

THE INTERPRETED WORLD'S RESISTANCE TO PERISHING IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *AKÉ*

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and the resourceful creatures see clearly
that we are not really at home
in the interpreted world (Rilke, *Duino Elegies* I: 11-13).

That which this way never lapses into the flux of perishing, overcomes from the start all perishability. What has merely passed away is without destiny even before it has passed (Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought).

ABSTRACT

Wole Soyinka's works are little read or researched in Nigeria and a degree project report on his works is increasingly a rare event, which is surprising for an author who has won the Nobel Prize for literature. The common complaint is that his works are difficult. His third novel *Aké* seems to have fared worse than the two before it. In addition to the charge of difficulty, *Aké* is also said to be autobiography, as if the appearance of facts of personal history – or any kind of history – in a novel necessarily disqualifies the work for consideration as art. Careful reading of the work, however, reveals characteristic patterning of art. It may even recall James Joyce's *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*, which remains one of the great works of Modernism, despite elements of personal history in it. In this paper, some of the artistic patterns of *Aké* are discussed, but the focus is on the ways culture-based interpretations of reality resist perishing under the onslaught of new modes of being in the world which Christianity and colonization have made possible. The unveiling of 'people power' and the 'General Will', in opposition to traditional and colonial power systems, in the context of the cultural upheaval which captures and reduces the autobiographical sequence, throwing up at the same time a character with heroic stature on the one hand gives the work identity as a *historical novel*, but also it posits another mode of perception and being in the world which more than matches the old system, before which that system loses self-certainty.

KEYWORDS: *Aisthētikos*, Art, Cultural Upheaval, Genre, Historical Novel, Interpretation, People Power

INTRODUCTION: *AKÉ*'S CONSTITUTION

Nigeria's winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, Wole Soyinka, is more frequently mentioned in Nigeria for politics, rather than literature. His literary work is rarely discussed by the critics, except for an occasional play. Most Nigerian students of literary studies of the present generation probably know that he is the author of *The Interpreters*, but few would dream of taking up that work in their project report or dissertations.

The conspiracy that will end up consigning Soyinka permanently to the archive of unread classics has been foisted upon the slogan: *he is too difficult*. But this conspiracy which now receives automatic recognition by students and scholars alike may well occult truth, a terrible truth. Whereas the world recognizes Soyinka as a great literary artist – and he could only be an artist because of works, for as Heidegger has reminded us, the work and the artist come from the same source, *art*, Nigerians find all kinds of excuses not to read him/his works. The *terrible truth*, therefore, may be that what Nigeria calls literature and reads avidly may be *not* what the world calls literature. The generation that read *The Interpreters* is now largely retired and no longer participates in research in African literature. But before moving on, it had steadfastly turned its back to *Season of Anomy* (1973). *Aké* only met stony silence when it arrived in 1981, despite overseas

reviews that called it ‘a classic’ and ‘enchanting’. Some of these, however, reviewed it as an autobiography of Professor Wole Soyinka and ‘a superb act of remembrance’. The basic critical need ‘to find out’ for oneself about a text and the claims made for it was apparently never aroused in Nigeria. Perhaps *fear* of Soyinka was only heightened.

Review and criticism are two essential acts connected to the preserving of a work of art; and so they guide us in deciding what a culture wants to preserve. As happens all over the world, it is the highly valued objects of a culture that normally get to be preserved. Government usually provides the enabling infrastructure. Institution and funding of academic departments are some of the ways this is done. It is therefore a matter of grave concern if the academic community are not playing their role in preserving the cultural artefacts. To be sure,

if a work does not find preservers, does not at once find them such as respond to the truth happening in the work, this does not at all mean that the work may also be a work without preservers. Being a work, it always remains tied to preservers, even and particularly when it is still only waiting for preservers and only pleads and waits for them to enter into its truth. Even the oblivion into which the work can sink is not nothing; it is still a preservation. It feeds on the work. Preserving the work means: standing within the openness of beings that happens in the work. This ‘standing-within’ of preservation, however, is a knowing. Yet knowing does not consist in mere information and notions about something. He who truly knows what is, knows what he wills to do in the midst of what is (Heidegger, 1971-2001: 64-65).

