

## Inverted Reality and Cultural Response to Modernity in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (*Le Lion et La Perle*)

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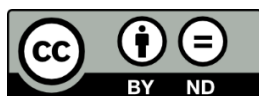
### Abstract

African dramatic literature is a product of and a response to the society which informs its creativity. This situation typically highlights the didactic nature of Nigerian dramatic literature. To this end, Nigerian playwrights such as Wole Soyinka have drawn inspiration for their dramatic creativity from the trajectory of events that occur in their immediate and remote environments. With the qualitative approach of textual analysis and literature review, the article adopts tenets of postcolonial theory to critique Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (*Le Lion et La Perle*) – a play that has been critiqued by some scholars from the perspectives of cultural and ideological conflicts. The socio-cultural relevance of the play may have informed its translation into the French language. For this article, however, the English version of the play is used based on the fact that English has more exhaustive coverage in literary discourses. With the theoretical and analytical approach in this article, the play is discussed beyond the spectrum of culture and ideological conflicts by considering its characterisation and plot. The cultural response to modernity is the advocacy for an artistic synthesis of tradition and modernity, aiming for sustainable modernity. There is a need for collaboration and cooperation between tradition and modernity as advocated in the dialogues and actions of Baroka, the Bale of Ilujinle. Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (*Le Lion Et La Perle*), like every other dramatic text, should be read as a “writerly” text to avoid fixation of meaning.

### Key words:

Soyinka's postcolonial drama, African cultural nationalism, Tradition versus modernity

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### Résumé

La littérature dramatique Africaine est un produit et une réponse à la société qui nourrit sa créativité. Cette situation influence généralement la nature didactique des littératures dramatiques nigérianes. Donc, les dramaturges Nigériens tels que Wole Soyinka ont donc généré des idées pour leurs créations dramatiques à partir de la trajectoire des événements qui se produisent dans leurs environnements éloignés et immédiats. Avec l'approche qualitative de l'analyse textuelle et de la revue de la littérature, l'article adopte les principes de la théorie postcoloniale pour critiquer *Le Lion et la Perle* de Wole Soyinka – une pièce qui a été critiquée par certains chercheurs du point de vue de la culture/ conflits idéologiques. La pertinence socioculturelle de la pièce a peut-être éclairé sa traduction en langue française. Cependant, pour cet article, la version anglaise de la pièce est utilisée car l'anglais est plus largement utilisé dans les discours littéraires. Grâce à l'approche théorique et analytique de cet article, la pièce est discutée au-delà du spectre de la culture et des conflits idéologiques en considérant sa caractérisation et son intrigue. La réponse culturelle à la modernité est la promotion en faveur d'une synthèse culturelle de la tradition et de la modernité pour une modernité durable. Il existe un besoin de collaboration et de coopération entre la tradition et la modernité, comme le préconisent les dialogues et les actions de Baroka, le Bale d'Ilujinle. *Le Lion et la Perle* de Soyinka, comme tout autre texte dramatique, doit être lu comme un texte « d'écrivain » pour éviter toute fixation de sens.

**Mots clés:** Le drame postcolonial de Soyinka, Nationalisme culturel Africain, Tradition contre modernité

### Introduction

A retrospective reflection on Nigeria's historical and sociological experiences reveals a fundamental gap in our perception of reality and the theoretical interpretation of the events of colonialism and the evangelisation of the entire African continent. These historical and sociological experiences alter our modes of thought from a rustic state to a perceived reformed state, without any critical interpretive models of reality, thereby establishing a knowledge-based encapsulation of Africans that leads to subservience and abject submissiveness. Consequently, these socio-historical arrangements have created a false image of Africa as a continent that perpetually depends on Europe for civilisation and sustainable economic development. These issues regarding African dependence on Europe for civilisation have been extensively discussed in Edward Said's

(1994) *Culture and Imperialism*, Homi Bhabha's (1994) *The Location of Culture*, and Elleke Boehmer's (2005) *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*.

