

IMPACT OF CREATIVE WRITING ON YORUBA CULTURE AND RELIGION: A STUDY OF TOMI ADEYEMI'S CHILDREN OF BLOOD AND BONE & AYOBAMI ADEBAYO'S STAY WITH ME.

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Upon the advent of numerous global ideologies such as Feminism and Racism amongst others, that have reprovved some African cultures and beliefs, there are essential roles played by Creative Writing to showcase some cultures and beliefs that govern the African continent. Creative Writing has become a vehicle for the enlightenment and empowerment of the Yoruba cultures and beliefs, as well as reforming the denial that comes with shoving the Yoruba cultures and beliefs to the behind in the diaspora. Thus, this essay aims to highlight Yoruba culture and belief representations, various structures of the Yoruba culture and beliefs, roles in Governance and International relations, powerful impact of the Yoruba culture and beliefs as conveyed by Tomi Adeyemi's 'Children of Blood and Bone', and Ayobami Adebayo's 'Stay with Me'. It is important to note however that, when considering the impacts creative writing has on Yoruba culture and religions, there are some fundamental questions to be asked, such as: how have the impacts brought about revolutionary changes? How does it reflect the superiority complex of a developing country?

Creative Writing made its debut during the early 30s through the likes of Wole Soyinka, Jacob K. Olupona, Daniel O. Fagunwa, Tobe Melora Correal, Amos Tutuola and Kayode J. Fakinlede. Their works not only rebelled against the 'darkness' commonly used to refer to the African continent at that point in time, but it also debunked the falsehood presented by foreign authors who barely knew the truth about the culture and beliefs of the African culture. At a time, the continent fought for its liberation from captivity, its people strived to embrace their culture without being sold out to westernization, which prompted the need for preservation through literary works as a cultural timepiece especially for the country 'Nigeria'. Chris Abani, an African speaker buttressed on the point during one of his Ted Talk while speaking on 'Telling Stories from Africa', when he said: "If you want to know about Africa, read our literature — and not just 'Things Fall Apart,' because that would be like saying, 'I've read 'Gone with the Wind' and so I know everything about America" (Chris Abani, 2007).

For the purpose of this essay, the method adopted is an in-depth study of *Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi and *Stay with Me* by Ayobami Adebayo. It becomes necessary to explain and analyze concepts related to Yoruba cultural and beliefs representation to hone their meanings and give room for better understanding.

Yoruba Culture is the way of life among a certain group of people in Nigeria. It can also be defined as the language, custom, belief, rule, mode of dressing, folklore, religion, symbol and memories developed by members of all social groups that make their social environments meaningful.

Religion on the other hand is “a united system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things. Religion seeks to mold the individual to fit into what is considered the norm, based on adherence to the supernatural as culturally agreed” (Emile Durkheim, 1988).

The Yoruba are religiously diverse as well, with most following either Christianity or Islam, though traditional indigenous religions are observed by many (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003).

Traditional religion varies from community to community in the Yorubaland. The Yoruba religion holds that there is one supreme being and hundreds of deities. Although, divided among other religions such as Christianity and Islam, they still observe annual festivals and other traditional religious practices (Bascom, 1984; Hetfield & Koslow 1996).

Cultural authenticity refers to the worthy acceptance of a way of life among a certain group of people while Religion authenticity refers to the beliefs as conforming to united system of practices that have been kept apart for spiritual purposes.

An Overview of *Children of Blood and Bone* & *Stay with Me*

Children of Blood and Bone drew inspiration from the Yoruba culture and religion. It follows the story of the main character ‘Zelie Adebola’, who remembers when the soil of Orisha hummed with magic. But everything changed the night magic disappeared. Under the orders of a ruthless king, majis were killed, leaving Zelie without a mother. The young adult fantasy novel also features a rebel princess ‘Amari’, who saw no justice in the actions of her father ‘King Inan’.

The setting is West-African inspired, based in the country ‘Nigeria’ and restricted to the south western part of the country – Lagos and Orisha. The story taps into the religion aspect of traditions and folklore from the West African region. It is an impactful allegory of relevant issues such as colorism, racism and Yoruba cultural & religion redundancy.

In addition, *Stay with Me* is about a woman ‘Yejide’, hoping for a miracle, a child. It is all her husband wants, all her mother-in-law wants, and she has tried everything – arduous pilgrimages, medical consultations, dances with prophets, appeals to God. But when her in-laws insist upon a new wife, it is too much for Yejide to bear. It starts in the midst of a Nigeria’s political turmoil in the 1980s. It is a novel of commitment, culture and the struggle to conceive a child. *Stay with Me* vividly explores the changes between the personal and disequilibrium of stability and safety in both spheres. As the novel progresses, it moves into a more minor key and a realization that forces ‘Yejide’ to question traditional attitudes towards the society.

Representations and Structures

These books as well as other pioneer creative writing works based on the Yoruba culture and religion, have served as a representation, identity, platform and intimate description of what the culture and religion is about, thereby, bringing its people and the diaspora closer to the truth and enveloped in the beauty of the power they both hold. Representation played a very significant role in putting together the masterpieces of authors, Tomi Adeyemi and Ayobami Adebayo, also structuring the plot, settings, characters and entirety of the two magnificent stories. In terms of structuring, the two authors in their distinct style of writing commemorated the Yoruba culture and religion by presenting the selected structures of religious beliefs, culture and power.