Always with a work of art, there is an invitation: silently, it displays itself. Hence the ancient Greek term *aisthetikos* (‘perceptual’), which was recalled to criticism in the seventeenth century, names the work’s mode of being – that state of unconcealment (Heidegger), demanding of a knower to stand ‘within the openness of beings that happens’ in that work. There are critical practices that, as Derrida (1982: 135) would say, *brutally* ignore the work’s unconcealment, training their sights instead either on the author and his private history or on his/her world.

Much of Nigerian criticism of Nigerian literature, the novel especially, is obligatorily biographical; nevertheless, this has become the reason for overlooking *Aké*. Studies of themes and messages and social relevance and engagement, as well as stylistics, are fundamentally about the author. In these kinds of studies, nevertheless, it is understood that the work is not *about* the historical facts that may occur in it. They are taken to arise by reason of what the author wishes to communicate – as if communication is literature or, in the practice of the stylisticians, as if literature is about the packaging of this item of communication. We may agree with these critics that the work is not about the historical/biographical, sociological facts. But we disagree with them as to what the work is *about* if it is literature.

For us, whatever enters into the taking form of the work – language, facts, patterns of ideation, attitudes and values are essential in bringing about the fusion out of which a new *act* is in place, namely the ‘setting up of a world’ (Heidegger). In the constitution of a work of art, there is an authentic emergence; there is something *other*. In Heidegger’s terms:

The more solitarily the work, fixed in the figure, stands on its own and the more cleanly it seems to cut all ties to human beings, the more simply does the thrust come into the Open that such a work *is*, and the more essentially is the extraordinary thrust to the surface and the long-familiar thrust down. But this multiple thrusting is nothing violent, for the more purely the work is itself transported into the openness of beings—an openness opened by itself—the more simply does it transport us into this openness and thus at the same time transport us out of the realm of the ordinary. To submit to this displacement means: to transform our accustomed ties to world and to earth and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and

prizing, knowing and looking, in order to stay within the truth that is happening in the work. Only the restraint of this staying lets what is created be the work that it is (64).

Jeyifo refers to *Aké* as a 'nonfiction work' (2004: 170), with apparently good reason, since the book is subtitled 'The Years of Childhood', and the dedication reads,

For Eniola (the 'Wild Christian'), and to the memory of 'Essay'. Also for Yeside, Koyoode and Fọlabọ who do not inhabit the memory span of the years recounted in these pages.

All this signifies that we are faced with a personal and family history. The 'huge critical acclaim' which Jeyifo says that the book won leads him to the view that 'the place of prose in the Nigerian author's literary corpus ought to be far more carefully explored than the term 'novel,' with its tangled African vocation ... would allow' (170). Exploration of the work as 'novel' is surprisingly out of consideration. On the other hand, 'huge critical acclaim' seems to have only the support of reviews: books and journal articles are rather hard to come by.

There is also a compulsive reading of Soyinka in terms of the Yoruba mythic tradition, so that what his work shares with world literature is more often obscured. Wright (2004) examines the history of attitudes of defensiveness that led to the limiting of the horizon in handling African literature and the implications for a globalized culture. Without reducing globalization to 'a simple process of homogenization' (Grossberg 2004: xiii), it must be possible to recognize resemblances where they exist; and African literature must also be available for comparative studies. It has not been shown that Africanness confers immunity from resemblance to other things found in other parts of the world; nor has it been shown that the African writer is unlike any 'on whom', according to Henry James, 'nothing is lost' (see Rawlings 2006, 106). For these African writers have in most cases experienced and read much that belongs to other worlds than *African*. There is, for instance, something about the kind of history recounted in *Aké* that recalls Joyce's *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. The possibility may not even be ruled out that Soyinka's private project was something like 'the portrait of an activist as a young boy'. In this case, the long list of grievances by Wole aged about eleven, which ends in: 'Before I fell asleep, I had made up my mind that when I grew up, no khakied official was going to extract one penny in tax from my hard-earned salary' (184), would be a high point of the narrative. However, this private project, if it was so indeed, is overtaken and assimilated by a huge event, a cultural revolution, where the individuals are no longer the central focus, but the event itself. The event still needs characters, but those of high mimetic literature, which are 'better than the men of the present day' (Aristotle, chapter 2). Wole, the young boy of the narrative clearly lacks the stature of a high mimetic hero and yields place as hero of his own narrative to Beere, Mrs Ransome-Kuti. He is involved in the upheaval as 'a limpet' (*Aké* 182), but near enough to be among the first to *hear* 'the expression Egba Women's Union' (184). The upheaval itself is the work of this new union under the leadership of Mrs Ransome-Kuti, Wild Christian, Madame Amelia (Kemberi), and others. The capture effects at play in this narrative are therefore not only in terms of an individual personal history taken over by a cultural revolution, but also the hero of the first story is overtaken and assimilated into the hero of the historical sequence, which is Beere.