Ambivalently, colonialism in Nigeria redefined African cultural worldview and social relations in consistency with the platforms offered by Western education, thereby classifying African people into the bipolar structures of the educated and the uneducated, the literates and the illiterates, as well as the learned and the unlearned. The members of the camps in the bipolar structures have access to different opportunities and privileges, with the eventual consequence of creating a class-based society, which negates the cultural nationalism and collective national identities that predated colonialism. Following the establishment of newly constructed colonial societies, where Africans could no longer share a homogeneous African ideology of communalism and collectivism, differences emerged along the lines of educational level and privileges in colonial services, including those of teachers, lay readers, domestic staff, and catechists. The pains were heavy on the minds of the underprivileged, who can also be described as the subaltern (the colonial population which suffers exclusion from the colonial power matrix, while its antithetical meaning is hegemony). In its general sense, the subaltern refers to the class of people who are oppressed and socially, politically, and geographically positioned outside the hegemonic power structure of the colony, which Gramsci's cultural hegemony denies a voice within the power structures of society (Akoh 2023, pp. 10-11). Even if the subaltern cannot speak in unity to form a state to change their situation, they can at least protest their subalternity in writing, as found in the thematic foci of plays/dramatic texts of the first generation of Nigerian playwrights, such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, James Ene Henshaw and John Pepper Clark.

In the category of the first generation of Nigerian playwrights, the present article focuses on Wole Soyinka, owing to his reputation as the first African Nobel Laureate and the topicality of the themes in his plays on the hegemonic shift – a temporary displacement of the dominant paradigm before the resurfacing of another hegemony. Two of Wole Soyinka's prominent plays that address European cultural hegemony against the backdrop of subaltern African culture are *The Lion and the Jewel* (1962) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975). In particular, the focus of the present study is on *The Lion and the Jewel*, as it features pan-African representation through dual linguistic expressions in English and French, the two

dominant languages of colonial administration in Africa. Furthermore, the play's subtle critique of inverted reality and the construction of cultural identities, as reflected in its characterisation and plot, warrants critical attention. With the conceptualisation of inverted reality, the present article charts a new course in the analysis of the characters and roles of principal characters – Baroka, Lakunle, Sidi and Sadiku – to establish how few of them, if not all, have been the opposite of what they claim to represent between tradition and modernity. By doing this, the article reveals an inverted reality through the language and actions of the characters, both individually and collectively, without compromising the spectrum of interpretive meanings, overt or covert, represented in the play. Additionally, this article does not excuse the subjective actualisation of inverted reality and the cultural response to modernity in the play.

### **Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* in the Orbit of Two Worlds**

At its first premiere in 1959 and its first publication in 1962, the simplest interpretations given to Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* are the clash between European and African cultures, as well as the ideological clash between tradition and modernity, and between the old and the new generations. These interpretations resonate in Showmya and Sinega's (2021) *Cultural Representation in Wole Soyinka's The Lion and the Jewel*, Watt's (2008) *Tradition v. Modernity: Wole Soyinka's The Lion and the Jewel*, Reddy's (2013) *Cultural Conflict in Wole Soyinka's Play The Lion and the Jewel* as well as Lalmawizuala's (2016) *Tradition versus Colonial Mentality: Understanding the Effects of Colonization in The Lion and the Jewel*. Also, the present article does not overlook studies on the play from the perspectives of gender, discourse analysis, as well as postcolonial and anthropological studies. Thus, the play has undergone different ideological configurations in response to the intended meanings inscribed in the text through its characterisation and overall subject matter.

A simple summary of the play shows a battle for love between a young teacher, Lakunle and an old village head, Baroka. With a series of events running into one another, thereby establishing ideological warfare between tradition and modernity, the play culminates in a marriage between Sidi (the village damsel) and Baroka (the Baale of Ilujinle). Beyond this simple plot of the play lies the ideological seal of identity construction and inverted reality, premised on the knowing and becoming of the principal characters,

most especially Lakunle, Baroka, Sidi, and Sadiku. As such, the present article upholds the assertion that “ideology signifies ideas and beliefs which help to legitimate the interests of a ruling group or class, specifically using distortion and dissimulation”. The strategies of distortion adopted in the representation of ideology subject it to endless interpretations in life and literature. This is the case in the interpretive adventures into the representation of identity construction and inverted reality throughout the play, which interrogates the commonality of educated and uneducated Africans as [re-]presented in the characterisation of Lakunle (an educated, Europeanized African) and Baroka (a pure, aboriginal African). Despite the differences in their sociological experiences and educational standards, the fact remains that both are Africans.

Considering the sociological background of the play, one may argue that Soyinka’s experience in London as a student provided a prompt for the play’s subject matter, which presents a psychological and social conflict between the rusticity of African culture and the presumed modernity of European culture. This situation has been a recurring motif in other literary genres of Soyinka, most notably in one of his most celebrated poems, “Telephone Conversation”. While in London, perhaps, Soyinka had witnessed the evils of racial discrimination and cultural chauvinism of the whites, thereby reliving in him the essence of African cultural renaissance. Also, Soyinka, who has been rooted adequately in African [Yoruba] culture, feels the urge to question the fake cultural identity of most Africans, who the European mentality of cultural supremacy over African culture has carried away. These Europeanised Africans, such as Lakunle in *The Lion and the Jewel*, typically suffer from an inverted reality.

