

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AFRICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE BASED ON MARYSE CONDE'S *I, TITUBA: BLACK WITCH OF SALEM*

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Abstract

African slaves deported to different parts of Europe, America and Asia had left indelible prints of the African cultural heritage in these parts of the world many years after the abolition of slave trade. As a result of this, literary works of many Caribbean authors portray African cultural heritage in all ramifications. Till date, many works of these authors with African origin showcase African culture. On the other hand, it is no hidden truth that many African youths try to imbibe European cultures while regarding African culture with contempt. These youths abandon the rich cultural heritage of Africa in pursuit of alien cultures considered absurd in Africa. For these reasons, cultural conflicts abound, giving rise to the confusion of what is culturally right or wrong in Africa as a continent. This piece of writing exposed and analyzed the rich cultural heritage of Africa as expressed in the work of Maryse Conde titled: *I, Tituba: black witch of Salem*. It equally sensitized the African youths on the importance of conserving their cultural values by adhering to them. It is strongly believed that this work will destroy inferiority complex inherent in our young people towards African culture vis-a-vis European culture. Psychoanalytical theory is the bed rock of the analysis of this work. The findings revealed that African cultural heritage is better appreciated and upheld by African descendants in the Diaspora than by those in Africa. It is recommended that the African culture be developed by Africans to international standard en lieu of abandoning it.

Keywords: Africa, Exposition, Analysis, Cultural, Heritage, Diaspora

1. Introduction

Africa as a continent has had its rich cultural heritage expressed in diverse ways over the years. Before the arrival of the white man into Africa during the pre-colonial era, African people had maintained and practiced their culture. There was communalism, a medium through which individuals having the same language, religion and leadership system etc. had interactions one with another. As Bernth Lindfors put it in her article - *Politics, Culture and Literary form in Black Africa*, "The African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans: that their societies were not mindless, but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity"(25).

Culture according to Ramanu Sanusi's point of view, citing Anthony Lekan in an article entitled *Man, language and identity linguistics for national development* is:

“The totality of the life of a people including their customs and traditions, ideas, world views and perceptions as well as their art, values, and language”(35).

Through social interactions, principles guiding different daily activities are established; hence laws and orders are put in place. Responsible individuals among the people were chosen to enforce these laws and orders in the society. In pre-colonial Africa, Chieftaincy was a means through which chosen individuals and their families organized the people in a community to fight for their common interests. Through this means, invaders of such communities are fought against, conquered and taken captive or warded off the community for its continual peaceful existence. It is therefore a fact that Africans made wars with neighboring communities, conquered them and took their women and children as slaves. Tituba, in her narration in the work under consideration affirm this view when she remarked:

“...A rich planter by name Darnell Davis bought her for a good deal of money. He also bought two male slaves and ashanties as well - victims of the tribal wars between their people and the Fantis”(1)

Hence, even before the commencement of slave trade, Africans had it as a culture to enslave themselves through inter-tribal wars. Slaves serving in various communities were eventually sold into slavery to the white man when they arrived in Africa for such trade. Tituba remarks again:

“While Abena stood there in front of him with her head hung low, Yao’s heart filled with immense compassion. It seemed to him that this child symbolized the condition of the entire people: defeated, dispersed and auctioned off” (5).

The arrival of the white man in colonial Africa reduced the African man to a being less than human. They painted the image of Africans as not having culture or civilization. For the white man to have his way in Africa he termed the existing African culture barbaric, he also viewed African religion with contempt, terming it satanic. The westerners made Africans to see themselves with the western mirror, hence Africans internalized inferiority complex which also made them to see their own culture as inferior to that of the west. In schools set up for African children, African indigenous languages were set aside for foreign languages. Till date, inferiority complex is still the lot of many Africans as a result.

In initiation à la littérature Africaine d’expression française, Leo Iyanda observed thus:

“pour eux les Afrique n’avait aucune histoire digne de ce fait: Les africaines sont des hommes sans culture et sans civilisation. Ils trouvaient les Africaines comme des barbares, des sanguinaires et des gens qui prenaient plaisir dans la guerre”. (93)

Translated, it means – “For them, Africans had no history...Africans are without culture and without civilisation. They saw Africans as Barbarians and monkeys and as people who took pleasure in wars”(93).

