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**Cultural Nationalism in William Butler Yeats's *Dierdre*
(1907) and Wole Soyinka's *Death and King's Horseman*
(1973)**

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The Master domiciliation laboratory:

To

- ❖ My beloved parents: Mohellebi Cherif and Mazeghrane Ghania, who assisted me all along my studies.
- ❖ My lovely sisters: Sophia and Silia
- ❖ My best Jugurta
- ❖ My aunt Souad

Tassadit.

To

- ❖ My dear parents, especially my lovely mother, who propped me all along my studies.
- ❖ My family and beloved brothers.
- ❖ To my dear Doucha.

Sylian.

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Abstract

The present research paper explores the issue of cultural Nationalism in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) and William Butler Yeats's *Dierdre* (1907). Throughout our investigation, we have tried to discuss some concepts related to cultural nationalism as it is theorized by Benedict Anderson in his famous work *Imagined Communities* (1983). We have also discussed how Soyinka and Yeats have portrayed their respective cultural identities, traditions, and beliefs in their respective works. Therefore, our major concern consisted of analyzing and comparing methods adopted by the two nationalist playwrights to support and maintain their nations.

To achieve our purpose, we divided the work into two chapters. The first chapter is concerned with establishing considerable areas of comparison between the two plays relying on Anderson's concepts of Nationalism including language, religion, beliefs, traditions and sacrifices. Actually, both Wole Soyinka and William Butler Yeats employed their cultural icons to promote people's national consciousness and their sense of belonging. And the second one was about myths and cultural memory as they are introduced in the literary works.

Key words:

Cultural Nationalism, identity, beliefs, traditions, nation, nationalism, rituals and celebrations, Irish literature, African literature.

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I. General Introduction:

Cultural Nationalism is an international movement that came into sight in the late 18th and reached its peak in the early and mid 19th century; it embedded cultural aspects of the nation and took various forms all over the world like the Irish revival and the decolonization of Africa. Indeed, such movements were initiated to preserve the cultural heritage, beliefs, and practices of nations. The Encyclopedia of race and racism defines the concept as: "A movement of group allegiance based on a shared heritage as in language, history, literature, songs, religion, ideology, symbols, land, or monuments"¹. The movement was conducted by intellectuals aiming to reclaim their countries culturally and politically and increase the citizen's cultural awareness. Hence, the quest for the nation's traditions, beliefs, and cultures was mainly achieved through literary works introduced by those intellectuals.

The African literary traditions go back to the pre-colonial period. They consist of "oral literature", "storytelling", and many writings in African dialects. The African Continent has since experienced harsh colonial oppression that came to its end in the mid-nineteenth century (the 1950s, 1960s) through decolonization. Indeed, many African writers and essayists tried to denounce Western colonial practices, emphasizing their sovereignty and self-determination. They have also focused on reviving their cultural artifacts and rejecting the imposed ones through their productions that supported the growth of native consciousness, among them Wole Soyinka. This last has worked on stimulating interest in indigenous culture and traditions by injecting into his literature proverbs, folktales, and legends of early Yoruba culture. He also strived to represent the African experience and the traumas inflicted by the colonizers who attempted to undermine the black culture. Obviously, we have chosen to deal with his famous play *Death and the King's Horseman* in which Soyinka demonstrated the rootedness of Yoruba people in their indigenous traditions and beliefs.

The Irish scholars and Intellectuals have also worked on reviving people's interest in their indigenous culture as an attempt to reject the stereotyped ideas introduced by the British colonizers. Indeed, the essential factor that supported the flourishing of national consciousness in Ireland was The Irish Literary revival; writers like Douglas Hyde, Lady Gregory, John Millington Singe, and William Butler Yeats founded the Irish stage or “The Abbey Theatre” intending to revive local language and identity. In fact, W.B. Yeats was the initiator of the idea of the Irish theatre, he produced works that intended to re-establish the connection between Irish citizens and their cultural descent and restored Irish consciousness and nationalism. *Deirdre* is the most prominent example of Yeats’ endeavor to revive Celtic mythology, tragedy, and beliefs that we are going to discuss in the following parts of our work.²

Seemingly, Both William Butler Yeats and Wole Soyinka aimed to restore interest in their cultures by spreading consciousness in their communities. Their two outstanding works *Deirdre* and *Death and the King's Horseman* respectively depicted Irish and African suffering under colonial subjugation, the painful cries of their nations, and claimed the recognition of their identities, their belonging, and the dignity of their past.