There is a sharp contrast between the pure naivety of Sidi and the pretended modernity of Lakunle, particularly in their representation of African identity. Lakunle copiously demonstrates unrepentant arrogance and inverted reality, which is antithetical to the African communal ethos. No matter the extent of his learning, he forgets the fact that he remains an African, and his behaviour must be consistent with the African normative standard of behaviour. Contrarily, he sees African culture as incompatible with his newly acquired European culture through education to achieve his selfish end. In an impressionistic manner of convincing Sidi to marry him without paying a bride price (a customary practice among Yoruba people to consolidate a marriage), Lakunle uses a collection of negative adjectives

to describe African [Yoruba] culture – his culture of birth and identity. While describing Yoruba culture, Lakunle describes it as “a savage custom, barbaric, outdated, rejected, denounced, accursed, excommunicated, archaic, degrading, humiliating, unspeakable, redundant, retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable”. The arrogant attitude of Lakunle towards everything African replicates the attitude of a few educated Africans that Ngugi wa Thiong’o describes in his *Decolonising the Mind*. This category of Africans consciously distances itself from its cultural beliefs and practices following the “cultural bomb” unleashed by the colonial hegemony of Europeans. In his submission, Wa Thiong’o (2007, p. 3) avers thus:

... the biggest weapon ... unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them view their past as a wasteland of non-achievement, and it prompts them to distance themselves from that wasteland.

The cultural bomb has hit Lakunle as he does not see any value in the African culture. One can, however, question the honesty in Lakunle’s attitude, which is precipitated by his unwillingness to pay Sidi’s bride price. Based on this, there is an inversion of his reality, aligning with the duality of his cultural representation. No doubt, Lakunle is an African with ‘half education’, which qualifies him to be a primary school teacher in a village school. With the position, Lakunle sees himself as superior to everyone in the village; he expects everyone to regard him as an opinion leader on social, political, and cultural matters. Lakunle is, however, displeased that the people of Ilujinle do not see any sense in his actions and utterances. In a face-saving manner, Lakunle retorts as follows:

... what is a jewel to pigs?  
If now I am misunderstood by you  
And your race of savages, I rise above taunts  
And remain unruffled. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, p. 5)

The rhetorical question used by Lakunle is a subtle reflection of his inverted reality, which ridicules his situation of half-education and cultural bigotry. He is dissociating himself from the culture that nurtured and prepared him for the limited European education he has acquired. With this attitude, he visibly demonstrates what Lois Tyson described as unhomeliness, which does not mean lack of home. In his clarification of unhomeliness, Tyson (2006, p. 419) avers:

Being “unhomed” is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak.

The unhomeliness of Lakunle is seen in his psychological dissociation with anything African following his deluded vision of refined European culture. Erroneously and as an indication of his inverted reality, Lakunle does not see himself as part of Ilujinle even though his ancestry is from the place. His education has given him a bloated conception of African identity as nothing to be reckoned with. His actions and misconceived notion of African identity are like a proverbial kettle calling pot black. Characters like Sidi, Sadiku, and Baroka are more relatable than Lakunle because they psychologically and sociologically connect with their African cultural roots, although with some traces of cultural infusion from the colonial mentality of Lakunle. For instance, Sidi appreciates the sanity and wisdom of African culture, hence her insistence on paying the bride price before marrying Lakunle. This insistence is shown in the following excerpt.

SIDI: Now there you go again. One little thing and you must chirrup like a cockatoo. You talk and talk and deafen me with words which always sound the same and make no meaning. I have told you, and I say it again. I shall marry you today, next week or any day you name. But my bride-price must first be paid.

*(The Lion and the Jewel, p. 60)*

The excerpt reveals the firmness of Sidi in the cultural ideology of virginity and bride-price. In African [Yoruba] cultural episteme, a maiden such as Sidi is expected to preserve her virginity and thus the need for a very handsome bride-price to reward the bride's family for the proper moral upbringing of their daughter. On this, Eniola and Aremo (2020, p.26) aver thus:

The payment of the bride price of a woman implies quite several things, among which are the consolidation of the relationship between the families of the bride and the groom, the enhancement of the value of the woman in the society, and it also includes ownership of the woman and her belongings, among others.

