

The Effects of Religion and Poverty on Nigeria's Development as Portrayed in Yoruba Written Plays

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Abstract. Nigeria has the resources to be among the affluent and developed nations of the world, wherein her citizens could have the basic needs of life and can individually contribute to the development of the nation without exclusion. This is however not the case; Nigeria is fast becoming one of the poorest countries in the world as 45% of her population live below poverty level - on less than a dollar daily. The literary world is a reflective one, where the image of experiences and occurrences are reflected fictitiously or otherwise. Ethnographically, literature also documents the experiences of a group of people at different times, showing their hopes, aspirations, fears, agitations, socio-economic and religio-political development. The (present) economic condition that is prevalent in Nigeria should be of immense concern to all, the literary artists being no exception. Our focus in this paper therefore, is to examine the extent to which Yorùbá playwrights have portrayed poverty as an endemic issue that is preventing individual and national development, especially in the light of the fact that the Yorùbá are in all things religious. We found out among other things, that misrepresentation and misinterpretations of what qualifies a (Yorùbá) person for Paradise as a Christian, is an important bane of the poor in taking the right steps toward rejecting poverty. This is apart from the non-provision of the basic needs of life by the state, in order to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. Our suggestion is that empowerment through poverty alleviation programmes by concerned individuals, corporate bodies and the state

particularly, will go a long way in coming to the aid of the poor. This is because unless the poor, who could have become poor by his ineptitude or by the prevalent government policies, is catered for, the average and rich persons cannot live their lives peacefully and to the fullest, without disturbance in one form or the other from the poor with their characteristic traits and vices.

Keywords: Absolute Poverty, Culture, Religion, Social Exclusion, Empowerment.

1. Introduction

The Yoruba, popularly referred to as the descendants of Oduduwa; their historic progenitor, is the second largest ethnic group in Nigerian, totalling 21% of the nation's population. Some of the others are Hausa/Fulani (29%), Igbo (18%), Ijaw (10%), Kanuri (4%), Ibibio (3.5%) and Tiv (2.5%) (World Fact Book, 2002). The Yoruba are predominantly found in the South-Western part of Nigeria in Ogun, Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, and some parts of Edo, Kogi and Kwara states. They can also be found along the West coast of Africa in Republic of Benin, Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The Yoruba are also across the Atlantic in Cuba, Brazil, Haiti, Trinidad, Tobago and America.

Nigeria, which is the country home of the Yoruba and other ethnic groups mentioned above, is a nation that has abundant human and natural resources that are sufficient to make her

one of the richest nations of the world. This is evident in her geography and population. She has a population of about 127 million people. Nigeria is located within a total physical area of 923,768 sq.km, water of about 1300sq. km, while the land mass is 4, 047 km and a coastline of 853km. Her appellation of “the giant of Africa” is justified by these features. Nigeria’s geographical wealth is highly enhanced by her climate; equatorial in the South, tropical at the centre and arid in the North. She is also blessed with resources like natural gas, petroleum, tin, columbine, bauxite, iron ore, coal, line stone, lead and zinc. It is however unfortunate that despite her abundance human and material resources, Nigeria is fast becoming one of the poorest countries in the world, as 45% of her population live below poverty level (Olumide et al in Alakuko 2013:78). According to them, the World Bank’s report show that Nigeria’s Human Development Index (HDI) is only 0.416 and about 70% of her population was vegetating below the breadline. Tope-Tapere (2013:9), when examining the level of poverty in Nigeria says:

...a large percentage of the population is surviving on less than \$ 1 a day...calculated to be 70.2%, with a gap of 34.9%, when the scope is extended to less than \$ 2 a day, 90.8% of the population can be seen to be poor.

Literature, in any of its (drama, poetry and prose) genres, is a reflection of the society where it is produced. Essentially, drama mirrors virtually all the activities of a society such that through reading a literary piece, one can know about the politics, economics, religious and social interaction among the people of a particular society. The impoverished conditions of a very large percentage of Nigerians discussed above, calls for the attention of her citizenry, the literary artist not excluded. The focus of this paper therefore, is to study the reflections of poverty as portrayed in (selected) Yoruba written texts, by considering the place of religion and cultural beliefs about the menace (poverty), and to examine the implications of these on individuals and national development. The theoretical frame work on which this study is hinged is sociology in the view of Karl, Marx. He was of the opinion that the forces of

production and social relationships of production, form the economic basis or infrastructure of society. Superstructure; the other aspects of society, are largely shaped by infrastructure. As such, the legal, educational and political institutions and the belief and value systems are primarily determined by economic factors. To this effect, Marx believed that religion is an illusion which (temporarily) eases the pain produced by exploitation and oppression, a series of myths that justify and legitimate the subordination of the subject class and the domination and privilege of the ruling class (Haralambos et al 2008:399). As far as Marx is concerned, if oppression comes to an end, the religion will no longer be necessary.

2. The Yoruba and Religion

It is not easy to come up with a definition that is broad and encompassing about ‘Religion’ without incorporating the idea that religious beliefs have variety. (Haralambos et al 2008:395). One major way by which religion can be defined is in terms of its functions in the life of individuals or the society as a whole. Yinger (in Hamilton 1995) says:

Religion is a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of human life.