Unlike a river-capture event which is purely *accidental*, the patterns of capture we are dealing with here are structural and pertain to the text's architecture. Literary works are of different kinds; each kind with its characteristic features, which help to shape the actual writing. Discussing the vexed question of the poet's intention, Northrop Frye remarks:

One may pursue the centripetal intention as far as genre, as a poet intends to produce, not simply a poem, but a certain kind of poem.... One has to assume, as an essential heuristic axiom, that the work as produced

constitutes the definitive record of the writer's intention. For many of the flaws which an inexperienced critic thinks he detects, the answer 'But it's supposed to be that way' is sufficient. All other statements of intention, however fully documented, are suspect. The poet may change his mind or mood; he may have intended one thing and done another, and then rationalized what he did (1970: 86-87).

A historical novel, such as *Aké*, is so by its generic determination; and genre is not so much a term of classification, but a shaping factor in text formation. It is *there* not only before the act of writing, but expresses itself by unfolding along with the writing, *as* the writing in its entire length and breadth. Accordingly, Paul Ricoeur writes,

Composition, belonging to a genre and individual style characterise discourse as a work. The very word 'work' reveals the nature of these new categories; they are categories of production and of labour. To impose a form upon material, to submit production to genres, to produce an individual, these are so many ways of treating language as a material to be worked upon and formed (1981: 136).

The patterns of capture in *Aké* are part of the individuality of this text, and all the markings of individuality together make up what Paul Ricoeur calls style. These markings of individuality are some of the elements whereby a text draws and engages attention as an art object. However, in becoming a *limpet*, Wole is able to indulge and feed an unquenchable curiosity which could not fail of its influence in the shaping of *the artist as a young man*.

Interpreted World

Aké is a book of interpretations. Narration itself is an act of interpretation: the objects, places, humans, events are not what they are: they are captured within a perspective. This is what warns us that we are not dealing with biography, but in the strict sense of the word, representation itself. The most dignified building in the immediate world inhabited by the child Wole is the Canon's residence. Here it is presented:

Only the Canon's residence could have housed the weekly Guest. For one thing, it was the only storey-building in the parsonage, square and stolid as the Canon himself, riddled with black wooden-framed windows. Bishops Court was also a storey-building but only pupils lived in it, so it was not a house. From the upper floor of the Canon's home one *almost* looked the top of Itókò straight in its pagan eye. It stood at the highest lived-in point of the parsonage, just missing overlooking the gate. Its back was turned to the world of spirits and ghommids who inhabited the thick woods and chased home children who had wandered too deeply in them for firewood, mushrooms and snails. The Canon's square, white building was a bulwark against the menace and the siege of the wood spirits. Its rear wall demarcated their territory, stopped them from taking liberties with the world of humans (1-2).

The persona is a little child, which explains why his thinking is entirely at the symbolic level, where the objects perceived are more than what they are. But the narration is by an adult consciousness who passes the child's symbolic word through another interpretation. Thus the building is 'square and stolid as the Canon himself' and 'riddled with black wooden-framed windows'; from the upper floor of this edifice, 'one *almost* looked the top of Itókò straight in its pagan eye', and so on. This 'interpretation of interpretation' marks the way in which the symbolic order resists perishing, as Heidegger would say, to make way for a system with a more or less symmetrical relationship between the representer and the represented.