It is, therefore, a general belief that a maiden whose bride price is not paid is no longer a virgin. The deduction from this situation is that Sidi demonstrates the actual reality of her cultural background. Similarly, Sidi has accepted the patriarchal configuration of her sex as lacking in self-determination. Just like Sidi, Sadiku also demonstrates resistance to the patriarchal definition of her sex. She gladly accepts her roles as a wife in the polygamous harem of Baroka, first as an inheritance and later as the most senior wife on the list of wives to Baroka, the Baale of Ilujinle. Considering the aura that surrounds her position as the most senior wife in the compound of Baroka, Sadiku lives in Eldorado with respect and honour attached to her social reputation as a "queen". While convincing Sidi to be a wife (the youngest and the most favourite of Baroka), Sadiku emphasises the 'comfort' which she (Sadiku) enjoys and which awaits Sidi. The following excerpt reveals thus:

SADIKU: Sidi, have you considered what a life of bliss awaits you? Baroka swears to take no other wife after you. Do you know what it is to be the Bale's latest wife? I'll tell you. When he dies - and that should not be long; even the Lion has to die sometime - well,



when he does, it means that you will have the honour of being the senior wife of the new Bale. And just think, until Baroka dies, you shall be his favourite. No living in the outhouse for you, my girl. Your place will always be in the palace; first as the latest bride, and afterwards, as the head of the new harem ... It is, a rich life, Sidi. I know. I have been in that position for forty-one years.

(*The Lion and the Jewel*, pp.20-21)

The deduction from Sadiku's assertion is that the womenfolk in the play have conveniently subscribed to the pigeonhole representation of their feminine gender. Following the patriarchal representation of the feminine gender in Yoruba society and the play, Sadiku does not see anything wrong with her responsibilities of satisfying the masculine ego of Baroka and other male folks, such as Lakunle. Considering the gender representation of women in patriarchal society and Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, Haste (1993, p. 69) describes women as "need-meeters to others"

With the above trajectory of plot development in the play and the consistent ideological conflicts between Lakunle and Baroka, the latter is placed at the centre of attraction, thereby suffering from inverted reality. Baroka faces the dilemma of "in-betweenness" with close reference to the sustainable hold on tradition or absolute rejection of modernity. This specificity in the critique of Baroka's characterisation forms the bulk of the discussion in the latter part of this article.

Baroka sees Lakunle as an albatross that should be carried carefully across his neck, and this is why he adopts diplomacy anytime both of them are in contact. Initially, they are both contenders on a fundamental issue of modernity and civilisation of the whole of Ilujinle. Another problem arises from the battle for love after the magazine's publication, which announces to the world that Sidi is the village belle. It is at this moment that Baroka sees the need to take a new wife, and the target is Sidi, the latest beauty-champion of Ilujinle. On hearing the declaration of Sidi as the village belle, Baroka retorts that "yes, yes ... it is five full months since last I took a wife ... five full months." (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 18). Following this retort, Baroka

confidently informs Ailatu (one of his wives and the latest before marriage with Sidi):

BAROKA: You have no time, my dear.  
Tonight I hope to take another wife. And the  
honour of this task, you know, belongs by  
right to my latest choice. (*The Lion and the  
Jewel*, p. 27)

Baroka hopes to achieve his goal at all costs. This informs his decision to lie to Sadiku that he has become impotent. This action is based on the prediction that Sadiku and Sidi are irrational in their information management. The trick works, and Sidi becomes a victim of Baroka's ploy - she ends up on his bed without the payment of bride price.

From the previous discussion in this article, Baroka and Lakunle are presented as characters with inverted realities owing to their mixed feelings towards tradition and modernity. These two characters exemplify what Du Bois has described as double consciousness, a state of psychological tension between the margins and the centre. Du Bois' description of double consciousness, as given below, is central to the discourse on the inverted reality demonstrated by Lekunle and Baroka. In his description, Dubois (1997, p. 38) avers that double consciousness is

... a peculiar sensation, this double  
consciousness, this sense of always looking at  
one's self through the eyes of others, of  
measuring one's soul by the tape of a world  
that looks on in amused contempt and pity.  
One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a  
Negro; two souls two thoughts two  
unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in  
one dark body, whose dogged strength alone  
keeps it from being torn asunder.

Although Du Bois used the term to describe African-Americans' cultural attitude in America, the signification of double consciousness is also relevant to describe the disposition of Africans towards their native culture after their exposure to European education, culture, and religion, as seen in

the actions of individuals like Baroka and Lakunle. These two characters suffered from the Oedipus complex (superiority-inferiority complex) between the nativity of their tradition and their respective inducted modernity through education and civilisation. The Oedipus complex between the duo of Baroka and Lakunle becomes complicated, perhaps, because of their different processes of induction to modernity – Lakunle through education and Baroka through civilisation. Consequently, they both hold each other with suspicions before the surfacing of Sidi as the bait to further fuel the ideological warfare between the Lion of Ilujinle and the school master of Ilujinle.