Hamilton is however opposed to Yinger’s view on the grounds that his functional perspective of religion gives room for other belief systems to be seen as ‘religion’. Apart from this, the view is based on generalized assumptions about the roles and purpose of religion and “the ultimate problems of human life” as said by Yinger above, is subjective to many interpretations. Another means by which religion can be defined is its concern with its content and not its function. Durkheim in Haralambos et al (2008:396) is quoted to have defined religion in terms of the difference between the sacred and the profane. It must be noted that it is not all scared objects that are seen by all as awesome and as such respected or venerated. Robertson (1970) who also views religion’s content as the basis of its definition, see it (religion) as referring to the existence of supernatural beings that have a governing effect on life.

Parsons (in Harralambos et al 2008:398) argues that all human actions are directed and controlled by norms provided by the social systems, especially cultural systems which provide guidelines for actions like beliefs, values and meanings. These are what religion is all about; bringing about order, cohesiveness and stability in society. Karl Marx's view about religion is a bit different from that of Parsons. To Marx, religion is a distortion of reality which provided many of the deceptions that form the basis of ruling-class ideology and false class consciousness. According to Marx:

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of the heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions; it is the opium of the people. (Harallambos et al 2008:399)

In early missionary accounts, the Africans, including of course the Yorùbá, were seen as a people wallowing in crippling superstitious beliefs, beings whose spiritual lives lack any value and who as such needed to be 're-born' spiritually by 'introducing God' to them. Where it was recognized that the Africans do have (their own) religion, negative coinages were used to refer to their religion. Some of these are *syncretism*, *fetishism*, *ancestor worship* and *polytheism*. Before the advent of Islam and Christianity, the Yorùbá (Africans) have had their own traditional religion. The term 'traditional' does not imply or limited to antiquity, but rather, it indicates that the religion is guided by a fundamentally indigenous value system that does not only have its own pattern, but also its own historical inheritance and traditions from the past. Even today, the African traditional religion has a contemporary reality that is objective, indicating the hopes and aspirations of the people.

A close observation of the Yorùbá reveals that they are religious in all things. Religion is at the root of their culture and it is the principle that determines their life. This can be seen in virtually all they do, be it farming, eating, hunting, dyeing, traveling, and carving or drinking. Among the Yorùbá, there is a widespread belief in a supposed male (Olademo 2014) supreme deity, God; *Olódùmarè* (Olupona 2014). He is the creator of the whole world

(*adédàá, asèdàá*). He is *atérére kári ayé*, Omnipresent, Omniscient and Omnipotent). *Olódùmarè* is also *adáké dájó*; a just being, who rewards and punishes good and evil doings. He is also *aláṣe láyé, alaṣe lórun*; who has the final authority over all matters. Next to God in the Yorùbá pantheon are the ancestral spirits like *Ọbátálá, Ọṣun, Ọgún, Sàngó* and *Èṣu*, who assist *Olódùmarè* in His supernatural duties. These too, are held awesome, for in their specialties and area of competence, they serve as channels between *Ènìyàn* (human) and *Olódùmarè*. There are also natural objects which the Yorùbá believes to be the habitats of some lesser deities. They can also be plants and animals (totems). These are other spirits or mystical powers which are recognized for their ability to aid or harm. Some of these are agents for witchcraft, magic and sorcery. The belief in one supreme God and a myriad of deities made Idowu (in Olupona 2014) employ the term "diffused monotheism" for the religion of the Yorùbá. This in Olupona's (2014) view is better tagged as a religion that "combines elements of monotheism and polytheism".

Without being apologetic, we are of the opinion that if the belief in the existence of angels and the deification of saints like Peter, Paul, Mary and Gabriel in Christian religion do not give the impression that the religion is polytheistic, then the belief of the Yorùbá in other deities and revered beings as channels/assistants to reach the supreme *Olódùmarè*, does not make their religion (too) less monotheistic.

3. Poverty: Definition and Measurement.

Generally, 'poverty' means a state of being with insufficient resources. It is a state of being poor, a life of lack and of needs. Giving a holistic approach to the definition of poverty and measuring its level is critical to political policy and (academic) debates about the concept (Lister 2004:12). Sociologists have discussed at length on whether poverty should be measured in absolute or relative terms. Some are of the opinions that there is a common minimum standard that can be generally applied to every society below which a person can be said to be

in abject poverty. To measure absolute poverty (also known as subsistence poverty), the resources to maintain human life is the yardstick. This is to say that people who do not have the means to maintain their minimal existence health-wise and physically, are in absolute poverty.

The supporters of *relative poverty* opine that the definition of poverty must relate to the standards of a particular society at a particular time. This means in essence that the level of poverty can only be measured by how affluent a society is. A summit was held in Copenhagen in 1965, it was decided there that there should be a two-tier definition of poverty. These are ‘absolute definition’ and ‘overall definition’. Absolute poverty was therefore defined as:

A condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic *needs, food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services* (United Nations 1995).