He also expressed his view on how the West sees African religion when he stated: “Il s’agit d’abord un lavage de cerveau des Africaines sur la pratique religieuse ou on reléguait a volonté la religion traditionnelle Africaine au profit de la religion importée”(92).

Again translated, it means, “This is first of all a brainwash of Africans on religious practices as African religious practices were relegated to background for profit of imported cultures”(92).

For these reasons, the African culture is neglected by Africans themselves, especially the young ones as they embrace foreign cultures resulting in cultural conflicts. Those interested in African cultural development must view this abandonment of African rich cultural heritage as aberration. The embrace of foreign cultures brings waywardness and discretization of African societal norms and values. Asobele Timothy in *l'héritage littéraire francophone* observes that these foreign cultures are strange to African values. He remarks:

“Cette politique renversera la tradition colonial qui consiste à ne pas projeter que les films des Cow boys, et des films indiens qui sont étrangers aux valeurs culturelle du peuple africain”(46)

Which translated means, “This politics will overhaul the colonial tradition which consists in projecting only cowboys films and Indian films that are strange to African cultural values”.

In this study, African cultural heritage such as African traditional religion, African oral tradition and African traditional medicine shall be considered.

2. Biography of the Author.

Maryse Conde a Caribbean writer has published many novels. Her novels treat different themes such as slavery, culture and feminism. She is a social critic, in her works *Heremankonon*, *Une saison à Rihata*, *Segou and I*, *tituba, black witch of Salem*, she criticizes the African and Caribbean society by pointing out some African rich cultural heritage as expressed by the daily lives of African slaves deported to these Caribbean islands. She was born on February 11, 1937. She did her secondary education in point-a-pitre. She went to France where she studied Classic letters at Sorbonne. She lived and worked for many years in Africa. Her experiences in Africa coupled with her experience as a Caribbean native helped her vivid description of African culture from the pre-colonial to colonial period in her works *Segou tom 1 and tom 2*. She returned to France in 1973 and taught in different universities and consolidated her career as a novelist. She taught Francophone literature in Paris vii(Jussieu), X (Nanterre), and iii (Sorbonne nouvelle). She has published not less than fifteen works.

3. Synopsis of I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem

I, Tituba, black witch of Salem, is a historic and mythic novel. Through the imaginary character of Tituba, Maryse Conde tells the story of slaves in a particular era in human history. The novel is written in autobiographic form by eponymous heroin. The story of *I, Tituba* started in 17th century at Barbados, one of the small English towns of the Antilles. Tituba was born as a fruit of rape of her mother Abena, by an English ship captain carrying slaves. Tituba is noted from the beginning as a child of sorrow because her mother Abena had little affection for her. She found warmth and comfort from Yao Abena's lover. A white master attempted to rape Abena and to escape the rape, Abena wounded him. As a result she was hanged in the presence of her daughter. Seeing her

lover hanged, Yao committed suicide. After the death of Abena and her lover Yao, Tituba her daughter was taken by Mama yaya. Mama yaya is an old woman who initiated her into the secrets of healing through plants and taught her how to enter in communication with the dead. After sometimes, Mama Yaya died and Tituba constructed a hut in the woods out sketch of the habitations.

She met John Indian one day, a slave of Susanna Endicott. Tituba loved this man so much and decided to abandon her life of a free woman to stay with him. She suffered many humiliations in her new status and the negative image of being raised by a witch. She was frustrated and attempted to kill Susanna Endicott, but the spirit of Mama Yaya counseled her against taking the violent path of the whites. As a result she inflicted her with serious sickness. Susanna Endicott was forced to sell the couple to a new master, a reverend puritan called Samuel Parris, who embarked on a journey to the United States, taking with him John Indian with Tituba, that is how Tituba became a slave by love.