Ironically, each of them claims unflinching knowledge and understanding of the culture they uphold yet lacks the proper wisdom to discern the meeting point between tradition and modernity. It is their lack of wisdom that renders them as characters with an inverted reality, characterised by dogmatism and the fanatical execution of their cultural beliefs. Both of them have been diluted by the loss of native intelligence that can prompt them towards purification. This situation is effectively enunciated in the latter part of this article. Lakunle's defiance of tradition and Baroka's resistance to modernity are counterproductive to the postcolonial transformation of the country, regardless of the latent intentions they may have for this. They, therefore, reveal the malaise of inverted reality in their thoughts and actions.

### **Can Modernity Live without Tradition?**

In "Tradition vs. Modernity: The Continuing Dichotomy of Values in European Society," Galland and Lemel (2006) argue that tradition and modernity are two sides of the same coin, complementing each other. This reveals that one is not superior to another. The primary issue in the collaborative relationship between tradition and modernity is the subjective interpretation of reality, which occurs through the processes of acculturation and socialisation. This is the exact case with Lakunle, whose half-education has infected him with cultural bigotry and short-sightedness to understand his folly of moving against the culture that nurtured him. With his limited education, he has presented himself to the whole of Ilujinle as the epitome of civilisation and modernity. One, then, wonders what kind of education he passes on to the students under his pastoral care and literacy, without affecting the sustainability of tradition.

Baroka, on the other hand, illustrates the manifestation of traditional African men who were initially uncomfortable with modernity and civilisation. Baroka's fear, perhaps, is that he will lose all the privileges attached to his office as the Bale of Ilujinle. In his deluded vision, he is making efforts to frustrate the construction of a railway that will connect Ilujinle with other big cities and towns, most especially Lagos, by offering bribes to the people working on the project. What Baroka fails to realise, perhaps, is that the infrastructural development in Ilujinle will bring more opportunities and privileges, thereby legitimising his concrete hold on the whole village. On this idea, Blom (2002) and Senyojo (2004) have argued that one of the best ways for traditional communities to advance and achieve more in the contemporary social matrix is through the dynamic absorption of modern ideals in part or their entirety.

Even though Lakunle and Baroka have cultural points of intersection, especially during performances, they are not serious-minded in harmonising tradition and modernity. The duo usually operates in two parallel directions. As soon as Baroka enters the venue of the performance, Lakunle makes efforts to escape from the scene. This is revealed in the following excerpt:

BAROKA: Akowe. Teacher wa, mista  
Lakunle.

LAKUNLE: A good morning to you sir.

BAROKA: Guru morin, guru morn, nbh!  
That is all we hear from alakowe'. You call at  
his house hoping he sends for beer but all you  
get is guru morin. Will guru morin wet my  
throat? Well well our man of knowledge, I  
hope you have no query for an old man  
today.

LAKUNLE: No complaints.

BAROKA: And we are feuding in  
something I have forgotten.

LAKUNLE: Feuding sir? I see no cause at all.

BAROKA: Well the play was much alive until I came; now everything stops and you were leaving us. After all I know the story and I came in right on cue. It makes me feel as if I was Chief Baseje.

LAKUNLE: One hardly thinks the Bale will have the times for such childish nonsense.

BAROKA: A-ah mister Lakunle. Without these things you call nonsense, that you say I am welcome, shall we resume your play?  
(*The Lion and the Jewel*, pp. 13-14)

The familiar play that Baroka refers to in the dialogue is that of the lost traveller. This indicates that Ilujinle has had previous opportunities to advance technologically and economically. Still, the negligence of the people and the pre-planned frustration of the efforts by Baroka have hindered these efforts. This situation, consequently, thwarts Ilujinle's graduation from traditionalism to modernity. Baroka is the presumed name, *Baseje* (a spoiler of good things), that he calls himself. He has been using his authority to disturb the smooth transition of Ilujinle to modernity. The lost traveller, who forms the subject matter of the performance that generated confrontation between Baroka and Lakunle, could not achieve anything in Ilujinle. Hence, he left in dejection and frustration. Baroka is self-seeking and pleasure-seeking, as shown in the dialogue with Lakunle. He (Baroka) wants everything that will satisfy his id, even at the detriment of the entire village. The only indigenous achievement of Baroka is the central toilet of the village.