Overall poverty on the other hand was seen as a broader concept incorporating absolute poverty, but also including features like lack of participation in decision making in civil, social and cultural life.

4. Synopses of Selected Texts

Basòrun Gáà (Gaa, the War Chieftain)

Gáà, is a war chieftain, by which virtue, he is also a member of the *Òyómèsì*; the Kingmaker’s council of *Òyó* town. He arrogates a lot of power to himself, such that rather than join hands with the other six members of the *Òyómèsì* council to come up with the name of the most promising Prince to ascend the throne, he does so single handedly, forcing his choice other members, who accepts their fate and dare not oppose him, for the fear of his powerful charms. Gáà kills any king who dares to antagonize him or refuses to be controlled. After the demise of King Májèògbé, Gáà hand-picks young prince Adégoólú as the new king of *Òyó* town. Being forced to the throne, Adégoólú looks for ways by which he can find Gáà’s

favours, so as to stay long on the throne. One of the means adopted is to pay courtesy visits to Gáà in his compound in the company of other members of the *Òyómèsì* council every morning, instead of Gáà being the one (as traditionally expected) to pay homage to the King daily. The other way to find Gáà’s favour is for Adégoólú to betroth Àgbonyín his only daughter to Gáà as a wife. This Princess Àgbonyín detests, because she is madly in love with Akínkúnmi, a peasant and lower class son of a craftsman. It is Akínkúnmi’s social class that makes his dream of marrying the Princess shattered. Gáà orders Àgbonyín to be killed when he hears that Adégoólú the king intends to have her enthroned as the Queen after his (Adégoólú’s) demise. The death of Princess Àgbonyín makes King Adégoólú to revolt against and subdues Gáà’s tyranny, by engaging a mercenary of soldiers led by Oyalábi, the field Marshall of *Òyó* army, from Jàbàtá town, a feat that the king does not deem fit when other citizens of the town were being murdered by Gáà.

Abé Àbò (Under (Spiritual) Protection)

Jòónú (John) is a devoted Christian, albeit to a fault. He does not bother to make any personal inquiry into whatever message any Christian brings to him “from God”. Jeremáyà (Jeremiah) comes to him to tell him about a vision wherein God told him to go and tell Jòónú to provide accommodation for him (Jeremáyà) while the construction of the new church to be built near Jòónú’s house, is going on. Jòónú swallows the bait hook, line and sinker, despite Jímò his half-brother’s warnings and threats. From Jòónú’s meagre salary, he makes it compulsory for Maria his wife to feed Jeremaya and his assistant alongside his (Jòónú’s) family of five. Maria has to adjust her cooking style to the extent that their meals become unpalatable. Jòónú insists, against his wife’s complaints of insufficient feeding allowance that Jeremáyà and his assistant must be fed, because their poverty on earth is a guarantee of their bliss in heaven. Eventually, Jeremáyà uses diabolic means to attract Jèení (Janet) and Maria, Jòónú’s daughter and wife respectively, for amorous affairs. The fake prophet is caught in his schemes at last and Jòónú realizes that he had been a fool all along.

Réré Rún (Havoc wrecked)

The labour force in Imògún town downs tools as a result of their ill treatment and poor working and living conditions. Their demands are; promotion as at when due, salary increment, a decrease in tax rate, free medical services and representation in the governing council. Làwúwo their union leader is reprimanded in the police custody, but released after some time. Làwúwo refuses to use the fund raised by his fellow poverty-stricken members, to engage the services of a lawyer. He is ready to stand before the judge to defend his case. He is also ready to remain poor like his parents and work relentlessly for the course of the masses, without expecting a reward. Làwúwo falls into the scheming Onímògún's (the king of Imògún) traps by going to attend a purported meeting of reconciliation in the palace, where he is offered a house and a car, while his photographs are taken as if he is in agreement with the offers. The labourers see the pasted photographs of Làwúwo 'receiving' gifts from the king and his chiefs and this makes Làwúwo to lose credibility as a leader. Getting home, he finds his wife dead as a result of an overdose intake of analgesic, after being robbed by swindlers sent to her by the king and his cohort. Làwúwo loses his mind and he becomes incapable of his leadership position among the impoverished labourers.

Ládépò Omọ Adánwò (Ladepo the child of perversion)

Ládépò returns home with virtually nothing, as a result of the indigenization decree imposed on all foreigners in Ghana. His father Fagade, has become the king of their town by then, but his mother has died because she was heart-broken after the travail of trying to locate Ládépò in Ghana, to no avail. Ládépò is not able to display affluence as wont of a prince on his return, apart from his unfulfilled desire of giving his mother a befitting burial. He asks his father to let him sell the family farmland to raise funds, but his father refuses. Ládépò in desperation joins forces with Ajòmàle who contested the throne with his father but lost, and Ajàgbé his (Ajòmàle's) soothsayer, for a price; to murder Fágadè the king. All the attempts made by Ajòmàle and his

forces against the king are unsuccessful, king Fàgàdé remains unsummon-table. The evil men are caught in the end, with the assistance of Tégbè, the king's personal assistant and palace jester. They are tried and sentenced to death. King Fàgàdé poisons himself because (he considers) it traditionally wrong for him to survive his son.