1. Review of Literature

Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and William Butler Yeats' *Deirdre* have received substantial consideration since their very first publication. Visibly the two literary works represent the situation encountered by their communities in a time of literary and cultural regeneration.

Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* was handled from different stand points and held a crucial position in African and worldwide literature through its contribution to the awakening of Nigerian consciousness and renewing ancient Yoruba traditions and beliefs. Among the early reflections on the work, James Gibbs's chapter entitled "*The plays of Exile*" taken from his book *Wole Soyinka* (1986) where he suggests that:

The characterization and the stagecraft of the play contribute to a moving and coherent examination of the colonial encounter in which the arrogant, supercilious, and well-armed British confronted a social structure and the metaphysical system they did not begin to understand, did not even try to appreciate. However, Soyinka is only partly concerned to make the British appear insensitive and ridiculous, a major concern is to present the Yoruba world and world-view on stage - and in this, he is also successful [.....] in Soyinka's view, there can be no clash of cultures when only one culture, Yoruba culture, in this case, is presented in depth³.

In this previous quote James Gibbs argues that the play mingles between the harsh colonial attitudes toward local beliefs and the native people rootedness in their inherited cultural system. Actually we can notice that from the beginning of the second act the British officer Pilkings and his wife tried to undermine native culture one prominent example is when they were disguised to attend the ball wearing the "egungun" masquerade costume. Eventually, the position of the colonizer further submitted through their way of perceiving the ritual of suicide since events principally turn around the suicide of the king's horseman who should accomplish his duty toward his nation by ensuring the continuity of their customs, before-mentioned act was held by the colonizer as non-sense and barbaric. Therefore, Soyinka

cautioned from identifying his work as an image of a clash of cultures but rather a profound illustration of his Yoruba mythology mixed with a hyperbolic portrayal of western values.

Iva Gilbertova has also carried a study on Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* in her work *Wole Soyinka: Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), in which she analyzes the play from different angles including themes, genre, and principally language as a crucial element in modern African literature. She argued that:

Linguistically speaking and except for a few Yoruba words, sometimes translated or explained, the language of the play is English, but even this one language, at least in some of its aspects, suggests differences between as well as contacts of cultures. It goes from the colloquial English of the Pilkings, colored by some professional jargon, via Amusa's pidgin, forgotten sometimes (maybe by Soyinka himself?) for a more correct grammar and vocabulary, to Olunde's cultivated English and to the snobbishly relaxed idiom of the colonials at the English club[.....]⁴.

According to Gilbertova the language of the play is closely related to the characters' representation and contacts of cultures. Thus, the typical English used by the Pilkings and the native educated Olunde differs from that associated with Yoruba people known as "Pidgin English" illustrated through Amusa, which is non fluent English mixed with local accents. Such amalgamation made of Soyinka a man deeply affiliated with his Yoruba society in touch with the alien one. In fact, he attempted to depict African identity through proverbs, metaphors, riddles, folktales by using the English language to transmit them to the wider community and to condemn the illegal practices of the colonizers.

William Butler Yeast's *Deirdre* (1907) has received much criticism, and has been studied from different perspectives. Richard Taylor, in his book entitled "*A Reader's Guide to the Plays of W. B. Yeats*" studied the character of Deirdre, as exposed in the play, as an archetypal, complex human being.