Religious beliefs can be in the traditional or modern approach. *Children of Blood and Bone* concentrated more on the various traditional forms of religious beliefs in the Yorubaland especially the “Orisha” traditional form of worship. It was a ploy to merge fantasy with reality to give a two-phased coin to its readers.

... “they used their gifts to care for the people of Orisha and were revered throughout the nation. But not everyone was gifted by the gods.” Though the sun shone brutal and the work was hard, each moment passed with a smile, with song. “‘Iwọ ni ìgbókànlé mi òrìshà, ìwọ ni gbójú lé... (Adeyemi, 2018: 14&220).

On the other hand, *Stay with me* employed both the traditional and modern forms of religious beliefs as cited by the author in the description written on the back cover of the novel. “Yejide’ has tried everything – arduous pilgrimages, dances with prophets and appeals to God” (Ayobami Adebayo, 2017).

... “I expected to hear about a new pastor I could visit; a new mountain where I could go to pray; or an old herbalist in a remote village or town whom I could consult” ... (Ayobami, 2017: 17).

Consequently, ‘Language, Moral, and Mode of Dressing, otherwise referred to as ‘cultural norm’ is another structure both authors delved in their masterpieces. While, *Children of Blood and Bone* represents fundamentally Language and Mode of Dressing, you can attribute Moral to *Stay with Me*. In *Children of Blood and Bone*, all incantations were written in Yoruba and the characters were made to dress in either ancient Yoruba royalty attires such as royal cloaks rich with velvet and golden hues, geles, kaftan or simple clothes like dashiki worn by commoners during the setting period. And from the details in the dressing and language, the time in which the story was written can be traced back to before colonialism, which sits on an opposite end of *Stay with Me*. *Stay with Me* gives insights on what it means to have morals such as greetings, respect in the Yoruba culture.

... I inspect her cloak. How did she even make it this far? The girl’s copper skin and thick robes scream noble blood, rich with velvet and golden hues. I gaze at the silk kaftan she’s forced me into. Its purple pattern twist with vibrant yellows and deep blues... I can’t remember the last time I wore a dress ... (Adeyemi, 2018: 59,371&372).

... bending in a semi-kneel again after they had come in and were seated in the sitting room... yes sir, he is upstairs. I will go and call him after I serve your drinks. What should I prepare for food? Pounded Yam? (Ayobami, 2017: 14).

To conclude structures as representations, Power is an important structure. The two novels look at two kinds of power, which are: Monarchy and Military Dictatorship. Monarchy is a system of government in which a person reigns supreme while Military dictatorship refers to the selfish motivations for seizing power, institutions through which the rule is structured and the ways in which military dictators leave power. One existed before the other in Nigeria and Monarchy is

that power. Even though, Nigeria as at the time *Children of Blood and Bone* had not gained exposure or being westernized, the kingdoms in Yorubaland always had a sovereign governing power, who controlled the people and society. Till this, the Obas, Kings and the likes still exist but without the power they wielded before the introduction of Military Dictatorship. *Stay with Me* gives an overview of what the experience of Nigeria was like under Military Dictatorship before the practice of democracy which refurbished the system of power and authority.

Impacts

Creative Writing as an art of expression has been able to inform, and reform cultures and religions through its power of words and meaningful attributions to personal experiences, and societal or global issues. Of central concern to Yoruba culture and religions, many writers such as the aforementioned ‘Tomí Adeyemi’ and ‘Ayobami Adebayo’, have been able to address the positive and negative impacts, as well as create passages for growth and revolution within the Yoruba society and how it is perceived in the diaspora. Some of the impacts made because of the literary works written by the two spectacular writers – *Children of Blood and Bone* and *Stay with Me* will be discussed in the subsequent sub-themes.

On stigmatization

This point is sustained by the work of *Stay with Me*, which elaborates on the issue of stigmatization of the pressure on women to give birth in the early stage of their marriage in the south western part of Nigeria and the perceived ideas external people have about the issue. It also features the reasons behind the stigmatization, which is based on the normalization, rationalization and customization of the people to certain beliefs.

The written work of Ayobami Adebayo has brought exposure to such cultural beliefs of the people. Thus, bringing about a dramatic change of the pressure on women to give birth at a certain period of their marriages. *Stay with Me* is a work that has revolved many beliefs from their pessimistic effects to optimistic. And has gone further to the displace a segment of the inferiority complex attached to the attitudes and perceptions of the people upholding such beliefs and the wrongful assumptions of the world.

“A relationship where marriage is not even involved — maybe people dated each other and had a child together — would be one that is stronger, lasts longer, is more important than a

marital relationship where there's no child. So, they live in that time and that world, and the family members feel that they have a right to tell them what to do and do sometimes terrible things to them just to make sure that they bend to their will” (Ayobami, 2017, National public radio, int. 2).

On Identity Acceptance and Appreciation

Children of Blood and Bone creates a world where Africans are seen in an extensive manner. It allows for the south western culture in Nigeria to take spotlight. It tells the story of the Yoruba culture and religions from an African’s vantage point on a global platform.

It could also be said that, the story has created a dramatic change in how Africans especially the Yoruba people want to identify with the cultural and religious beliefs, as well as gives room for more appreciation of the contents and beliefs of the south western culture and religion.

In the concluding analysis, Creative Writing has greatly impacted the Religion and Culture of Africa as a continent and brought people closer to the truth of what the African cultures and religions, specifically the south western entails. As well as bringing about dramatic changes and reflecting the superiority complex of a segment of the African cultures and religions.

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