Ilé ti a fi itọ mọ (A house built with saliva)

Ọtòkìtì is a civil servant whose social status is impaired because though a devoted official in the ministry, he is denied promotion. This gives him a lot of concern, but he continues to work unrelentlessly. Adésòdún his wife wants them to buy a plot of land, so that they can start the construction of their own personal building. Her husband is skeptical about this, considering their large family and the extended family burdens he has to bear. Adésòdún suggests that they withdraw their children from private schools to public (free) schools and let the ones in pre-school classes stay away from school. These she says, will allow them to save money towards the construction of the house. Ọtòkìtì appreciates and cherish his wife. Few weeks after his wife's suggestion, he is given a letter of promotion that comes with a car loan and cheap government housing facilities. The joy of the family knows no bound. The new improved life style which Ọtòkìtì now enjoys shows his real person. He starts to have extra-marital affairs with his secretary and stop to care for his family. He later comes to his senses and returns home to his wife and children.

5. The Readings

5.1 Causes of Poverty

Poverty is the most serious of all social problems. This is because it is so closely connected with a range of other ills like poor health, crime, drug abuse, family violence and divorce. All these have huge impacts on health, life expectancy, educational achievements, human rights, political stability and several other aspects of life. The poor are usually hungry looking, wretchedly dressed, easily angered, and

unhappy; having low/negative self-image among many other traits.

Tope-Tapere (2013) and Alakuko (2013) have pointed out that the concept of material deprivation is often linked to “sin” in the Bible (Psalm 37:25), directly or indirectly as the wages of; (indirect) sins (Ezekiel 20: 58, Jeremiah 31:29), laziness (Proverbs 13:4, 19:15, 20:13, 23:21), worthless pursuits (Proverbs 28:19). Oppression and fraud (Proverbs 14:31, 22:7, 28:15) are some other reasons that the two scholars pointed out as reasons for experiencing poverty according to the Bible. They however agreed that unemployment, inadequate supply of land, bad economic principles, lack of education, international exchange rate, lack of good health, conflicts and warfare, misuse of available resources, societal structure, inequality, and neglect of rural areas, are some of the other sociological reasons for poor financial status (Alaluko 2013:13; Tope-Tapere 2013:6).

In the plays under study, the playwrights have pointed out the extended family syndrome, (especially in Africa) whereby a ‘rich’ member of the family is expected to shoulder the financial burdens of all the members as a major reason for poverty. In *Ilé ti a fi itọ mọ* (hitherto referred to as Text I), Ọ̀tọ̀kítí is the wealthiest and the most educated in his (extended) family. As demanded by Yorùbá Culture, since he is blessed by *Olódùmarè*, he is looked up to by his relations for sustenance. He tells Adésódún his wife:

Ọ̀tọ̀kítí: ...*Kí n wá mu àbíkẹ̀hin òun obinrin tí à n pè ní Àsímọ̀wù tira... kí n má ran an lọ ilé-ìwé... Atọ̀kẹ̀... pé kí n báòun wá àádọ̀ta pónun tí òun yòò fi bèrẹ̀ sí ta ojà wẹ̀wẹ̀wé... Ojo ránsẹ̀ wá gba ogbòn pónun l’ówó mi nígbà tí obinrin tí ó fẹ̀ fẹ̀ ja’we... aburo baba mi wipe oun yio fi ọ̀mọ òun ọ̀kúnrin sọ̀wọ̀ sí mi lọ̀la... ọ̀mọ nàà yìò ma gbé ọ̀dọ̀ mi... owó ilé-ìwé... așọ... ìwé... nitoripé... mo ti lọ ilé-ìwé? ... sé èmi nikan ló yẹ kí ó ru àjàgà gbogbo idílẹ̀ mi...Nitoripe...mo ti lo ile iwe*

(p. 11-12)

(...I should come and take his last daughter called Asimowu to live with us...send her to school... Atọ̀kẹ̀...that I should give her fifty pounds for petty prading...Ojo sent for thirty

pounds when his fiancés was about to divorce her former husband... my uncle said he would send his son here tomorrow...to live with me...school fees...uniforms...books... am I... the only one who should shoulder the responsibility of all the members of the family?...Just because I am formally educated...)

Class system, especially feudalism (very pronounced in the past all over the world), is another reason pointed out in the texts as the cause of poverty. In *Basọrun Gáà* (henceforth referred to as Text IV), Akínkúnmi, a proletarian, son of a craftsman; a generation of people who make umbrella for the royals, dares to show his intention of marrying Princess Àgbònyín, daughter of the incumbent king. His friend Olúbùșe warns him to forget a dream that can never come true:

Olubuse:- *Akínkúnmi, o ì í joko rẹ̀ jẹ́é.*

Koo p’omọ ọ̀ba tí?

Ipá rẹ̀ k’omọ ọ̀ba ni fífẹ̀

Ipá ẹ̀ni to ju ọ̀ lọ kọ̀mọ ọ̀ba ni fífẹ̀?