When they got to Boston, they spent a little time there and Samuel Parris' family left Boston for Salem as a result of financial problems. In Salem, Tituba was not going to be a happy young woman. Mr. Samuel Parris was ordained Reverend by his church, and Following the hysterical crises that followed as a result of Tituba's presence around Betsey, Samuel Parris' daughter and her cousin, Tituba was accused of witchcraft and was cast into prison. Tituba confessed to be a witch following the advice of a young woman Hester, who was detained for adultery. Through this means she escaped death. After a long stay in the prison, she was redeemed by a Jewish trader. Tituba fared well in Benjamin Cohen D' Azebedo's house because he treated her with respect.

Following the persecution that followed in the community, the small town did not accept the friendship between Tituba and the Jew. One night, the house of Benjamin was burnt and the children were lost, this persecution that broke out made the Jew to relocate to the island of Rhode. He therefore granted Tituba liberty and she also decided to return to her native country, Barbados. When she returned to the Island, she was welcome by the maroons, a detached group that she neither shared the views nor their ways of life. She returned and restored her old abode. One day, the slaves brought to her a young man who was cruelly flogged, when healed this man became Tituba's lover. Iphigene was accused of inciting a revolt, as a result he was executed and Tituba was hanged for this crime. She therefore joined the invisible world and took up the difficult task of helping the slaves in the future.

Going through this work, it was discovered that many daily practices of the inhabitants of this community are worthy of note as they portray African cultural heritage of the slaves deported from Africa. Ramanu Sanusi also noted that "Lorsque les hommes se déplacent ils font avec leurs cultures". Meaning that "When people move from place to place, they move along with their culture". It becomes imperative that the custodians of African culture are duty bound to redress these wrongs and to correct the initial false history through the west.

It is observed that the cultural practices despised by Africans are still of value to these continents and countries in the Diaspora. This work brings to light the emptiness of western culture and tradition which is characterized by intimidation, selfishness and wickedness. It is indeed saddening to see the African culture highly valued and developed in other continents but despised and viewed as inferior by Africans, the rightful owners. This is the reason Ramanu Sanusi citing Ayo Kehinde in his work '*La littérature africaine à la croisée des chemins: Language, Culture and Mondialisation*' questions the future of African culture.

4. Review of Related Literature

Many writers have written about culture and cultural development. Here is account of other works on culture which has aided better understanding on the subject.

"Tradition is supreme," the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria would say. This aphorism has always stood the test of time because, truly, tradition is supreme', however, to what extent is this true considering the modern African continent? How many people still believe in African culture, and to what extent? What can we do to rejuvenate our dying culture? Many Africans have forgotten their roots, their identities, and are fast taking on a new look, a new personality, a new history and a new culture'' (35-36).

Amilcar Cabral in his work "National liberation and culture" describes the relationship between culture and the domination of a people. he observes thus:

"History teaches us that in certain circumstances, it is very easy for a foreigner to impose his domination on a people. But it likewise teaches us that, whatever the material aspects of his domination it can be maintained only by the permanent and organized repression of the cultural life of the people concerned" (485).

In accordance with the above statement, a people cease to exist so long their cultural values no longer exist because it is their culture and values that identifies them. When the cultural life of a people is neutralized and paralyzed they are already dominated.

Agostinho Neto in "Concerning national culture" also maintains that;

"Developing our cultures does not mean to subject it to other cultures but where there exists already acculturation resulting from contacts with European culture, There is need to reach agreement on the utilization of agents of culture from the people to bring about a simple comprehensive current of culture (494).

This means that every society is duty bound and should be responsible for the development of its cultural values. Frantz Fanon on 'National culture' discloses the means through which the colonialists were able to penetrate the colonized. He describes the lies of the colonialist to the colonized. Colonialism tactically worked on the psyche of the colonized. Fanon stated that:

"When we consider the efforts made to carry out the cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch, we realize that nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by

the colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism was to drive into the native's heads, the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality"(253).

This entails the application of psychoanalytic theory to influence the natives. Through this analysis as well, the psyches of the natives will be affected positively to embrace their cultural values which the colonial masters influenced them to despise.

Paul Hountondji in the concluding part of 'True and False Pluralism' noted that:

"African culture must return to itself, to its internal pluralism and its essential openness, he also pointed out the fact of the involvement of our Psychology in order to develop our cultural values and heritage. He insists "that we must therefore, as individuals liberate ourselves psychologically and develop a free relationship both with African cultural tradition itself as an open system of options" (269).