The world of experience itself is also interpreted. We get a very strong sense of this when the narrative briefly moves to Isara, Wole's father's hometown. The mother, Wild Christian, activates here strategies of defence. Isara is seen

by her as a world of malignancy, where poisoning is the order of the day: There are relations who,

would have fed us morning till night but here, Wild Christian was at her most unbending about our accepting food outside the walls of our grandfather. This went beyond the mere censure on GREED. She was morbidly afraid that we would be poisoned.

Our Ijebu relations, it seemed, had a reputation for poisoning, or for a hundred and one forms of injuring an enemy through magical means. We were drilled in ways and means of avoiding a handshake, for various forms of injury could be operated through the hands. One would return home and simply wither away. Thus we perfected the technique of bowing with our hands at the back; the more persistently a chance acquaintance proffered his hands, the more resolutely we kept our hands behind, bowing respectfully and looking permanently on the ground (130).

The grandfather confirms this view where he observes to Wole, 'O-oh, you think I simply bring you all here for the New Year without looking out for you?... There is more to the world than the world of Christians or books' (143). But he considers that the town where the family lives and feels quite at ease is no less a source of anxiety, although for a different kind of reason: competition and struggle for space. But he assumes that the parents are enough protection for the children. Special arrangements, however, have to be made for Wole as he prepares to leave home for the first time to go to a boarding school; and for this private ceremony with Wole, he sends the parents and siblings away to Sagamu. He is 'baked and seasoned', in the words of a fellow candidate for interview at the Government College, for life in the outer world by a series of incisions made in his ankles and wrists, after which he is instructed:

'Whoever offers you food, take it. Eat it. Don't be afraid, as long as your heart says, Eat. If your mind misgives, even for a moment, don't take it, and never step in that house again. Do you understand what I have just said?'

I could only nod, dumbly.

'I said, anyone offers you food or drink, if your mind does not hesitate, go ahead. It is I that say so. If however, you experience even one moment of doubt, turn your back on that place and never go back. Next, don't ever turn your back on a fight. Where you are going, maybe next year, maybe the year after the next, I don't know. For all I know they may not let you back here before you go to that school but it does not matter. Wherever you find yourself, don't run away from a fight. Your adversary will probably be bigger, he will trounce you the first time. Next time you meet him, challenge him again. He will beat you all over again. The third time, I promise you this, you will either defeat him, or he will run away. Are you listening to what I am telling you?' (147)

Wild Christian's strategy for evading poisoning is non-objectionable to the Christian sensibility she espouses, although the fear of poisoning itself probably has a superstitious aspect. The grandfather's remedy, however, goes uncontested both by her and her husband who has a key leadership role in the Christian community both in *Aké* and *Isara*. He must have gone through the ritual himself; hence Wole's question to the grandfather on that point goes unanswered.

This ritual is itself how the old interpreted world by the Isaravillagers and the grandfather resists perishing under the Christian and *bookly* interpretations, as Heidegger might say. The bearers of the Christian and bookly interpretations, on the other hand, are so penetrated by the old tradition that they themselves become its unwitting projectors and preservers. But the resistance is not simply by function of the weakness of the Christian and bookly worlds: there is also the factor of

the force exerted by the *other* world claimed by the grandfather to exist. The narrative also associates these movements of force with *witnesses*. Such is the interpretation of the sudden sickness of Sanya, by ‘an elderly woman, one of Rev. J.J.’s converts’ and the remedy she applies, which is a delicacy made in such a quantity as would have been enough for ‘an appeasement feast, a *sàarà*’ for all the children of the neighbourhood. However, all is locked in with the invalid. Those who eavesdrop on him, including Wild Christian are able to hear:

things like: ‘Behave yourself, there is enough for everybody. All right you take this, have an extra wrap ... Open your mouth ... here ... you don’t have to fight over that bit, here’s another piece of crayfish ... behave, I said ...

And they would hear what sounded like the slapping of wrists, a scrape of dishes on the ground or water slopping into a cup.