Abí àá wulẹ̀ í máa tanra ẹ̀ni jẹ̀?

(p. 65)

(Akinkunmi, you better not

deceive yourself.

And let the Princess be?

Do you have the wherewithal to marry a princess?

Does one who is highly placed than you have the means?

Why would one deceive oneself?)

Akínkúnmi tells him that the girl loves him.

Olúbùșe replies:

Nígbà tó wá jù ọ̀ lọ yi nkọ?

...șa jẹ̀ko maa ba ti ẹ̀ lọ.

Omọ ọ̀ba ni, tálákà niwọ̀...

(p.65)

(Now that she is better placed than you?

...just let her be.

She is a Princess, you are a pauper)

The people in the low class know the class they belong to and more often than not, they accept it as their *kádàrà/àkúnlẹ̀yàn* (primordial destiny) and will not take steps that can make their lives

better. In *Basòrun Gáà* under discussion, Àgbònyín asks Akinkunmi how often he baths:
...Nígbàwo niwọ́ í wẹ, abi nígbàwo lemi í wẹ?
...Jimọ
Oloyin ...emi í ọmọ ọla ni?
(How often do I bathe, or on which occasion do I take my bath?...last Friday of the month)

When Àgbònyín confirms that she is indeed a princess, Akinkunmi does not even attempt to give their love affair the impetuous to survive or find a way of improving his social status. He says:

Oníṣonà ni baba mi. Iran awọn baba mi ni nwọn í sù máa ọ̀ṣẹ ọ̀nà f'awon baba rẹ. N'ko mọ 'wọn ara mi kọ-un?

(My father is a crafts man. Our generation is the one who makes designs for yours. Have I not over-stepped by boundaries?)

Lack of (adequate) education, which results into inadequate remuneration, is also pointed out as another reason why people remain poor, in the themes of some of the plays under study. In *Àbẹ Àbò* (referred to as Text V from now on), when his wife Maria complains about the insufficient feeding allowance given by Jòónú, he tells his wife that his salary is meager as she knows his level of education:

...o moye tímo n'gba.
Èlọ́ lo tún fẹ́ kí n fí kún owó onjẹ?

(p. 24)

(You know how much I earn. How much do you want me to add to the feeding allowance?)

Láwúwo the union leader in Text II laments his poor conditions and mentions his poor educational status thus:

...ni mo fí kọ́ṣẹ́ bírikilà, tí mo tún kọ́ Kafinta, tí mo kọ́ ilé kikún lódà, kí n, tóó wá re lésìnnì tí mo fí mọ́ táá tàà tá...

(p. 39)

(...that I learnt brick laying, then I learnt carpentry, before learning painting, after which I studied on part-time basis to have the little education that I now possess...)

Poverty survives in part because it is useful to a number of groups in the society. The perpetuation of poverty in the society is often the result of the social structures put in place. This structure ensures that low wages could be paid to workers so that the cost of production would be low, thus helping the rich to be richer and ensure that their status is guaranteed. The low wages that are not commensurable with the period and nature of the work of the workers in Imogun in Text II is an instance. This is why Láwúwo laments:

...Kí ẹnì kan máa kọ́ ilé nlaánlá kiri bí ikán, k'ẹnì kan má rówó sanwó ọ̀ṣuu yàrà kan ọ̀ṣọ t'ó n yá gbé; kí ẹnìkan máa ra mótò bọ̀lì bọ̀lì lósoosù, kẹ̀nì kan má sì rí bàtà bọ́ sésẹ̀; kí ẹnìkan máa fí egbeegbèrún apo owo sẹ́ irántí iku baba rẹ́ t'ó tí fàiyẹ sílè kí nwon tóó bí irú wa, kí ẹnì kan má sì rí kọ̀bọ́ mu sílẹ́ f'omọ́ jéun...

(...for a person to be building mansions all over the place, while another cannot afford to pay the rent of one-bedroom apartment; a person is buying state of the art cars every month, while others cannot afford to buy shoes to trek; for a person to be spending thousands on the remembrance of his father who had died before the likes of myself were born, while another person cannot afford a dime for his child to feed...)

The size of the family also determines the financial status of people. In Africa, the larger the number of a man's children and wives, the more recognition he commands. This is more so in the past, where a lot of hands are needed on the farm for subsistence and commercial farming. This cultural habit still goes on in many quarters, in modern times. Ọ̀tọ́kítí in Text I has a family of seven, yet his relations are planning to send three more mouths to him to feed, clothe and send to schools. (see pp. 12-14). In text V, Jòónú feeds himself, Maria his wife, Jimọ his half-borther and Jẹ̀nẹ̀tí and Sánndè his children. Despite this, Jeremaya and Solo (Solomon) his assistant, are also under his roof. He takes care of their welfare. This results into Jọ̀nu's family having innutritious meals.

Sudden tragedies and calamities can impoverish a formerly wealthy person. Persons experiencing relative poverty can also become more impoverished and a person going through abject poverty may become worst for it. In Text

III, Prince Ladepo claims to have been very hard working and as such wealthy while in Ghana. He says:-

Nibi mo f'owọ şişẹ de

Iru mi ko tọ ki ntun ráágó mọ...