He dare not have her searched for the knife, which he suspects she will turn upon herself. The shift from passionate pleading to cold detachment and mastery of the situation completes and perfects her character, elevating her to archetypal significance. Her death and reunion with Noise is a paradigm of Yeast's tragic joy.⁵

Actually, Deirdre was described as a complex human being as illustrated in Richard Taylor's words since she has pretended to accede to Conchubar's desire in order to save the life of Noise, but when she realizes that there is no escape she manages to take her life in order to avoid humiliation of living with her lover's murder. Taylor has also claimed that the play share Yeats's notion of tragic joy. Therefore, Deirdre's death and the murder of Noise were both tragic, but their love triumphed at the end although they are defeated. Her suicide is considered as a victory because the two young lovers gain eternal life and will reunite again as well. To the Musicians of Deirdre "love-longing is but drought / for the things come after death"⁶

Concerning the plot, Richard Taylor made a comparison between Yeats's two respective works *Deirdre* (1907) and *The Shadowy Waters* (1901) by stating that they have two different opposite plots. He adds that, Yeats gets closer from Realism and Symbolic meaning in this play than he had in *The Shadowy Waters*.

Iollan was killed and replaced by Forgael, which strikes us as being right and natural, or at least psychologically satisfying in so far as the mythic pattern coincides with a normal human process. The young do, in fact, ultimately usurp the place and prerogatives of the older generation. It is wrong and unnatural, however, for Conchubar to reverse the order of things and betray Noise in an attempt to unite himself with Deirdre.⁷

In the previous quote, Richard Taylor compare between the young and the old generations. He mentions that in the first one, it was wrong and unnatural for Conchubar to betray the young couple by killing Noise after promising to give his forgiveness. In fact, his only wish is to regain Deirdre and to punish Noise for sealing his future wife. Unlike to the second generation, it strikes that it is right and natural to kill Iollan. Taylor believes that, it is a normal human process contrary to Conchubar's treacherous trap.

2. Issue and working Hypothesis:

From the above literature review, we can notice that *Deirdre* and *Death and King's Horseman* have attracted the attention of different scholars and critics. Therefore, writers such as Richard Taylor have already approached the issue of tragic joy and plot in *Deirdre*, and others focused on language and culture in *Death and Kings Horseman*. In order to reinforce these previous studies, we would shed light on another important perspective which is a comparison and analysis of cultural nationalism in the two plays.

The purpose of this study is to highlight some notions of cultural nationalism adopted by the playwrights. In fact, Nigeria and Ireland have similarly experienced the harsh conditions imposed by the British oppressors, which led intellectuals like William Butler Yeats and Wole Soyinka to renew people's interest in their cultures. Indeed, throughout this piece of research, we will draw a link between the two nationalist authors and their plays.

The issue of Cultural Nationalism is demonstrated in Soyinka's and Yeats's respective plays. We understand that the quest of these playwrights is to denounce the British colonizer and make a revolt through writing. Both playwrights reflect the cruel reality of their societies they believe that via their literary works they will contribute to the preservation and protection of their cultures and identities. Indeed, the question we are asking is: how similar are the methods adopted by the two playwrights to renew people's interest in their nation?

Relying on Benedict Anderson's theory of nationalism presented in *The imagined communities* (1983), we intend to study the issue of cultural nationalism in both *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Deirdre*. Did Soyinka and Yeats succeeded to reach the intended aim? How did the two playwrights presented their two respective cultures, and what did they do to rise cultural nationalism in their respective nations?. These are the questions we will be answering throughout our work

3. Methodological outline

This research paper is undertaken following the IMRAD method. Indeed, our work begins with a general introduction in which we have introduced the theme of our dissertation, followed by the review of the previous literature and criticism on William Butler Yeats' *Dierdre* (1907) and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975). The first section also contains the issue and working hypothesis. The second section of our dissertation includes a synopsis of the theory of nationalism introduced by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined communities* (1983). It also comprises a brief summary of the two plays and a biography of each of the two authors. In the results we display the major findings of the research paper that we are going to discuss in the following parts.