Every form of literature drama, poetry and prose expresses the culture of the people that produced it, if we actually want to carry out any type of review on culture then we must set to review whatever that is classified under literature.

5. Psychoanalytic Theory Employed in the Analysis of the Text

Psychoanalytic criticism argues that literary texts, like dreams, express the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author and that a literary work is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses. One may psychoanalyze a particular character within a literary work, but it is usually assumed that all such characters are projections of the author's psyche. This theory adopts the methods of "reading" employed by Freud and later theorists to interpret texts.

One interesting facet of this approach is that it validates the importance of literature, as it is built on a literary key for decoding. Freud himself wrote,

"The dream-thoughts which we first come across as we proceed with our ten strike us by the unusual form in which they are expressed; they are not clothed in the prosaic language usually employed by our thoughts, but are on the contrary represented symbolically by means of similes and metaphors, in images resembling those of poetic speech" (26)

Like psychoanalysis itself, this critical endeavor seeks evidence of unresolved emotions, psychological conflicts, guilts, ambivalences, and so forth within what may well be a disunified literary work. The author's own childhood traumas, family life, sexual conflicts, fixations, and such will be traceable within the behavior of the characters in the literary work. But psychological material will be expressed indirectly, disguised, or encoded (as in dreams) through principles such as "symbolism" (the repressed object represented in disguise), "condensation" (several thoughts or persons represented in a single image), and "displacement" (anxiety located onto another image by means of association).

Despite the importance of the author here, psychoanalytic criticism is similar to New Criticism in not concerning itself with "what the author intended," but with what the author *never* intended (that is, repressed). This unconsciousness has been distorted by the censoring conscious mind. In the text under study, the unresolved emotions and psychological conflicts led to inferiority complex which resulted in depiction of identified groups and their cultural values. These are the conflicts observed in the lives of the Africans slaves towards Tituba. They avoided her, and yet needed her knowledge of herbs to be healthy. Also, the experiences Tituba had while growing up reflected in the text. The rejection of her herbal practices as seen in the text also happened to her adoptive mother while she was young.

6. African Traditional Religion

The place of religion in every society cannot be overemphasized. The same goes to African traditional religion. Africans are in reality the most religious people in the world. Unimwan Deberi citing Maurice Delafosse in *contributions à l'étude du théâtre francophone* noted that: "Aucune institution n'existe, que ce soit dans le domaine social, ou dans le domaine politique, voire même en matière économique, qui ne repose sur un concert religieux ou qui n'ait la religion pour pierre angulaire." (158).

Translated, this means that "There is no social institution, political or even economical that does not rely in one way or the other on religious practices as bedrock" (158).

Religion as part and parcel of African life is demonstrated in the novel. Tituba describes this practice when she was born, Yao her step father had prayed his African way of prayer to the ancestors when she was born. She remarks:

"Yao, on the other hand, was delighted. He took me in his big bony hands and anointed my forehead with the blood of a chicken, after having buried my mother's placenta under a silk cotton tree. Then holding me up by the feet, he presented me to the four corners of the horizon" (6).

Yao an African slave in a faraway country did not forget the religious practices of his people. At the birth of a child, the consciousness of a supreme being who gives life and in whose hand the destiny of every human lies is usually demonstrated by sacrifices invoking the presence of this supreme God to watch over the child. In African culture, this duty is reserved for the priest who occupies the position of a mediator between the visible and the invisible, the living and the dead, the natural and the supernatural. Yao had to play this role though a slave, he stood as a priest to commune with the supreme God concerning the new born and if possible procure through his sacrifices a bright future and destiny for the child.

This is clear evidence that Africans have the consciousness of a divine being and therefore were in search of ways he could recognize or know this God. There is always a vacuum in man that only the knowledge of the true God can fill for man's need are insatiable. When a man comes in contact with the true God, he experiences true satisfaction. Because Africans did not know the right way to the true God, they invented things about him, trying and seeking to reach this Supreme Being. In his quest, he began to find solace in a human being who is consecrated to show the way or

communicate with higher powers. This is the role priests play in African traditional religion.