Mo ti şe t'ojọ iwaju mọ'se ounje...

(p.36)

(With all my labour to be rich

It is not my type of person who should lack

I have secured a prosperous future...)

However, the indigenization decree by the Ghanaian government makes Ladepo to leave the country unprepared and unable to pack most of his belongings home. He laments:

Emi tí mo ti di olowo ni Ghana,

Ti mo wa de'le tan, ti mo d'ẹru oḷoun...

(p.45)

(I, who have become very wealthy in Ghana, getting home to become a pauper...)

5.2 Poverty: God's Condition for Paradise?

In Christianity, many people believe that poverty is the will of God. This is based on bible verses like Mathew 5:3 and Mark 10:21-25 which claim that there is assurance for the poor to make eternity and enjoy the blessings therein. This is evident in Text V, where Jòónú chides his wife for grumbling because of the hardship their family is going through by feeding Jeremáyà and Solo. He advises her:

Jòónú:- *Óyẹ kí gbogbo èniyàn mọ pé iyà ni a wá jẹ láyé, gbogbo irọra di ọrun. asán ni ilé ayé.* (p.26)

(It is good for all to know that we are in the world to suffer, all the enjoyment that we need awaits us in paradise.

The world is full of vanity)

In a similar vein, Adésódún tells Ọtọkítí her husband in Text I:

Baba Wándé, şe ò ngbọ mi, ng ò fẹ gbó rará wípé ò n ronu, tàbí pé ò mb'arajé tori ọrọ yi, nitoripe okele gbìgbẹ t'oun talafia, o' san ju ile ti o kin fún ẹran pipa t'oun t'jìà... (p.3)

(Wándé's father, are you listening to me, I do not want to hear that you are troubled,

or that you are unhappy about this issue, because a dry morsel (without stew) eaten in peace, is far better than a house filled with beef and eaten in discord...)

when the husband is worried about their poor condition as a family.

In text IV, Gáà becomes impoverished as result of his having to show 'superiority' in position and affluence to King Adegoolu who decides to pay him homage in his court every morning. Gaa gives the king money for breakfast, every day.

He tells his servant:

Gaa...Gbagi...gbowo, k'o o gbobi f'Alaafin...

(p. 22)

(Gbagi...take money, take kolanuts, give them to the king...)

Oyekan (2011) is opposed to the idea that 'poverty is ordained by God' as a means of assurance for paradise bliss. To him such an interpretation is obviously a distortion of the scriptures and hence inconsistent with the truth of biblical teachings on poverty. Religio-culturally among the Yorùbá, *Olódùmarè (God) is 'Ọba aláàánú, Ọba tí kii şàbòsí, Ọlówó gbogbọrọ tí í yọ omọ Rẹ lófín'* (Merciful king, impartial king, He who has a long arm with which He draws his children from the abyss). With this notion about God, the Yorùbá do not perceive Him as a person who will use living a life of misery, hardship, lack, want and sadness as a yardstick to qualify for entry into *ọrun rere* (good heaven/paradise), though they abhor poverty and always make supplications to God for *àyé irọrùn* (comfortable life), *ká rí jẹ – ká rí mu* (a life of abundance) and *ifọkànbalẹ* (Satisfaction) while working hard for survival. They do not tolerate laziness, over spending, stealing, false livelihood or other vices, which can lead to poverty. The Yorùbá also believe that if one is persistent and perseverant in his choice of work, after some time he/she will become at it and by that begins to prosper. This is what is meant by the saying '*Ádóòşí loògùn ọrọ*'.

At another time, Gaa is very boastful when giving the 'feeding allowance' to his stooge; the king. He asks Gbagi, his personal servant to give money to Adegoolu, he then turns to the King and says:

Owó ounjẹ rẹ àárọ̀ yin nu-nu

(p.94)

(Here, take, that is for your breakfast today)

After several months, Gaá's resources begin to dwindle. He starts to complain about his impoverishment, caused by King Adegoolu's visits thus:

Gaa: *Howu, n'jomọ̀ yi kí ó gba gbogbo owó wa tan báyii? A kí 'ni lóni, a kí 'ni Lola yi, njẹ ko nşẹẹ di wahala si wa lórun bée?*

(p.69)

(What! Is this child not the one who will spend all our money? Paying homage today, doing the same the next day, will this not make us bankrupt?)

This is because the Yorùbá believe that *işẹ ni òògùn isé* (work is the antidote for poverty) and that poverty is not an issue to be taken lightly, hence the maxim:

İşẹ kii şohun àmúşeré, iya kii í şohun àmúpitàn,

(Poverty is not an issue to be joked about and suffering is a sad experience to be recounted). For these, they believe that one must work hard to peg poverty from being inherited by one's generation. This is why they say:

İşẹ kii mú loko-láyà kọ má ran omọ.