The discussion is divided into two chapters, in the first one we analyze and compare the two literary works relying on the concepts theorized by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983)

The second chapter studies the element of myth and cultural memory in the two works. Actually, both Soyinka and Yeats tried to renew interest in their traditions, rites, and values by engaging rituals, myths, and symbols derived from their ancient legacy. Our endeavor ends with a general conclusion where we recapitulate the major results that have been found throughout the work.

Endnotes:

¹*Nationalism and Ethnicity: Cultural Nationalism*. (Encyclopedia of Race and Racism, Encyclopedia.com), available from URL:

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/nationalism-and-ethnicity-cultural-nationalism>. Accessed on: January 13, 2021.

²Bradley Anthony, *Imagining Ireland in the poems of W.B.Yeats: Nation, Class, and State*, Palgrave MACAMILIAN (United States, 175 Avenue: New York, 2011), 7-8.

³Gibs James Soyinka, wole (Higher and Further Educations Division Macmillan: LTD, 1986), 123.

⁴Gilbertova Iva, *Soyinka Wole, Death and King's Horseman* (Brenénské University, 1995),

⁵Taylor Richard, *A Rider's Guide to The Plays of W.B.Yeats* (United States of America, 1984),55.

⁶Ibid, p52

⁷Ibid.

II. Methods and Materials

1- Method: Synopsis of Benedict Anderson's Theory of Nationalism:

Introduction:

In the *Imagined communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson tried to supply an advanced study of Nationalism. He suggests that nations are powerful cultural constructs with distinct antiquities that emerged in the 18th century in the western hemisphere and rapidly spread in Europe. In fact, they are arresting emotions that mobilize citizens of a particular community; Therefore, Anderson considers a nation as an "imagined political community."¹ It is envisaged as its residents imagine themselves tied to other unseen and unknown individuals with whom they share mutual interests and regard themselves as parts of a shared nation. Such connections are influential in that they motivate them to die and kill for their country.

Anderson's term imagined is related to the idea or the image kept in the mind of citizens who share a sense of belonging to the same area. In fact, it is the feeling of fraternity and comradeship between people who do not know each other but still regard themselves as a family with a shared language and culture that motivates them to die and kill for their nation. Actually, this is what makes a community imagined.

According to Anderson nationalism is the fruit of cultural ideologies; so, languages and religious beliefs are essential ingredients of cultural identities. These two factors are prominent for the imagined communities as they encouraged the growth of patriotism through people's awareness of the importance of preserving their ancestry. Anderson maintains that:

We are all aware of the contingency and ineluctability of our particular genetic heritage, our gender, our life-era, our physical capabilities, our mother tongue, and so forth.²

Therefore, Individuals' cultural belonging is rooted in religion (Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism) and the dialects inherited from their antecedents. These concepts we will try to explain.

Religion:

Benedict Anderson sought to accentuate the significance of religion in supporting national imaging. He asserts that Nationalism is quite similar to religious views; thanks to intuition, religions such as Islam and Christianity existed for thousands of years. The verisimilitude of such entities relies on the fact that they gave sense to their center through the promotion of the sacred language, for instance, Muslim people around the globe meet in Mecca for a common reason; they are not familiar with other languages. Besides, the only thing that matters for them is that they share the same religious beliefs; Consequently, They were communicating through the medium of sacred scripts and signs, every community consider its language as unique, pious, and different from others.³

In the chapter entitled *cultural roots* Anderson presented an authentic symbol of nationalism; which consists of the tombs of the soldiers buried without their names on the monuments as an example of the prominence of the nation over the self. He states that: "No arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of the unknown soldiers"⁴. According to Anderson people did not feel any need to know who is resting inside as the identity of the whole is the only thing that matters.