The sacrifices of live animals and in some extreme cases, the sacrifice of humans were involved when these priests sought to appease this god. The mortal man fears death which is the end of every living thing, when disaster strikes, he runs to the priest to find solution to the threat to his existence. He also depends on the priest to predict the future. For Unionmwa Edebiri, she explains the roles of these priests in her work *Contributions A L' Etude Du Theatre Africaine Francophone*: She remarks,

“Dans la conception des ethnologues, le monde visible est régi par le monde invisible, celui-ci étant le domaine des forces surnaturelles composée du Dieu créateur, des divinités de tout sortes, des esprits, des génies et des mânes ancêtres. Selon cette conception, les forces surnaturelles seraient à l’origine de tout ce qui arriveraient à l’homme ici-bas, de ses joies aussi bien que de ses peines. D’ où la nécessité impérieuse et constant pour l’homme de se les concilier et de les apaiser sans cesse” (159-160).

Translated-

“In Ethnologues conception, the visible world is regulated by the invisible world. The invisible world being the domain of supernatural forces made up of God the creator, divinities of all sorts, spirits and ancestral manes. According to this conception, supernatural forces are the origin of all that happens to man here on earth, his joys and his pains. This necessitates the constant need for man to reconcile himself with them and appease them”.

African traditional religion, these priests have different appellations by different people. Some refers to them as witch doctors, seers, healers, magicians, marabouts and witches. Africans attributes extra-ordinary powers to these priests. This was the case of the heroine of the novel under consideration.

Tituba was brought up by Mama Yaya after the death of Abena and Yao. This woman is described by the slaves in Barbados as possessing extra-ordinary powers. She used her knowledge of herbs to heal the slaves of their wounds. According to Tituba, Mama Yaya had the ability to communicate with the invisible. This is what she said:

“an old woman took me in. As she had seen her man and two sons tortured to death for instigating a slave revolt, she seemed to act deranged. In fact, she was hardly of this world and lived constantly in their company. She had cultivated a fine art and ability to communicate with the invisible....people were afraid of her, yet they came from far and wide because of her powers” (9).

It is worthy of note that the custodians of African culture, follow the prescribed ways of the worship of their gods.

7. African Oral Tradition

African oral tradition is a form of literature practiced in the African pre-colonial period. This form of literature was transferred orally from one generation to the other. During this period, grand-parents orally transferred African cultural heritage to the younger

generation through songs, short stories etc. Leo Iyanda in *Initiation à la littérature Africaine d'expression française* sees oral literature as:

“L’ usage esthétique du langage non écrits, l’ensemble des connaissances et des activités qui s’y rapportent. On parle d’oralité lorsque la parole, le langage, et le discours sont non-écrits et fondées sur des caractères oraux. L’oralité caractérise une situation sociale” (12).

Translated-

“The uses of non written esthetics language, and all knowledge and activities that surround it. We talk about orality when the word, the language and the discourse are non written and founded on oral characters. Orality characterizes a social situation”.

This form of literature still exists today among the traditionalist, the guardians of the African tradition. During marriage ceremonies, funeral rites and meetings of heads of clans and families, this form of oral renditions by gifted members of the society is always expressed. In Igbo communities, every gathering for any meeting by elders is usually started with Kolanut breaking. Usually, there are many forms of oral tradition which include: songs, poems, riddles, and proverbs, short stories, such as epics, myths and fables.

In African societies, songs are used for different reasons. They serve the purpose of encouragement during collective works for effectiveness and they also serve the purpose of implanting moral lessons. In Africa, women usually sing when carrying out house chores. Songs are equally used to send disturbing babies to sleep. During marriages and birth ceremonies, certain songs are used and this keeps people abreast of the type of ceremony in progress. There are also songs which serve the purpose of informing people of death. Certain songs also praise past and present heroes of the people.

On the other hand, riddles are used to develop the intelligence of children and young adults and to make listeners task their brains in order to provide the correct response to questions asked by the teller or orator. Proverbs are wise and refined words usually employed by the wise, to demonstrate the mastery of language. All these various forms of oral tradition in Africa enrich the culture of the continent.

