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Do I live or die

It all depends on who's understanding you cherish in your heart!

The question of life and death and the subtle transition is seen completely different in two cultures presented in this text. We have one culture's own beliefs that try to change the course of another's traditions through obligations, duty, hesitation, and bad timing that bring disastrous results. This paper will attempt to look at the decisions of one's belief and obligation to duty that destroyed the lives of the very ones they were trying to save.

As the reader we observed two cultures that have completely different views of how they look at the value of life and death. While reading the text we see both cultures through a window looking in. We can choose one side against the other as seen in the text or we can look at both sides of each culture and be more accepting of what we do not understand.

I can appreciate this text from the British colonial understanding of what they see as more important and agree that suicide is barbaric and unacceptable. This way of thinking comes natural for Westerners. Or I can place myself in the shoes of the Horseman of the King who sees the necessity of the act of committing suicide. The reader has to formulate for themselves the value of life from Pilking's view or death for the sake of continuing Elesin's service for his dead king. To keep with tradition and the culture. Which the English is slowly taking away.

This ritual is Elesin's duty to perform. This is a sacred ceremony consisting of a serious action. According to Yaruba's culture he has to do this. This act is considered to be prized highly. This means he would have to die not only for his king but for his people and do so in an appropriate fashion. A Westerner really has to step out of our customs and embrace Elesin's

position. The reader has to see suicide as an acceptable act. So we can understand suicide in this society can be honorable.

We have to first explore the tradition and history of the Yoruba religion. It is a rich and powerful faith for them. It incorporates parts of Christianity and Islam. It is considered a “diffused monotheism.” Yoruba society strongly believes in reincarnation within the same bloodline. Which may explain the central ritual of the text. The death of Elesin, “the King’s horseman” will allow him to join his master in the afterlife.

Wolf Soyinka surely understood that these two cultures in the form of a play will ignite powerful views. This is the purpose of this paper. To look at these views from both sides of the cultures in hope to get a better understanding of this literary work.

We must see this must not have been easy for the Nigerian people to live and watch how they were losing their freedom and cultural ways under the British regime’s way of doing things. This conflict of both cultures “carved a thematic path for the drama” we see unfold in this text. The function of this ritual is to expose the real ongoing struggle for the Yoruba people under colonial control and oppression. The ritual’s success and importance to the text is to show the resistance to the colonized. Preventing Elesin from accomplishing his obligation negatively affected the traditions and beliefs in a deep way. Elesin’s character in some ways symbolized Nigeria as a vibrant culture that is being taken away.

Now let’s take a look at Pilkings character and why he finds it necessary for him to stop this suicide ritual that the Yoruba people find it key for their culture to survive. Simon Pilkings is an officer of Oyo. A colonial Nigerian city. He is portrayed as an arrogant, pompous person who does not respect the practices of the native religion. “Nonsense” and “mumbo - jumbo” (1319) is what Pilkings refers to as Yoruba religion. He continues to show his lack of respect towards these people when he wears a egungun to a costume party. Because he thinks little for the Yoruba traditions he never considered or respects their way of life. Instead he imposes his own ideology. Which is the Christians’ idea that death by suicide is a sin.

This play allows us to examine two cultural significance to how they see death. Ultimately Soyinka clearly shows that death is different for the Yoruba people and the English. Unlike how Elensin and his culture may see death. Pilkings saw Elensin's suicide as an unthinkable, blasphemous act. That goes against his Christian belief of sanctity of life. Pilking dramatically shows the contrast to his view as a Westerner towards death. Which symbolizes how the English feel about life and death.

Throughout the play we might struggle to understand both cultures of life and death. We witness Elensin's own turmoil with death. Pilkings character even picks up on Elensin's hesitation to follow through. Which, Pilking suggests is normal and understandable. Which can also confuse the reader who might be trying to view the actions of Elensin as acceptable and Pilkings decisions to stop it, without being biased to either side.

How does Olunde influence the reader? How does his character play a part in the decision of Elensin or Pilking character. Does Olunde use what he learned in the Western culture to sway his father not to follow through with this ritual. Or does he come to stand with his people and the culture he was raised in. Soyinka places the reader at two ends of the spectrum through Elensin and Pilking's characters. Olunde, Elensin's son, may be the voice of reason for both cultures. A mediator for both sides, if you will. Olunde's character is being trained in England to be a doctor. Pilkings' character is thrilled about Olunde's arrival. Since he has been in England four years, Pilking is hoping that Olunde may have experienced some kind of assimilation or Cultural appropriation.

Olunde's character may somehow affect how the reader may look at life and death on either side. In some way, while we read the play, there may be a part of us that may feel Olunde will save the day. That Olunde's character will be the voice of reason. If so then we still have not fully embraced Yorubas' culture and are still struggling with the ritual and their way of life. We are still very invested and absorbed with our own Western way of thinking.

There is still hope for the reader of this play. We learn that was not the case for the character of Olunde. Olunde's only reason for returning to Nigeria was to bury his father. Olunde was still very much tied to the ways and culture of his native land and people. Although he was completely involved in the Western world he has not abandoned his personal inherited sense of family identity or the values, traditions of his upbringing.

As the reader of the play if we yet not embraced the fullness of life and death through the eyes of the Nigirians. In spite of the fact Soyinka used colorful characters like the praise-singer, Iyalaja, "mother" of the market and Serjeant Amusa. -- Amusa who converted to Muslim shows us the strong ties and values to the native culture and beliefs. Which was the first character in Pilkings' circle that indicated how serious and significant this culture is in this community.-- They all played a part early in the play to highlight the importance of this culture, society, and ritual is to the reader. Soyinka allowed us to come into a new vibrant cultural world of the Yoruba people. It was our opportunity to journey into this community. So we freely understand how life and death meant to them. Soyinka does this one more time before he ends the play. So even if the reader was still on the fence on what this ritual meant to these people he used Olunde's character along with the mother of market to end the play.

Conclusion

After reading this paper, we must at times, to get the best of what the author is trying to convey in their text. We need to come out of our comfort zones. We have to surrender our own ways and beliefs for the moment to kinda introduce a new culture and way of thinking. That is what Soyinka did here. After reading this text we can somehow be accepting of a person's lifestyle when it comes to their personal values and religious background.