Admittedly, the before-mentioned symbols are of high importance to religious imagining since they will remain there forever and provide a connection between the dead, the living, and the unborn. From this, we come to notice that a sense of kinship stands between the three realms "It concerns itself with the links between the dead and the yet unborn, the mystery of regeneration"⁵

Sacrifice:

In his work *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson describes the nation as a mental image in the mind of citizens who might ignore the existence of each other. The former has been inherently affiliated thanks to the feeling of brotherhood, citizenship, and mainly the sense of belonging; therefore, feelings alike drove people to put a line to their lives to preserve their ancestry and to show their love and empathy toward their respective nations "the idea of the ultimate sacrifice comes only with an idea of purity, through fatality"⁶ Besides, Anderson has also challenged the assumptions that relate nationalism to discrimination and prejudices as it is rather linked to something more astonishing, like the deep love of the Nation and the willingness to sacrifice for its continuity. Anderson puts forward that "it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love and often profoundly Self-Sacrificing Love."⁷

Benedict Anderson puts forward that the nation is often associated with the idea of the family; the former is often considered as the emblem of profound love and sacrifice. Besides, the author of the *Imagined communities* has also highlighted an important factor that directs people to die for their nation which consists of the wars of independence and revolutions of the colonized people against colonial hostilities; he asserts that "Dying for the revolution also draws its grandeur from the degree to which it is felt to be something fundamentally pure"⁸

Capital of suffering:

Human suffering has long been a subject matter for many theorists who issued different causes of pain as a capital dilemma in people's lives. According to Benedict Anderson, religions have for many years attempted to solve the question or at least explain the long-suffering of humankind. He suggests that:

The extraordinary survival over thousands of years of Buddhism, Christianity or Islam in dozens of different social formations attests to their imaginative response to the overwhelming burden of human suffering — disease, mutilation, grief, age, and death⁹

Indeed, death was an elemental cause of suffering from the very first beginnings of life, people used to put a line to their life to ensure continuity leaving behind their families, thus, they undergo profound pain. Therefore, one prominent cause of suffering during past decades was colonial oppression, the conquest for natural resources, wealth, and to obtain more territories, colonialism conquered many large areas around the world; leaving indigenous people in disaster situations, they were tortured, killed, and were separated from their languages, culture and so forth. Thousands of people were sold as slaves in many colonies of the world as well. Moreover, the colonialists, spread diseases into colonies, native culture was violated, the loss of land, some were forced to change their religion; they destroyed indigenous social, political, and economic structures, repression and exploitation, and much more. Conflicts broke out between many tribes; the colonized people were exploited by working for long hours in the day, and many people were died due to starvation, wars, and revolts; where the only solution is to kill or to be killed.

Through our analysis of Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* (1983), we come to the conclusion that it is the most suitable theory on which we can learn on to study the issue of Cultural Nationalism in *Soyinka's Death and King's Horseman* and Yeats's *Deirdre*.

2- Materials:

2.1. Summary of *Death and the King's Horseman*:

Death and the King's Horseman (1975) is one of Wole Soyinka's distinctive tragedies, a representation of Yoruba cosmology through the introduction of traditional Yoruba culture and beliefs, it portrays the ritual of transition consisting of the King's Horseman that must accompany his dead king to the afterlife to guarantee the continuation of the nation.

Indeed, the play rises with Elesin ready to achieve his responsibility, surrounded by Layaloja mother of the market, and other women who were arranging for the exceptional event. Elesin notices a beautiful girl and decides to marry her; Layaloja accepts the desire of the dying man. Nevertheless, she was afraid this act might deter him from fulfilling his duty. Thus, on one hand, Elesin is preparing himself to die, on the other, there is the British couple (Pilkings) preparing themselves to attend a great ball, wearing the "Ogungun" costume of death, a local sacred dress. Interfered by the coming of Amusa a native policeman who was surprised regarding them disguised by the dress of death, the British couple was offended to apprehend that a suicide ritual is programmed by the native people. Pilking ordered Amusa to arrest the dying man Elesin Oba, at the moment he commences his transitional act, Olunde his eldest son was explaining the necessity of such ritual to Yoruba society. Before he took charge of the responsibility of his father and hangs himself. Later on, Elesin was arrested and Layaloja comes to visit him in the cell to blame him for being weak, she mentions that someone else had sacrificed himself in his place. Elesin recognizes the gravity of his failure after apprehending that Olunde sacrificed himself in his place, so, he strangles himself using the chains.