When the woman judged it was time, which was well after dusk, nearly six hours after Sanya was first locked up, she went and opened the door. There was Sanya fast asleep but, this time, very peacefully. She touched his forehead and appeared to be satisfied by the change. The household who had crowded in with her had no interest in Sanya however. All they could see, with astonished faces, were the scattered leaves of 50 wraps of *àgidi*, with the contents gone, a large empty dish which was earlier filled with *èkuru*, and a water-pot nearly empty’

No, there was no question about it, our Uncle Sanya was an *óró* (11).

Óróis explained on page 5 as ‘a kind of tree demon’. So the interpreted world here has things like ‘tree demons’, which are invisible to *normal* human beings. But they are not only visible to persons like Uncle Sanya, who are *Óróin* in an incarnated form, they are able to share physically in an ‘appeasement feast’, all this in the parsonage itself. Stories of this kind which involve *credible* witnesses like Wild Christian or Rev. J.J. or even whole congregations of Christian worshippers seem to suggest that more than *interpretation* is involved; that there is indeed ‘more to the world than the world of Christians or books’. But there is a big struggle in which for the first time the interpreted world of tradition comes under serious pressure, not from ‘the world of Christians’, but perhaps of *books*.

Disorder for the Sake of Order

Hegel was probably the first to theorize the historical novel, although he called it *epic*. But its features are well laid out. It usually articulates around an event in which a society radically changes its identity. He writes in his *Aesthetics* about the lack of this kind of event in the works of contemporary European writers:

For the whole state of the world today has assumed a form diametrically opposed in its prosaic organization to the requirements which we found irremissible for genuine epic, and the revolutions to which the recent circumstances of states and peoples have been subject are still too fixed in our memory as actual experiences to be compatible with the epic form of art. Consequently epic poetry has fled from great national events into the restrictedness of private domestic situations in the countryside or a small town in order to find there situations which might be fit for presentation in epic (1975: 1109).

Contrary to the demand by Marxist inspired theories that art has to be engaged, Hegel, a powerful presence in the ancestry of Marxism, is maintaining that ‘the recent circumstances of states and peoples’ – the revolutions in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – are too close and present to consciousness to allow exploitation by art. This is how he explains the prevalence of low mimetic art, the so-called realist literature of the period.

This high mimetic historical novel shares with the realist that their objects 'never have a presence outside human perception, real or imaginary', but are 'comparable to those in our daily lives, as they occupy our minds at every moment' (Robbe-Grillet 2000: 822). A main point of contrast is the scale of the central event and the associated upheaval. In addition, the historical novel lays 'claim to portraying the totality of the life-process' (Lukács 221). This totality is not of life in the naturalist conception; for as Lukács explains,

Obviously, no literary character can contain the infinite and inexhaustible wealth of features and reactions to be found in life itself. But the nature of artistic creation consists in the ability of this relative, incomplete image to appear like life itself, indeed in a more heightened, intense and alive form than in objective reality (221).

A main way in which this sense of the totality of *life* is achieved is the air of the unfolding process of time. Such is the unfolding of *Aké* as the unfolding of Wole's life from the intimate environment of the family and parsonage, outwards to Isara, to Abeokuta Grammar School, to Government College Ibadan, back to the Grammar School, and the women's uprising. All the time, he is growing up, getting his education, earning himself roles outside the immediate family environment, and getting to know the world better and the forces at work in it. The workaday lives of the ordinary people are also seen as well as the cultural and political structures which exert pressure on them. At the same time, the narrative moves as if on a gradient, attaining fulfilment in the crisis over the women's movement. So there is a sense that it is this one event, rather than the person and history of Wole, that gives the narrative cogency. Uncannily, this movement that is setting itself against the power system is happening at the same time that the nationalist forces seeking to throw off colonialism are starting to coalesce, gaining the attention and enthusiastic support of the people all over the country and causing the colonial administration to react and fight back (200). There is here a sense that the women's movement is but one manifestation of the 'forms of common life produced by the relations of the spirit as it suspends its subjectivity and realises itself,— an objectivity in which precisely its self-determinations in general lose the form of inclinations, just as the content loses subjectivity, contingency, or caprice' (Hegel, *Philosophy of Spirit* 393).