In the novel under review, we see traces of these oral traditions well portrayed, Tituba and John Indian with other slaves through all these aspects of oral tradition spiced up their lives to some extent. They gathered for a get-together once in a year with songs, dances, riddles and short stories as we shall begin to see.

This buttresses the importance of all forms of African oral tradition in the African societies and culture. In the text, Tituba employed short stories to make the lives of the two children of Samuel Parris worth living. Also, the slaves practiced the use of riddles to entertain themselves in their free time. We also see the use of proverbs in the conversations between the slaves and their masters. Tituba noted that while the slaves worked, they made use of songs to ease off their predicaments. Tituba equally dreamt and affirms; “One day I fell asleep in the middle of the afternoon. It was the dry season. The slaves were chanting plaintively as they hoed and cut in the stifling heat” (9). It is

worthy of note that most times dreams are the aftermath of one's daily practices and activities. When an activity occurs in the subconscious, it is an evidence of continuous repetition. So the slaves even in foreign lands exhibited this rich cultural heritage of singing while at work.

In her practice of herbal medicine, Tituba used or employed the use of incantations to strengthen portions. She remarked; "I devised drugs and portions whose powers I strengthened with incantations" (11). For Tituba to combine her knowledge of herbs with incantations which is usually an African cultural practice shows that she mastered and believed in this practice. Obviously, she must have seen it exhibited by Mama 'yaya and other slaves in Barbados. It must have been a normal way of life and daily practice.

Again, short stories as a form of oral tradition are part and parcel of African cultural heritage. Tituba, the Heroine of our text and her husband John Indian used stories to entertain themselves during their leisure. She reported that John told her stories "He told me stories parading around in the midst of an imaginary circle of listeners" (23). As we read novels today in their written forms, most of African novels are compilations of this form of oral tradition with some forms of modifications and modernization to suit the western standard as affirmed by Kester Ogemdi in *Etudes critiques du Romans African Francophone*.

"ce qui est caractéristiques de ce genre d'écriture de la littérature orale dans le processus de la production Romanesque. La démarche qui consiste a rattacher L'oralité à l'écriture explique par le désir, d'une part, de justifier les thèses des richesses culturelles et historiques de l'Afrique, et d'autre part, de montrer la transition de l'oralité à l'écriture (187).

Tituba, in the course of her journey to Salem in Samuel Parris' house invented and told stories which she must have heard from Mama 'yaya and other slaves to the minister's children. Her problem and the later accusation she got as a witch was primarily because of the stories she told Betsey and Abigail. She remarked:

...usually my conversation with Goodwife Parris did not take this turn, for she got enjoyment from stories that delighted Betsey: those of Anancy the spider, people who had made a pact with the devil, zombies, soukouganans and the hag who rides along on her three-legged horse. She would listen to me fervently as her daughter- her beautiful hazel-brown eyes dotted with stars and ask..... my answers were evasive. In truth, I was afraid she would report these conversations to her uncle, Samuel Parris, and that the flicker of pleasure they gave our lives would be snuffed out (42-43).

Truly, the oral tradition of African cultural heritage revives the lives of the down trodden and encourages the discouraged. Hear what Tituba observed when John Indian was telling his own story.

"John Indian was sitting at the stern in the midst of a circle of admiring sailors telling a string of tall tales. Curiously enough, this man who had cried his heart out when our beloved Barbados Faded into the mist, was already back to normal" (40).

Thus short stories, an essential form of African oral tradition provides relief, healing and entertainment for hurting and aching hearts as we have seen in the case of Goodwife Parris and the sailors.

The novel under study is also dotted with proverbs. Every wise saying of African poetes is mostly embedded in proverbs. Proverbs consists of refined and concise sayings full of hidden meaning and wisdom. The use of proverbs was well illustrated in this novel as Tituba the heroine employed them in the course of her recitations. For economy of words, the narrator here was not willing to openly suspect her mistress, she therefore employed a proverb, she said thus: “one day, I pushed open the door of the kitchen where she sat waiting for our lessons and immediately her look told me that she had a Lethal weapon she was about to use on me” (26).

