers on Orunmila, the Yoruba god of wisdom and divination. The story's "The Priest of Ifa" figure serves as a representation of him. The purpose of Orunmila's character is to interpret divine messages and help the characters, especially the main character Odewale, understand their futures. This is consistent with Yoruba beliefs that Ifa divination can provide counsel and reveal one's future.
2. **Eshu (Elegba):** Eshu is an Orisha who lurks at intersections and entranceways. The opening and closure of opportunities in life are thought to be under his power. People frequently ask Eshu's favor to clear their path and open doors for achievement. The messenger who informed Odewale about the prophecy and his birth assumes the guise of Eshu.
3. **Ogun:** Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron, war, and technology, is not a character but is symbolically present through themes of conflict, power, and the use of weapons. We could see when Odewale kills King Adetusa with a hoe during a land dispute.
4. **Yemaya (Yemoja) and Oshun:** These two Yoruba goddesses, associated with the sea and freshwater, are not portrayed as characters but are indirectly referenced through themes of fertility and motherhood. Ojuola giving birth to a son 9 years after the prophecy shows how fertile she is. (Ifa Karade, 2020)

In Wole Soyinka's play *Death and the King's Horseman*, Elesin, the king's horseman does not directly reunite with Yoruba divination practices in the traditional sense. However, there is a significant spiritual and cultural connection throughout the play that reflects elements of Yoruba spirituality and cosmology. Elesin's role as the king's horseman is deeply rooted in Yoruba tradition and spirituality. His duty is to accompany the recently deceased king to the afterlife and ensure a smooth transition for the king's spirit. This role is considered sacred and is tied to the concept of destiny in Yoruba culture.

Elesin's dedication to his job as the king's horseman is clear throughout the play, and he sees it as the realization of his destiny. He thinks that by carrying out this ceremony, he will gain dignity and a measure of immortality in the hereafter. Elesin isn't shown in the play performing formal divination rites like Ifa divination, but Yoruba spiritual ideas have a significant influence on his actions and views. The Yoruba worldview, which includes ideas about destiny, ancestral reverence, and the importance of rituals, underpins Elesin's character and motivations.

It's important to note that Yoruba religion is a syncretic belief system, and the worship of Orisha often coexists with other spiritual practices. Devotees of Yoruba religion believe that by honoring and appeasing the appropriate Orisha through rituals, offerings, and prayers, they can gain favor, protection, and guidance, which in turn can influence the course of their lives and destinies. The relationship between individuals

and Orisha is deeply personal and shapes various aspects of their life experiences. (Ifa Karade, 2020)

3.11 Consequences of Interrupting Sacred Rituals and the Challenges of Maintaining Cultural Identity in the Face of External Pressures

The Yoruba people's ancient ceremonies are interfered with by British colonial authority in Soyinka's drama "Death and the King's Horseman," which depicts a collision of cultures and ideals. This response to my inquiry, "Can fate be interrupted?," from chapter one of this study. Tragic results and effects result from this interruption.

1. **British Colonial Intervention:** The main occurrence of fate's interference comes when Pilkings, the District Officer of British colonial authorities, interferes with the ancient Yoruba rite of Elesin, the King's Horseman, committing ritual suicide in order to follow the recently slain king to the afterlife. Elesin sees this rite as the accomplishment of his destiny, while the Yoruba people regard it as a sacred responsibility.
2. **Clash of Values:** The British colonial officials, influenced by their Christian beliefs and cultural biases, perceive the Yoruba ritual as barbaric and incompatible with Western values. Pilkings, in particular, feels it is his duty to prevent Elesin from carrying out the ritual. This clash of cultural values leads to the interruption of Elesin's fate and the disruption of the ritual.

3. **Elesin's Delay:** Elesin's own internal conflict also contributes to the interruption of his fate. The procession was his journey to fulfilling his fate but he becomes enamored with a young Yoruba woman, which delays his commitment to the ritual. This internal struggle reflects the complexity of human desires and emotions in the face of cultural and spiritual obligations.
4. **Tragic Consequences:** The interruption of fate has tragic consequences. Elesin is prevented from carrying out his duty, and this is viewed as a grave offense in Yoruba culture. The disruption of the ritual is believed to bring a curse upon the community, and this curse indeed materializes with devastating consequences, including the death of Elesin's own son.

Ogun is associated with iron, craftsmanship, and technology. The chain, being a metallic object, falls within Ogun's domain, as iron is one of his primary symbols. Ogun represents the transformative power of iron, which can be both a tool for creation and a weapon of destruction.

In Yoruba cosmology, Ogun is seen as a resilient and determined deity. Ogun's qualities of determination, resilience, and adaptability are mirrored in the character of Elesin, the king's horseman. Despite being restrained by the chain and facing the opposition of the colonial authorities, Elesin remains steadfast in his commitment to his cultural and spiritual duty, much like Ogun's determination in the face of adversity. The chain's presence represents the resilience of Yoruba culture and spirituality, which continue to exist and adapt even in the face of external pressures. While the chain

symbolizes colonial oppression and the dehumanizing nature of British colonialism. It is a physical manifestation of the colonial authorities' control over indigenous cultures and traditions

It all highlights the enduring strength of Yoruba traditions and their ability to survive despite attempts at suppression. The chain disrupts the natural order and balance that should exist between Elesin's role, his community, and the spiritual world. Its presence signifies a disturbance in the cosmic balance. The disruption of the ritual and Elesin's inability to fulfill his duty result in a curse on the community and the death of Elesin's son. The chain symbolizes the catalyst for these devastating events.