Although Soyinka does not mention how the school came into Ilujinle, we speculate that it involved the government, which saw the need to develop Ilujinle. The negative attitude of Baroka to modernity and infrastructural development in Ilujinle aligns with the view of Petkovic (2007, pp. 23-39) that "like the form of regression and stagnancy in culture, traditionalism

opposes each change or innovation, it withstands to modernization, stigmatizing everything that carries with it the accompanying sound of new, other, and different”.

Apart from concentrating on the serious business of modern development in Ilujinle, Baroka creates time for a frivolous lifestyle. This is consistent with the idea that growth might be slow; modernity will persist, whether with or without collaboration. This argument is based on Gyegye's (1997) position that traditions are a synthesis, not an antithesis, to one another. Thus, there is a need for a synthetic relationship between Baroka and Lakunle – the innovation in education, in conjunction with proactive traditional institutions, has the potential to usher in a new age, an advancement in technology, and a new epoch in the socio-economic history of Ilujinle.

The synthetic relationship between tradition and modernity, as proposed by Gyegye, is not unusual to Ilujinle. This village has been a point of attraction to the outside world, particularly in Lagos. This indicates that Ilujinle is already on the path to modernity and development, despite the machinations of Baroka, who fails to understand that modernity can only prompt the advancement of existing traditions. The story of socio-human relations in Ilujinle changes with the arrival of a magazine which arrives from Lagos. The magazine, in the context of the play and based on the interpretive approach adopted in this article, symbolises modernity because it opens up Ilujinle to further modern development. Similarly, the arrival of the magazine in Ilujinle complicates the conflict and advances the plot of the play. This is because the prominence and recognition given to Sidi's photograph on the magazine's cover awaken the lustful feelings of Baroka towards her, as the following excerpt reveals:

THIRD GIRL: Yes, yes, he did. But the Bale is still feasting his eyes on the images. Oh, Sidi, he was right. You are beautiful. On the cover of the book is an image of you from here [touches the top of her head] to here [*her stomach*]. And in the middle leaves, from the beginning of one leaf right across to the end of another, is one of you from head to toe. Do you remember it? It was the one for which he

made you stretch your arms towards the sun.  
[Rapturously.] Oh, Sidi, you looked as if, at that moment, the sun himself had been your lover. [They all gasp with pretended shock at this blasphemy and one slaps her playfully on the buttocks.]

FIRST GIRL: The Bale is jealous, but he pretends to be proud of you. And when this man tells him how famous you are in the capital, he pretends to be pleased, saying how much honour and fame you have brought to the village.

SIDI: [with amazement.] Is not Baroka's image in the book at all?

SECOND GIRL: [contemptuous.] Oh yes, it is. But it would have been much better for the Bale if the stranger had omitted him altogether. His image is in a little corner somewhere in the book, and even that corner he shares with one of the village latrines.

(*The Lion and the Jewel*, p. 11)

With her photograph prominently displayed on the magazine's cover page, Sidi's beauty has been proclaimed to the world. Consequently, Baroka sees this as an opportunity to enhance his fame without embracing modernity. This is an erroneous assumption because, with the magazine and his marriage to Sidi, he cannot escape the inroads of modernity into Ilujinle, as "the world around us is growing more complex by the day; reality is changing or mutating at an amazing speed" (Layiwola 2010, p. 10). The world around Ilujinle is becoming dynamic and changing, as hinted by Lakunle with his constant references to the civilisation in Ibadan and Lagos while making efforts to convince Sidi. The arrival of the magazine only validates the claims of civilisation made by Lakunle.

At a deeper level of analysis of Baroka's ideology or attitude towards modernity, one can say that he is not entirely averse to the evolving changes

in Ilujinle. His problem, perhaps, is the fear that the emerging modernity will alter the normative values of his people. With this, one can say that Baroka conceives of modernity in line with the philosophical thoughts of Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber, who have argued that a paradigm shift often accompanies the emergence of modernity. This is not to say that Baroka does not want modernity. The primary issue he faces is the approach and fear of the unknown. For this reason, he wants the whole process to be gradual, systemic and organic. It can, therefore, be said that his conception of modernity aligns with Emile Durkheim's ideal of transcended solidarity from the mechanical phase to the social phase of solidarity. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the village maidens unanimously appreciate the magazine with no exception of Baroka and Lakunle, but with different vested interests. This reveals that they are all prepared for the imminent change that will be ushered in by modernity. In a review of the social solidarity proposed by Emile Durkheim, Malik and Malik (2022, pp. 7-10) identify four operational levels of social solidarity – (i) the system of bond between individuals and society (ii) the bonds between individuals within a society (iii) members of society are united by ties to that society (iv) solidarity refers to the intensity of the cohesion of attachments which link the individuals to their society. We can, therefore, see the traces of social solidarity in Ilujinle, thereby preparing the village for modernity.