Further down in page 31, the narrator also remarked: “As the saying goes when the cat’s away, the mouse will play (31). While her enemies accused her of witchcraft, in her answer she said. “Don’t go to so much trouble for me, Goodwife Proctor”, I said. “The spit of a toad never changes the scent of a rose” (83).

Songs and poems as very important forms of African oral tradition were used by the heroine often. When Tituba poured out her emotions, we recognized part of her African cultural heritage. Her emotions could be recited or sang. She taught Betsey Parris one of the poems she composed about her unborn baby. :”Lament for my lost child”.

“The moon dropped into the water,
Into the waters of the river,
And my fingers couldn’t reach it,
Woe is me!
The moonstone has fallen
Sitting on a rock on the riverbank
I wept and lamented
Oh, softly shining stone
Glimmering at the bottom of the water
The hunter passed that way
With his bow and arrows.
“Why are you crying, my lovely one!”
“I am crying because my moonstone
Lies at the bottom of the water”,
“If it is but that, my lovely,
I will help you”
But the hunter dived and was drowned.(55)

This poetic lament was turned into song when they are relaxing. They hummed these songs just as it is done in most African homes. The heroine exposed also the fact that her late mother Abena, was always singing. Although she lost her mother at a very tender age, she still remembered the songs of her mother. she said “I let him do what he wanted while I drifted lazily into the delights of pregnancy, caressing my belly that grew rounder under my touch and singing songs to my baby. There was a tune that Abena, my mother, used to hum and now it came back to me:
Up there in the woods,

There's an ajoupa,
Nobody knows who lives inside
Nobody knows who lives there
It's a Calendar zombie
Who's fond of fast pigs (162).

Imagine the relief, healing and comfort songs and poems brought to the slaves. What encouragement! What solace! This African cultural heritage is still active and must be upheld and not be exchanged with foreign cultures. African society as a whole can regain its values and high moral standards if individuals can recover already lost aspects and endeavor to pass these cultural heritages on to the younger generation in our societies.

8. Traditional Herbal Medicine

What is herbal medicine? Herbal medicine represents the use of or combination of different roots and herbs for curative purposes. When we refer to the medicinal roots and herbs as traditional, we mean the combination of these roots and herbs coupled with faith in supernatural powers, ancestors or gods to bring about healing and cure for ailing people and the sick. The modern medicine may also be herbs or roots mixed with chemicals divided in certain proportions to bring cure and healing as well. In modern hospitals, the physicians agree to the fact that they care but God heals, just as the traditional herbal medicine practitioner believes in his incantations to influence his god or ancestors (supernatural power) to empower these herbs to bring about cure.

Having stated already that one of the purposes of this write up was to analyze and expose African cultural heritages that are becoming less popular as a result of modern technologies especially in health centers and hospitals, we shall examine the benefits of these traditional herbal practices as seen in the novel under study.

Tituba, the heroine of the novel of focus learnt this knowledge of herbs from her adoptive mother Mama Yaya. Being slaves, even if there was anything like hospital and health centers, definitely, it was not meant for them but for their masters and their families. Therefore, the knowledge of curative herbs and roots was a very vital knowledge for the slaves. Tituba's knowledge of medicinal herbs was misinterpreted by first, the African slaves and eventually by her masters whom she had equally used it to help. This misinterpretation continues today as those who are into traditional herbal medicine practice are labeled witch doctors just as Tituba was labeled "witch". This practice from the time colonialism took effect in Africa has become branded as satanic in order to pave way for the medications of the West. To worsen the situation, Christian religious leaders who have become indoctrinated also see this practice as barbaric and satanic. They therefore discourage Africans who become their converts from patronizing these traditional herbal medicine practitioners, hence this beneficial practice to man is still struggling to survive.

Tituba re-counted how she got the knowledge of herbs, she remarked,

“Mama Yaya taught me about herbs, those for inducing sleep and those for healing wounds and ulcers. Those for loosening the tongue of thieves, and those that calm epileptics and plunge them into blissful

rest. Also, those that put words of hope on the lips of the angry, the desperate and the suicidal” (9).