At the end of the play, Layaloja announces that Elesin's wife is pregnant as a sign of continuity of the nation and the traditions by the process of regeneration, and add “now forget the dead, forget even the living turn your mind only to the unborn”

2.2. Summary of *Deirdre*:

Yeats's *Deirdre* (1907) is a tragic love story of two young lovers whose events took place in a guest-house in the forest. The play begins with a group of three musicians that Yeats use for giving information about the characters, king Conchubar finds a young child named Deirdre in the wood, then he engaged a wise woman to take care of her. As Deirdre attains womanhood, he falls in love with her. King Conchubar planned to marry her but before the marriage-day Noise, a young man climbs and abducts Deirdre from the house where she was sequestered.

Fergus, an old man informs the musician that Deirdre and Noise are to come, telling them that Conchubar overcomes his jealousy and gave his forgiveness for the two lovers after they fled and hid from Conchubar's wrath. Fergus tells Deirdre and Noise that the king will arrive in person to meet with them. Deirdre suspects Conchobar contrary to Noise, who trusts him and Fergus too. Deirdre understands after talking to the first musician that Conchobar intends to kill Noise and to take her as his wife. She took a knife, pretending that she will help Noise, but after she realizes that there is no escape from this situation, she pleads with him to allow her and Noise to go free and that she is the only person to blame, but he was murdered despite Deirdre's begging.

When Deirdre was confronted with the evidence of Noise's death, she pretends to accede to Conchobar's desires, who imagine that Deirdre will surrender to him and that she is tired of opposing him, and then he allows her to gaze on Noise's grave for one last time. As she slips behind the curtain, Deirdre takes her life on Noise's grave.

2.3. The historical context of *Deirdre* (1907) and *Death and King's Horseman* (1975):

William Butler Yeats and Wole Soyinka are among the revivalist authors during two significant literary periods. Yeats wrote *Deirdre* the renowned stories of pre-Christian Ireland, which is a story of a tragic love story of a young beautiful woman who sacrificed her life for her beloved. Correspondingly, Soyinka wrote *Death and King's Horseman*, which is a story of a ritual suicide of the chief Horseman of the Yoruba king. Therefore, in this chapter, we are going to tackle the historical context of both plays. The two works are produced during two important periods in the world of literature. Thus, the historical context is necessary because it is important to mention these periods from the history of post-colonialism as well as the history of Irish people.

The Historical Context of *Death and King's Horseman* (1975):

According to Soyinka, "*Death and the King's Horseman*" is based on historical events in Oyo, Nigeria in 1946. Soyinka's work might have been influenced by **Duro Ladipo's** *Oba Waja*. Duro Ladipo (1931–1978) was one of the best-known Yoruba dramatists. He wrote uniquely in the Yoruba language. When Wole Soyinka wrote *Death and king's horseman*, he was living in exile from Nigeria, lecturing at Churchill College of Cambridge University in England.¹²

Wole Soyinka was arrested for illegally visiting the secessionist territory Biafra in August 1967, and held without charges for two years and two months. He was supposed to have been involved in various plots to help the Biafran cause and overthrow the Federal Military Government and he was accused of being a Biafran spy. Soyinka believed that the government policies toward Biafra were unjust, and he said as much in letters to the editors of national publications. He passed several months in two different prisons in Lagos and Ka Duna where, for almost two years, he was kept in solitary confinement.¹³

While he was in prison, the war continued. Shortly after Soyinka was released from prison in 1969, the war was over and Biafra had been completely wiped out. It was the first modern war between African blacks, the state lost its oil fields—its main source of revenue—and without the funds to import food, an estimated one million of its civilians died as a result of severe malnutrition. A death toll numbering more than one million people. In addition, the Nigerian economy was in ruins; although profits from oil skyrocketed, most of the money was divided up between corrupt Nigerian military rulers and European oil companies, while the average Nigerian was unemployed and underfed. Despite the effort to reconstruct the nation, religious and ethnic tensions are still present in the politics of Nigeria. For many years in Nigeria, the military government was in power. After these experiences, Soyinka directed the University of Ibadan's Theatre Arts Department for a short time, and lived mostly outside Nigeria for five years. He traveled throughout Europe and the United States, teaching, writing, and directing, and he spent two years as an editor in Ghana.¹⁴