(If a couple suffers from poverty, there is no way their children too can avoid it)

5.3 Poverty: An Inhibition to Development

It is not easy to give a single and concise definition to 'development'. Adagbada (2017) says that:

'Development' as a phenomenal issue, is very complex. As a concept, it cuts across several disciplines, but it is easily located in virtually all human enterprises. To develop means to come to, or improve gradually, to a larger, better, more complete or more advanced stage. It implies growing or increasing, such that it brings forth full potentialities'.

Development can be at the level of individual persons, it can also be at national level. When

development is being discussed about individual persons, this implies increased skill and further or enlarged capacities, greater freedom, increased creativity and material well-being. If the discourse on development is at the national level, this must manifest progressively, whereby there is evident improvement in the living standard of the general citizenry of a nation. There must be economic and social advancement which enables people to realize their (full) potentials, have self-confidence and be free from want, ignorance, economic exploitation, social injustice and the likes. Adagbada (2017) goes further to suggest that in order to achieve and make effectively durable, developmental programmes "must not just be made into administrative policies, they must continuously and reliably be sustainable". As rightly, put by Jesus in the bible (Luke 5:31; Mark 2:17, Mathew 9:12.) those who are healthy need no physician, but those who are ill. The wealthy and the averagely well-to-do in the society should no doubt be included when empowering the citizenry for better and improved life, but priority must be given to the poor, by enlarging their participation in decisions affecting them. "It should be pro-poor, pro-nature, pro-jobs, pro-women and pro-children" (Soola 2003:13).

In Text I, the poverty to which Ọtokìtì is subjected as a result of poor remuneration in his place of work, is responsible for his family living in an apartment that is too small for convenience. In order to build a personal house, his wife advices him thus:

...Làbáké ti o şẹşẹ pe omọ odun mefa geere, jẹki a mu oun lọ si ile-iwe ofẹ. A n sọ pe ile-iwe ofẹ buru...Femi... Kayode... kini a nna poun meḗḗḗḗ fun lóri awọn omọde wonyi?... Wọn yio gbọna ile ẹkọ ofẹ lọ... (p.11-12)

(...Làbáké that is just six years old, let us take her to public school. We are saying that public schools are bad... Femi... fayode... why are we wasting Twenty-five pounds on these children? ... they will go to public school too... The couple is ready to sacrifice their children's future for building a more conducive house. As

the wife mentions in the dialogue above, the public schools are not good, as such the children will not get the best type of education that can prepare them for personal development and an assured future that will not be that of need, lack and ignorance. In such positions, they will never be able to contribute to national development.

Prince Ladepo's poverty in Text IV is what led him to crime, in an attempt to live up to social expectations. His return home from Ghana without his property makes his personal development stunted. He is supposed to mount the throne after the demise of his father, but the murder-attempt crime which he commits will not allow that monarchical tradition to be upheld, bringing the recognition and development of his ruling family genealogy and right to the throne, to a halt.

If Morenike has not poisoned herself as a result of being duped by the swindlers set against her in Text II, Lawuwo, her husband would not have lost sanity and would still have been able to continue to lead the struggle against the oppression of the workers by the King of Imogun and his chiefs. This could have led to self-development for each of the workers, and on the long run, it would have made Imogun town more developed.

6. Poverty Alleviation / Reduction: Empowering the Poor for Better Life

Many sociologists have suggested diverse ways of bringing poverty (and in equality) to an end in the world. Haralambos et al (2008:214) have pointed out that any society wherein there is inequality is bound to have poverty. This they say, is because if all the individuals with below-average incomes are defined as poor, then the only way that poverty can be eradicated would be to abolish inequality in income. The reason for this is that if some people have higher than average incomes, then others must fall below average. Some sociologists like Spencer (in Haralambos 2008:238) who share Marx's view, belong to the Individualistic school of thought, concerning poverty. To them, those who suffer from earning very low incomes do so because they are unable or unwilling to provide adequately for their own well-being. As such it

is neither the society nor the social groups which they belong that are accountable for their wretchedness. Spencer particularly, quaries about the poor:

Why did they not realize that he was usually 'a bad fellow', one of the good-for-nothings...vagrants, sots, criminals...men who share the gains of prostitutes; and less visible, and less numerous, there is a corresponding class of women.

As far as Spencer is concerned, those who are too lazy to work should not be given food. The school of thought to which Spencer belongs is of the opinion that if the state puts in place welfare programmes for the poor, laziness and moral decline will spread among the people; such that individuals will be attracted to the easy life on offer, rather than working harder to overcome poverty and better their lots in life. Alakuko (2013:69) shares the same view about lazy people. He says:

...the grave danger in laziness is that the mind becomes inactive to the extent that even when there are openings and opportunities, a slack hand cannot articulate such.

Leaving the poor to his own ('self-imposed') curse is also corroborated by the Bible, to the effect that hard work is the antidote for poverty (Proverbs 6:6-11). Paul the apostle also stresses that "if anyone will not work, let him not eat" (II Thess. 3:10). Poverty therefore can be regarded as part of life; an incentive to make people work harder.