The knowledge of herbs that Tituba possessed was what the slaves needed to survive their many ordeals, but for fear of witch craft, many of them shied away from and dreaded her practice. Tituba still made mention of her lesson about herbs with Mama Yaya. “Mama Yaya put the finishing touches to her lessons about herbs. I devised drugs and portions whose powers I strengthened with incantations” (11). This knowledge of herbs was mixed with faith in the invisible supernatural powers.

The people branded every traditional practitioner a witch, and this was their view about Mama Yaya who cured and took care of people around her. In the discussion between Sussana Endicott and Tituba we observed that;

“Sussana Endicott smiled as if all these niceties broke little weight and went on. “Weren’t you brought up by a certain Nago witch called Mama Yaya. “witch”?, I stammered. “Witch”? She took care of people and cured them (26).

Till date, anything herbal medication for so many Christians is viewed as in and those who seek the help of these traditional herbal practitioners are termed backsliders among other Christians. Hence, those Christians who seek their help do so secretly. This was equally the case with Samuel Parris’ family. Tituba used her knowledge of herbs to cure good wife Elizabeth Parris, but secretly for fear of her husband. Tituba said, “we devised a thousand tricks to be together in the absence of the devil, the Reverend Mr. Parris.” ... I rubbed their pale, unhealthy skins using oil whose secret Mama Yaya had entrusted to me. Gradually, their skin turned golden under my touch”(32).

Tituba used her knowledge of herbs to save the life of Elizabeth Parris when all hope was lost. She said this,

“what was I going to do in this unknown and inhospitable land across the sea? I decided to make substitutions. A maple tree whose foliage was turning red would do for a silk-cotton tree. Glossy spring holly leaves would replace the Guinea grass; yellow odorless flowers would do for the sala pertuis, the panacea for all the body’s ills, which only grows in the foothills back home. My prayers did the rest. In the morning the color returned to good wife parris’ cheeks. She asked for little water. Toward midday she managed to feed herself. And in the evening she went to sleep like a newborn babe. Three days later she gave me a smile as feeble as the sun through the gable window. Thank you, Tituba! You saved my life!” (45).

Such life saving medication without side effects is what has been abandoned for what we call modern medications. In recent times, at the climax of the corona virus pandemic, the world stood still as Madagascar joined the West in the discovery of a herbal preventive remedy to the ailment. To peoples’ shock however, WHO classified the conventional solution risky, insisting that it needed to undergo clinical tests before it can be certified safe.

Aghast, Harold Benga, a researcher in Complementary and Alternative Medicine lamented, “What Madagascar and other African countries are trying to advocate for with the introduction of herbal medicine to prevent or cure corona virus is the recognition of traditional medicine that has long been relegated to the backseat despite having been embraced by local communities for the cure of numerous ailments.

The result of reactions like the one above is that those who practice traditional herbal medication are discouraged and rarely economically buoyant hence, the development of these practice dwindles. Modern medication from the West is preferred and patronized, the West get richer, having brainwashed the blacks and Africans to see their own practice as ineffective and satanic, consequently the continent’s economy continues to suffer.

Conclusion

In literature, no aspect of human experience is left. We have analyzed and exposed some African cultural heritage which should be developed to meet international standard. Any aspect in the practice of religion that is not in consonance with human wellbeing should be done away with and the existing ones refined and developed. African oral tradition brought warmth and togetherness to communities before the individualism of the Whiteman overturned everything. The trust and confidence this very practice brought has given way to suspicions which divides Africans and makes the continent vulnerable. As a result of this lack of unity, colonialists have continued to control the continent’s politics and economy till date despite their acclaimed independent. To be totally free from the grips of the colonialists who have refused to let go, our cultural heritage must be appreciated, developed and upheld.

This paper is a call to look positively, evaluate our traditions and cultures, be proud of what we have and see how to make it the envy of other continents. The Africans are called to watch their habits and attitudes to what is theirs, assert their beliefs and not be swayed by strange cultures. Negative and inconsistent lifestyle of Africans should be done away with. There is also need to equally understand the values of the African culture and avoid unwholesome imitations which further divide Africans and make them insignificant.

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