In Africa, Rituals are very significant and it is regarded as a transcendental act. Death rituals are planted in the cultural beliefs, traditions, and religion of the Continent. For some traditional African societies, rituals provide direct access to gods and spirits. In Yoruba society, ritual suicide is very worthy of admiration and necessary, someone or something must be sacrificed to avoid the curse and to be blessed. Indeed, Soyinka introduced his play after Nigerian independence to create on Nigerian people national consciousness and the sense of belonging by turning back to their ancestral legacy as a form of rejection of the effect of the colonial imposed values.

Whereas previously he had written about the negative effects of the colonial powers on the colonized, he now addressed weakness and corruption wherever he found it. In

particular, he was concerned with exploring how Africans treated each other unjustly, and how his community had betrayed itself. *Death and the King's Horseman* is a play that reflects this later vision, as Soyinka himself insists in his Author's Note.¹⁵

The historical context of *Deirdre* (1907):

Yeats's "*Deirdre*", was based on events that took place in a guest-house in the forest, in 1907. William Butler Yeats, like many Irish writers, was inspired by Irish folklore and legends. His poetry was strongly influenced by the Irish nationalist Maud Gonne; she remained a powerful figure in his poetry, whom he met in 1889.¹⁶

William Butler Yeats was profoundly implicated in politics in his country in the twentieth. Ireland has rebelled against Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century; some of his poems reflected pessimism about the political situation in Ireland. Additionally, the themes of these poems are related to the changes that occurred in Irish history such as: "The Second Coming", "Easter 1916" and "Sailing to Byzantium".¹⁷

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Ireland saw a strong interest in reviving Ireland's Gaelic literary heritage as well a political nationalism. It was also a period where many Irish literary talents were flourished. Indeed, the Celtic twilight inspired various writers to use Irish folklore, myths, and tales of the peasantry in their works, such as John Millington Synge, William Butler Yeats, and others. Lady Gregory who was considered as the mother of folklore tried to translate the Gaelic oral culture with the aim of conserving the Irish language and folklore ethos before the death of the locals who lived in isolated rural areas.¹⁸

Moreover, William Butler Yeats was a prominent figure of all Irish writers during the literary revival; he was firmly established as the father of the renaissance and was actively contributed to founding the abbey theatre and the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art. He

published the Celtic Twilight who explores ancient folklore from various Sources in the West of Ireland and it was this that gave the revival its nickname.¹⁹

In the spring of 1904, Yeats returned with Deirdre on his mind after a successful lecture tour in America, where he delivered more than sixteen lectures many at leading American universities. Indeed, Yeats succeeded to produce the story of a young woman who chooses to die instead of humiliating her love. “It will be my best play—my Deirdre is a very confident serene person”²⁰, he said. Furthermore, Yeats succeeded in incorporating earlier times into current reality by ritualizing historical, religious and psychological truths.

Endnotes

¹Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections o the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Library of Congress, 1983), 6.

²Ibid, 10.

³Ibid,

⁴Ibid, 09.

⁵Ibid, 11.

⁶Ibid, 144.

⁷Ibid, 143.

⁸Ibid, 144.

⁹Ibid, 10.

¹⁰*William Butler Yeats*. (Encyclopædia Britannica Available from URL: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Butler-Yeats>. Accessed on: June 09, 2020.

¹¹*The Collected Plays of W.B.YEATS* (1934), 111.

¹²“Death and the King’s Horseman”. Encyclopedia.com, retrieved from:

[Death and the King’s Horseman | Encyclopedia.com](#). Accessed on: June 1, 2021.