Baroka's leaning towards the path of modernity is revealed through his series of dialogues with Sidi while he makes efforts to woo her. He makes Sidi understand that he believes in modernity but not in the approach adopted by Lakunle. During the re-enactment of the stranger with the devil horse, Baroka acknowledges the sense in Lakunle's prompt towards modernity. This is shown in the following excerpt:

BAROKA: And where would the village be,  
robbed of such wisdom as Mister Lakunle  
dispenses daily? Who would tell us where we  
go wrong? Eh, Mister Lakunle? (*The Lion  
and the Jewel*, p. 17)

With this acknowledgement, a path to modernity is established. From another perspective, one can say that Baroka publicly states this to endear Sidi to himself based on the open knowledge of the likeness that Sidi and



Baroka have for each other. This argument still adheres to the view that Sidi is the bait, or rather, she is the signification of the centre of gravity for the cultural tension between tradition and modernity. Similarly, Baroka flatters Sidi with the “superior knowledge” of Lakunle to sway Sidi’s love towards himself, as the following excerpt reveals:

BAROKA: Ah, I forget. This is the price I pay.  
Once every week, for being progressive.  
Prompted by the school teacher, my servants  
were prevailed upon to form something they  
call The Palace Workers' Union. And in  
keeping with the habits -- I am told -- of  
modern towns. This is their day off.

*(The Lion and the Jewel, p. 37)*

Although the above dialogue is a flattery of Lakunle’s conception of modernity, Baroka is surreptitiously adopting it. Apart from genuinely acknowledging Lakunle’s knowledge, Baroka has also taken some steps towards modernity with the construction of a stamp-making machine, which was kept in the secrecy of his palace. While showcasing the machine for Sidi, he states that:

BAROKA: The work dear child, of the palace  
blacksmiths. Built in full secrecy. All is  
not well with it -- But I will find the cause  
and then Ilujinle will boast its own tax on  
paper, made with stamps like this. For long I  
dreamt it. And here it stands, child of my  
thoughts.

*(The Lion and the Jewel, p. 49)*

The deduction from Baroka’s assertion is that, perhaps, he prefers endogenous modernity – a form of modernity which grows from within the village. This means that he does not want imposed modernity that people will find challenging to manage or relate to, as in the case of Lakunle. The endogenous modernity will aid in the technological development of the land and the scientific thinking of the people within the trajectory of home-grown development. With a preference for endogenous modernity, Baroka

aims to demonstrate that Africa possesses native intelligence and cognitive acuity, which can propel the continent towards technological advancement and sustainable scientific discoveries. The advancement in technology will serve as the catalyst for urbanisation and industrial revolution, consistent with Schaniel's assertion that "the new technology may create change in society, and that the direction of change is determined by the nature and function (use) of that technology in the adopting culture" (1988:496). Baroka may, therefore, be aware of the capabilities of technology to evolve a new society of surprises and pains. For this reason, he aspires to a modernity that is self-generative, dynamic, and flexible to the sociological, economic, and cultural needs of the people. Another critical point registered by Baroka's action is that Africa is not a void geographical space with no home-grown knowledge system that can propel science and technology. This situation, therefore, explains the joy and satisfaction of Baroka at the unveiling of the machine before Sidi.

### **Text and the Reformulation of Ideas: A Postscript**

Since "a text is characterised by its constituent form of language (langue + parole), grammar, syntax and lexicology/phono/semantics graphetics, graphology, tenor, tone, structure, and cultural artefacts that define its ideological contents" (Fashina 2023, p.19), a critic of a text needs to enervate all the nuances of meanings overtly or covertly expressed in the text. Following this submission, a text yields to different connotative and denotative interpretations, thereby becoming a writerly text (a text which generates multiple meanings based on episodes of readings and literary criticisms) as explained by Barthes (1970). It is on this understanding that the present article critiques *The Lion and the Jewel* beyond the general conception of cultural conflicts between tradition and modernity or ideological conflicts between the old and the new generations. Instead, the present article reformulates the textual ideology of the play within the framework of cultural synthesis between tradition and modernity.