The women's movement is first of all for the purposes of self-help and self-enlightenment soon turning to an adult literacy programme. The same pattern of capture we have already seen is again at work. Taxation and harassment by tax officials are beginning to interfere with the formerly private project of self-enlightenment and a turning point is quickly reached at the narrating of experiences:

'The *Parakoyitook* half of my farm produce for market toll. I went to the local councillors to seek their help.'

'We were waylaid on the way to the farm. The Local Police asked us to contribute one-fifth of every item as duty.'

'I tried to dodge the uniformed men. I turned into a path I thought I knew and- got lost. Only God saved me or I would still be wandering in the forests.'

'They have no heart, those men. They look at you like they have no flesh and blood until you give them what they want.'

'We spent the night in a police cell. They seized all our goods and will continue to hold them until we bring them our Tax papers. But we have not even been to the market, how can we pay when they have taken the goods we are going to sell?'

'It is those chiefs. They are in this together. They set the *adana* to do their dirty work because they daren't levy a toll on farm produce.'

'No, it's the Alake; I heard one of the *adana* say we shouldn't complain to him. 'Go to Kabiyesi who sent us,' he said.'

'Our own tormentors said it was the white man. He said the order came to the *ajele* from his fellow white man in Lagos. They are just servants of the white man in Lagos.'

'ENOUGH!'

The voice was none other than Kernberi's (182).

Parakoyi, adana, ajele are officials and agents of different ranks who prey on the hapless women, claiming that they are carrying out orders transmitted down the structure of indirect rule, from the colonial administration in Lagos, through the local king, the Kabiyesi. Indirect rule, therefore, is the order of the day and Kernberi's 'ENOUGH!' is the announcement that this *order* is going to be disrupted and set aside. Kernberi's 'ENOUGH!' therefore announces the birth of a political movement.

From among Men

The system of indirect rule places the king, the Alake of Abeokuta at the centre rather than at the head of the political process. But this only mimics another system of indirect rule, which is traditional. This is the system of rule by the *ogboni*, who are said to slide,

through Aké like ancient wraiths, silent, dark and wise, a tanned pouch of Egba history, of its mysteries, memories and insights, or thudded through on warriors' feet, defiant and raucous, broad and compact with unspoken violence. We were afraid of them. Among other furtive hints and whispers we heard that they sent out child kidnappers whose haul was essential to some of their rites and ceremonies. Certainly they controlled the *orocult* [A secret male cult with the task of carrying out sentences] whose bull-roarer sent all women into the first available indoor refuge. It was unusual for the bull-roarer to be heard in daylight, and without warning, but it happened once when I was in the shop with Wild Christian. She quickly locked the shop doors on us until the danger was past. Their weird chants drifted many evenings into the parsonage, punctuated by concerted thuds which, we learnt, was the sound of their staffs striking the clay floor as they circled round in their secret enclave. There was no formal teaching in such matters, but we came to know that in the *ogboni* reposed the real power of the king and land, not that power which seemed to be manifested in the prostration of men and women at the feet of the king, but the *real* power, both supernatural and cabalistic, the intriguing, midnight power which could make even the king wake up one morning and find that his house posts had been eaten through during his sleep (203)

The *ogboni* stood for and controlled power in every sense of the word. In Egba and Aké, power obviously resides in the menfolk, but only to the extent that *real* power is wielded by those among them who have the privilege of belonging to the *ologboni*. The qualification for membership is not stated, but in their *interpreted world*, male folk are dominant: they alone, if appropriate conditions be met, may have access to power – supernatural, cabalistic, political, judicial, and cultic. The women's declaration of NO MORE TAX (208) is a political statement of far-reaching consequences, but they go much farther:

And then I heard the ultimate challenge of the women, for this was not just a rallying-song, even an ordinary war-song, but the appropriation of the man-exclusive cult – *oro* – by women in a dare to all men, *ogboni* or not... When I saw stocky, middle-aged and elderly, grizzled men, the fearsome *ogboni*, abandoning their hats, shawls, staffs of office and run on the wind ... and beheld even the non-*ogboni* men skirting the palace environs, moving deeper into their shops, and finally picked out the wording of their new chant:

Oro o, a fes'oro / Oro o, a fes'oro / E ti'lekunmo' kunrin / A fes'oro

(òrò-o, we are about to perform òrò / Lock up all the men, we are bringing out òrò) 213).