In our own view, the lazy (healthy) drone, who refuses to work so that he can provide for himself does not deserve any pity or assistance. He should not sit aloof and be waiting to reap where he has not sown our point of divergence from Marx's and Spencer's views is that... since crime, disease, prostitution, thuggery and other vices are committed by the poor against the average and rich person, for conscious and subconscious psychological reasons of 'getting back at the society,' and to look for means of survival, steps must be taken towards their welfare, such that living may be peaceful for all in the society and the hard working people who

had foresight about their welfare, may enjoy their labour.

The issue of welfare basically concerns the well-being of the people in a particular society. It is an issue concerned with basic needs like food, clean water, shelter, prevention and/or dealing with absolute or relative poverty and providing education among other things. Biggs (2000:8) has pointed out that there are welfare states in the world, which see these care for the masses as part of governance. A state like that is a state in which the government uses organized power deliberately (through politics and administration) in an effort to modify the play of market forces. To Haralambos et al (2008:260) this means that welfare exists in states where there is a market for goods, services and labour; a typically capitalist society. This is a state where the government decides that the people's essential needs and well-being will be with government's intervention.

A developing country like Nigeria may be not be able to go to that (total) extent to assist the poor. Like O'Donovan (in Alakuko 2013:70) points out, the principle of empowerment to work, earn the ability to live a healthy and fulfilling life should be cultivated in the attempt to help the poor. Rather than giving fish to the poor, they should be taught how to fish. Alcock (2003: 178-276) identifies four major sectors from where people can receive welfare assistance in contemporary times. One of such is the Informal Sector; where family, neighbours, friends and associates come to the aid of the needy by feeding, educating or housing them. "This type of aid is not usually organized or regulated and in practice is based on individual dedication and goodwill or reciprocal agreements". The Voluntary Sector is another area for assisting the poor or needy according to Alcock. This consists of organized charity bodies. They are set to deal with social problems like child trafficking/abuse, old age, war, natural disaster victims and the likes. Examples of such corporate bodies are religious organizations, the Red Cross and National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). Most of these bodies rely on charitable donations and sometimes they receive help of funding from the State. The Private Sector too, according to Alcock, contributes to

the welfare of the poor, albeit with the aim of making profit. They provide alternatives to government's provisions for those who can afford them, especially in the areas of health and education. Marxists and Democrats are highly critical of this sector. Their argument is that it contributes to inequality and oppression. The State Sector or government welfare service is the fourth in Alcock's (2003) categorization. It involves the state in providing welfare services for its citizenry. While agreeing with Alcock's categorizations and suggestions, to the effect that Christian, Islamic and other religious organizations, well-meaning individuals, relations and corporate bodies should come to the aid of the poor, by empowering them to work in order to earn their daily bread and be able to participate in the affairs of their society, we are of the opinion that government policies at local, states and national levels will have more impact and sustainability if geared towards providing enabling environment and wherewithal for the poor. If Ladepo in Text III of the plays under study has been able to get assistance from a state empowerment/poverty alleviation programme immediately after his deportation from Ghana, he could have gone into trading as he claims to have been doing in Ghana, or engage into mechanized farming on the family's farmland. Such programmes would have changed Akínkúnmi's life too in Text IV. Instead of remaining a pauper, whose social status does not benefit marrying a princess, he could have taken his family's craft work to a higher level; by exporting high grade umbrellas and all other leather works. Adésódún in Text I, Morenike in Text II and Maria in Text V would have been able to get loans or grants to trade and be better able to assist their husbands, if they are empowered by well-meaning individuals and especially, the government.

7. Conclusion

In this study, we have examined the portrayal of poverty as an endemic challenge among Africans, especially the Yoruba of the south-west Nigeria, in selected written Yoruba plays, as it relates to Christian religion and culture, and how it affects the development of individual

person and the nation as a whole. We have pointed out the fact that the Yorùbá are religious in all things and this affects their world-view and social interaction, particularly their financial status. Their acceptance of *Olodumare* as the one/ force from whom *kádàrà* (fate) is chosen, does not stop them from striving to change their status in life, for better. Culturally, they believe that *owó eni là á fi itún iwà ara eni se* (One can change one's status consciously). It is the Christian religion and its (confusing) notion about poverty being the visa to paradise, which makes Christian converts to accept living a life of penury before they can qualify to enter paradise after death.

Our suggestion is that people should realize that an individual is entitled to enjoy life. As such, there is no point waiting for what one's children can do or provide for one as a parent. This being so, there is no point in raising a family that is too large. People should also learn to set their priority right and live within their means. Apart from these, well-meaning individuals and voluntary corporate bodies should come to the aid of the poor by empowering them to work functionally to earn a living, so that they can provide for their basic needs and be able to contribute to the development of their society. We are also suggesting that the state must endeavor to bridge the (too) wide gap between the rich and the poor in Nigerian, by providing the basic necessities of life like clean water, health facilities, education, access information, good road and housing facilities. Apart from these, programmes should be organized for training the poor, whereby they can go into different spheres of the economy like starting cottage industries, farming, aquaculture, furniture making and auto-mobile production and repairs. Small and medium scale entrepreneurial ventures from such training will go a long way in bringing about development to the nation, apart from generating employment.

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