With the characterisation and approach to conflict resolution in the play, Soyinka does not overtly present the theme of cultural or ideological conflicts. The inference from the play, instead, underlines the ideals of cultural synthesis as received from the dialogues of Baroka and Sidi, whose dispositions towards modernity were not an outright rejection of the evolving changes in Ilujinle. Their responses towards modernity are a

conscious appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of the “new order” being preached to them by one of their own, Lakunle. It is also the submission of this article that the negative attitude of Sidi and Baroka towards modernity is informed by the radical and escapist approach that Lakunle adopts in preaching modernity to the people of Ilujinle. Instead of taking him seriously, the people of Ilujinle view him as self-serving, as he attempts to marry the village belle without paying the customary bride price. All these have not indicated serious cultural or ideological conflicts, but rather a misrepresentation of purpose towards achieving a common goal – the evolution of a modern culture in Ilujinle.

The marriage of Sidi to Baroka at the end of the play does not signify the loss of modernity in the cultural/ideological battle, as some critics, such as Watt (2008), have led us to believe. It is, rather, an attempt by Wole Soyinka to emphasise cultural synthesis and the re-invigoration of tradition and modernity for a sustainable symbiotic relationship. The marriage between Baroka and Sidi, therefore, is a synthesis of the positive energies of the old generation and the new generation to procreate modernity. Thus, the marriage is not an economic loss to the growth and development of Ilujinle. Sidi becomes convinced of Baroka's competence and native intelligence in transforming Ilujinle after a closer discussion between them. Surprisingly, Sidi avers that “I can no longer see the meaning, Baroka. Now that you speak almost like the school teacher, except your words fly on a different path, I find . . .” (*The Lion and the Jewel*, p. 52). This discovery of Baroka's competence may even lead to a sexual relationship between them – an action that culminates in marriage at the end of the play. The issue of cultural synthesis is also echoed in the return of the magazine (the totem of modernity) to Lakunle. By not tearing the magazine, Sidi still sees the value in the document. The primary problem, however, is the source of the magazine.

Critically, Baroka is aware of the need for cultural synthesis and synergy between the old and new generations to ensure sustainable modernity. This is based on the understanding that modernity only thrives on existing traditions, from conception to deployment. Any attempt to overlook this stringent process towards modernity will amount to “mocking the real wounds of the inflictions where they are deepest and most enduring” (Osundare 1993, p. 7). This is the exact situation that Baroka wants to avoid by insisting on cultural synthesis and home-grown modernity, which

hinges on collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders, irrespective of their generation, age, and level of education. An instance of this argument is seen in the dialogue between Baroka and Sidi:

BAROKA: The old must flow into the new,  
Sidi, Not blind itself or stand foolishly  
Apart. A girl like you must inherit Miracles  
which age alone reveals. Is this not so?

SIDI: Everything you say, Bale, Seems  
wise to me.

BAROKA: Yesterday's wine alone is strong  
and blooded, child, and though the  
Christians' holy book denies the truth of this,  
old wine thrives best within a new bottle. The  
coarseness is mellowed down, and the  
rugged wine acquires a full and rounded  
body . . . Is this not so—my child? [Quite  
overcome, Sidi nods.]

BAROKA: Those who know little of Baroka  
think His life one pleasure-living course. But  
the monkey sweats, my child, the monkey  
sweats, it is only the hair upon his back which  
still deceives the world . . .

*(The Lion and the Jewel, p. 53)*

This unearthing of another possible interpretation of the play demonstrates a liberal approach to cultural nationalism and modernity. Baroka is not self-conceited as Lakunle has presented him in the play. Instead, he proves rationalism in adopting the modernist model for his village. Consistent with the discussion in this article, there is no statement on cultural victory. There is no victor and no victim. Instead, there is a need for an endogenous approach to the evolution and deployment of sustainable modernity.

## Conclusion

This article has examined the representation of inverted reality and the cultural response to modernity in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. A review of previous works on the play reveals a general conceptualisation of cultural/ideological conflicts as the primary thematic construct of the play. Although this general position on the play is valid, the present writers engaged in reformulating ideas with the argument that the play's focus is a quest for cultural synthesis between tradition and modernity. This idea is articulated with due consideration for the characterisation of Lakunle, Baroka, Sidi and Sadiku. During our discussion, it was argued that Lakunle and Baroka suffer from an inverted reality because their lives and actions are antithetical to the values they represent in the play. It was also argued that the position of the play, as interpreted by the present writers, is that Baroka opts for an endogenous model of modernity, which is expected to be participatory, dynamic and flexible to the needs of the people.

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