There is more than seizure of power involved here. Another interpretation of the world than that of the *ogboni* and indirect rule is becoming apparent. In this new interpretation, power belongs to the people – not just the women, but all the people. In fact the struggle being waged by the women – ‘the women’s war’ – is on behalf of all:

The men became more fully involved, at least, they became more openly involved. At every step, they had shouted their encouragement of the women's actions and even in some cases, driven their hesitant wives from the home, angry that such wives did not know that the cause concerned them also, and that its victory would bring them much-needed relief. One physically dragged his wife to the palace one morning, gave her money to spend on food and assured her that he would look after the children until the strife was over. There were also many women there with their young who camped out in the open with them and shared the hardship. But the movement of laden lines towards the Aafin now included men. They stopped by on the way from their farms; many had even journeyed to the farm to bring the women yams, fruits, palm wine. A hunter or two stopped to drop the day's catch of bush meat and share jokes with the women.

Beere and The Group negotiated with the new District Officer, the former having been recalled (219).

Even in the breaking of the agreements reached by the king as soon as the siege on the palace is lifted, the new sense of power belonging to the people is not given up. The District Officer, for instance, cannot gainsay Beere warning that ‘the next time round, he is going’ (224). This new District Officer has saved the king’s *head* this time and by the agreements signed, kept the system of indirect rule going. To avoid perishing in this conflict, the *ogboni* fall back to their ancient cunning as they get into a separate agreement with the women: ‘As for us’ they say, ‘we are not surprised or alarmed. Ifa said it all before and, when it started, we went back to consult again and Ifa said – now is happening what I told you before’ (221).

CONCLUSIONS

Change is a catch-all word, embracing every form of alteration and even a dropping from currency. Heidegger’s word *perishin* in the headnote is useful for a cultural production which is utterly displaced from consciousness. In Soyinka’s *Aké*, over and against the received ways of the people, there are new ways of being in the world, such as Christianity, and of perception, such as from the viewpoint of Western education; there are also new political practices, such as ‘people power’ which would eclipse traditional power systems and ways of seeing and being in the world if they took hold. At the culminating point of the crisis with the missionaries in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Ajofia the chief *egwugwuof* Umuofia makes a great concession to the missionaries:

‘The body of the white man, do you know me?’ he asked.

Mr. Smith looked at his interpreter, but Okeke, who was a native of distant Umuru, was also at a loss.

Ajofia laughed in his guttural voice. It was like the laugh of rusty metal. ‘They are strangers,’ he said, ‘and they are ignorant. But let that pass’ He turned again to the missionary. ‘You can stay with us if you like our ways. You can worship your own god. It is good that a man should worship the gods and the spirits of his fathers. Go back to your house so that you may not be hurt. Our anger is great but we have held it down so that we can talk to you’ (61-62).

The two systems may stay side by side. Ajofia sees no harm in this. Okonkwo’s view, however, is that accommodation is unworkable. He seems to have sensed that allowing the Christians a foothold would lead inevitably to the *perishing* of the traditional system. The issues have been reduced in sociological criticism to cultural struggle. At the philosophical level, we are faced with ways of being in the world which arise from how the world is interpreted. The interpretation of the world in *Akéas* having an occult dimension, where *real* power resides resists perishing under direct onslaught from the teachings of the Christian church. The force that is able to shake it is a political force namely the will of the people. Here Christianity and education probably have a supporting role. The women are in the van of the movement of this Will. The old structures are able to resist perishing under this pressure by trickery and double-dealing. The Alake signs an agreement he has no intention of keeping; the *ogboli* put out that the upheaval is part of a history already foreseen by the Ifa and welcome the women’s demands as what they had only been waiting for. The gain by the people is a new awareness of what they can do when they exercise the Common Will. Trickery and cunning may have saved the old order from perishing, but this order still has much to fear from Beere’s ‘the next time around’.

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