Here are some key consequences that result from interrupting fate in the play
“The gods are not to blame”

1. **Unforeseen Tragedies:** The primary consequence of interrupting fate is the unfolding of unforeseen tragedies. When Odewale learns of the prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother, he takes actions to prevent this fate from coming true. However, his efforts to avoid his destiny inadvertently lead him down a path that fulfills the prophecy. This tragic outcome, which includes the death of his father, King Adetusa, and his mother, Queen Ojuola, reflects the idea that trying to escape one's fate can ultimately bring about the very events one seeks to avoid.
2. **Guilt and Suffering:** Odewale experiences intense guilt and suffering as a result of his actions. He is haunted by the realization that he has killed his

father and married his mother, fulfilling the prophecy. This psychological torment is a consequence of his attempt to interrupt his destiny.

3. **Loss of Innocent Lives:** In the play, the consequences of interrupting fate extend beyond Odewale. Other characters, such as the innocent characters who are affected by Odewale's actions, also suffer tragic fates. For example, the sickness and curse that came as a result of Odewale being king of Kutuje land.
4. **Revelation and Catharsis:** The consequences of interrupting fate lead to a moment of revelation and catharsis for the characters and the audience. The truth about the prophecy and the tragic events that unfold serve as a powerful commentary on the inevitability of fate and the futility of trying to escape it.
5. **Restoration of Cosmic Order:** Ultimately, the play concludes with the restoration of cosmic order. Odewale's actions and the resulting tragedies serve as a reminder of the power of fate and destiny in the universe. The play ends with a sense of closure and a reaffirmation of the idea that the gods' will cannot be thwarted.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary

It should be noted that since the classical literary period had a firm belief in the ‘external-power’, it is less surprising that Sophocles and Euripides, who happened to be the lead playwrights of the age, highly featured fate as a major thematic aspect in their drama works. In the classical literary period, generally, and Greek mythology, specifically, people had a firm belief in fate that was not only considered to be beyond man’s control, but that it also determined the course of events in the ancient Greek society. For the Greeks, everything in life apparently happened for a reason, and the path they led in life was prescribed for them by forces far beyond their control. This classical concept of “an unalterable universal order” or the deterministic motif profusely features in such African literary works as *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and *Death and the King’s Horseman: A Communion Rite* by Rotimi and Soyinka, respectively, as a probable reminder to the African audience that although man should have a sense of duty and is sometimes influenced by masculine egoism due to the predominantly patriarchal nature of African societies, the vagaries of life in African societies, much like in classical Greece, are beyond his (man’s) control.

This research has highlighted the tragic vision of Ola Rotimi and Wole Soyinka in their plays. The two plays that were analyzed in this research reveal the active representation of fate and consequences of interrupting Yoruba culture depicted

by Ola Rotimi and Wole Soyinka in their plays. Both plays, Ola Rotimi's *God's are not to blame* and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the king's horseman* are intellectual representations of fate as a major role in tragedy because they both portray how fate plays a major role in Yoruba tragedy. This view is perhaps more illustrated by P. J. Conradie (28) in his critical essay, "*The Gods Are Not to Blame: Ola Rotimi's Version of the Oedipus Myth*". His argument is that: "As was to be expected, Rotimi experienced certain difficulties in transplanting the myth to Africa. An interesting aspect is the role of the oracle. The Yoruba have an elaborate system of divination, and in this respect they resemble the ancient Greeks. But there are differences in their use of divination."

Fate refers to a predetermined course of events or outcomes that are believed to be beyond human control and influenced by some external force, such as destiny, divine will, or supernatural forces. It suggests that certain events in a person's life are preordained and cannot be changed or avoided, regardless of individual choices or actions. Fate has been a concept present in various cultures and belief systems throughout history, often intertwined with notions of predestination or cosmic order (Steven, 15).

In Yoruba religion, fate is often viewed through the lens of their belief in destiny and the concept of "Orúnmilà," the Yoruba deity of wisdom and divination. Fate, or "Orúnmilà's verdict," is believed to be determined through divination rituals performed by a Babalawo (a priest or diviner). These rituals involve casting oracles

using divination tools like the Ifá oracle, which are believed to reveal the path and destiny of individuals.

Wole Soyinka often draws upon African myths, folklore, and cultural traditions to explore the concept of fate in his works. He believes that fate is deeply rooted in the cultural and mythological narratives of African societies. These narratives often emphasize the interconnectedness of individuals with their communities and ancestors, shaping their destinies. He emphasizes the agency of individuals to make choices and confront the challenges presented by fate. In his works, characters often grapple with the tension between destiny and personal choice. He has explored how oppressive political regimes, such as dictatorships, can shape the fate of individuals and communities. His experiences as a political activist and his imprisonment in Nigeria have influenced his perspective on the role of power and resistance in shaping one's destiny. One of his notable perspectives on fate can be found in his play *Death and the King's Horseman*. In this play, Soyinka delves into the clash between cultural traditions and colonialism in Nigeria. One of the central themes is the idea that fate, as understood by the Yoruba people, is inextricably linked to their customs and rituals. The British colonial authorities, however, do not comprehend or respect these beliefs, leading to a tragic clash of cultures. Through the characters and events in the play, Soyinka explores the notion that fate is not just a matter of individual destiny but is deeply intertwined with one's cultural and societal context. He highlights the dangers of imposing one's beliefs and values on others and the tragic

consequences that can result from such cultural clashes. He also emphasizes the importance of respecting and understanding different cultural perspectives on fate and destiny.

Ola Rotimi, his definition of fate in tragedy likely reflects the idea that characters in his plays are often subject to forces beyond their control, leading to their downfall of tragic outcomes. Fate, in this context, may be seen as a powerful and inevitable force that shapes the destinies of the characters, regardless of their actions or choices.

The play is heavily influenced by Yoruba mythology and religion. The concept of fate is intertwined with the belief in destiny as determined by the gods. The protagonist, Odewale, is destined to kill his father and marry his mother, much like the Greek tragedy of Oedipus. This fate is predetermined by the gods, and the characters are powerless to change it. Despite the inevitability of his fate, Odewale makes choices that lead to tragic outcomes. His defiance of the gods' prophecy and his actions have far-reaching consequences, including the deaths of innocent characters. Fate, in this play, is not just a matter of predestination but also a result of individual choices and their repercussions.

In *Death and the King's Horseman* the play explores the clash between British colonialism and traditional Yoruba customs. The role of the king's horseman, Elesin, is to commit ritual suicide to accompany the recently deceased king to the afterlife. The conflict arises when the British colonial officer, Pilkings, intervenes to prevent the

ritual, believing it to be barbaric. Elesin sees his role as a divine duty and his fate as tied to the king's death. However, the clash between cultures and the intervention of the British authorities disrupt his fulfillment of this duty. The play raises questions about the clash between individual and cultural fate, duty, and the imposition of colonial values.

In both plays, fate is a central theme, but it interacts with individual choices, cultural norms, and external influences. Rotimi and Soyinka uses these elements to create complex narratives that challenge traditional Western notions of tragedy and explore how fate is shaped by cultural and societal contexts. In both cases, characters are caught in the web of their beliefs and the consequences of their actions, ultimately leading to tragic outcomes.

These books consistently and emphatically relay how fate plays a role in the journey of man. The books were written from the Yoruba point of view, regardless of the fact that Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* is an adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Rotimi's construct explores the universal theme of predestination and how it is emphasized in the Yoruba tradition. The authors of the books and their characters are used as samples to represent the Yoruba society.

In Soyinka's drama, *Death and the King's Horseman?*, the tragic hero, a highly individuated medium, is supposed to carry himself through the will of music on to a higher place of being. In thus expecting some bliss or ecstasy, he hopes to rise to a level of consciousness higher than that of his environment whence the explosion of

rapturous joy brings himself both dismemberment as well as re-creation for other roles. The tragic hero, Elesin Oba, drifts around the normative imperatives of his role, but in failing recognizes the true phenomenon of communal sacrifice, seeks an easy exemption and an alternative. This manifests outwardly as changing history and colonialism. Inwardly, the genuine cult of his own cosmos recognizes this as a failure of the imagination which makes him an unworthy, therefore incapable, element of sacrifice. He thus evades a certain 'dark' area of experience which lies between dream and drunkenness.

4.2 Conclusion

Fate is the overwhelming force that grips humanity; it exposes the tragic figure to perilous decisions that push them towards self-ruin. It bolsters their misguided self-assurance, leading them to make a succession of blunders that hasten their descent into moral decay. Therefore, in this tragic portrayal, the tragic character's downfall hinges on their ignorance or absence of awareness, paradoxically evident in their unwavering conviction of self-understanding. Eventually he, still confident about knowledge becomes foolhardy, and this foolhardiness, becomes the hubristic tendency of his mortal fate which plunges him into deeper turmoil, and he becomes conscious of the truth about himself only at the eleventh hour wherein is inexorable fearful death. But this misfortune is the result of coming into the stage of life in the carnality of mortal beings. Ill-fate is the archenemy of the tragic protagonist, and all other characters,

internal and external including the gods who become causative factors in the chain of events that lead to the hero's fall can only be deemed, at worse, 'unintentional accomplices' to the tragic hero. In other words, to be born with tragic fate is equal to a tragic situation prepared in advance for the tragic hero, pending fulfilment by him in the exercise of freewill. The gods, by showcasing their awareness of the tragic character's prehistoric state, grant them the opportunity to understand their destiny. They permit the one who holds this fate to exercise their free will in either embracing or changing it. When someone adopts a dismissive and disrespectful attitude towards the gods, the unfortunate fate of the tragic hero is reshaped into the intention of the divine beings. In this manner, the will of destiny merges with the will of the one who holds it and the will of the gods.

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