¹³Benjamin Maiangwa, *Revisiting the Nigeria-Biafra War: the Intangibles of Post-War Reconciliation* (University of Manitoba), available from URL:

[\(PDF\) Revisiting the Nigeria-Biafra War: The Intangibles of Post-War Reconciliation \(researchgate.net\)](#). Accessed on: March 21, 2021

¹⁴“*Death and the King’s Horseman*”. *Encyclopedia.com*, retrieved from:

[Death and the King’s Horseman | Encyclopedia.com](#). Accessed on: June 1, 2021.

¹⁵“*Death and the King’s Horseman*”. *Encyclopedia.com*, retrieved from:

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¹⁶Crosson, *Irish Literature: On Overview* (National University of Ireland, Galway), 724.

¹⁷Amal Riyadh Kitishat, *William Butler Yeats: The Hidden Nationalism* (Journal of Language Teaching and Research, June 2019), available from URL:

[\(PDF\) William Butler Yeats: The Hidden Nationalism \(researchgate.net\)](#). Accessed on: March 21, 2021.

¹⁸Ibid, 485.

¹⁹ Ibid, 486.

²⁰Ronald Schuchard, *The Chanting of Yeats’s Deirdre* (Princeton University Library), available from URL:
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.25290/prinunivlibrchro.68.12.0201.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A29f5cfa0684eb6735b33bd07c48bc9>. Accessed on: February 03, 2021.

III. Results:

Through our analysis of *Death and the Kings Horseman* (1975) and *Deirdre* (1907), we have come to the conclusion that a set of similarities make our investigation achievable. The problematic we have raised in this research paper centers on findings out the cultural icons that the two playwrights employed in the two plays to resuscitate people's cultural consciousness. Indeed, our study takes theoretical bearings from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) which seems to be adequate for the issue of our discussion.

In the first chapter of the discussion, we have found that the two playwrights have relied on Anderson's concepts to shed light on their respective cultural components. In fact, we have focused on comparing the two and noticed that there is a strong affinity between them as they have similarly represented their cultures, beliefs, traditions, and identity. The writing of our research work has allowed us to discover that both Yoruba and Irish people are stick to their religious convictions despite the alien attempts to impose their own beliefs. We have also found out that the love of the nation is fundamental and can push people to put a line to their lives. In addition, we have tackled another concept of Anderson; used by the two authors and discovered that rites celebrations are central in both Yoruba and Irish cultures as they portrayed their ancestral traditions.

Then in the second chapter, we have perceived that both Soyinka and Yeats adopted a similar method in expressing their patriotism through the renewal of ancient tales and legends as they are representations of their memorial past.

To sum up, our modest endeavor enabled us to explore both Yoruba and the Irish cultures through the works of Wole Soyinka and those of William Butler Yeats. In fact, the two playwrights are nationalist figures that expressed their love for their nation as well as the rejection of all forms of oppression.

IV. Discussion

I. Chapter one: Performing Nationalism in *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Deirdre*, a comparison using Anderson's concepts

Introduction:

The present chapter is an analysis of Anderson's ideas and perceptions as manifested in both *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Deirdre*. But before that, it is worth mentioning that Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) was mainly devoted to the study of nation, nationality, and nationalism. The approach has reached the worldwide and become a source of influence to cultural practices and literary productions. Indeed, the theorist has suggested that: "Nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it (.....)"¹

This implies that the construction of a nation is a process based on religious and cultural organizations that come before it. The before mentioned systems involve rituals, traditions, religious practices, and beliefs that vary from one community to another. Indeed, our study is a synthesis of all that has been said before. This chapter embodies Anderson's concepts in both Soyinka's and Yeast's works.

a- Religion:

By introducing the *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson discovers that national and religious imagining is quite similar in that they both animate public consciousness and the sense of belonging to a given community.

In the first place, Yoruba was perceived as a purely religious community with rich and complex ideologies that Wole Soyinka tried to demonstrate in *Death and the King's Horseman*. Remarkably, the Yoruba cosmology consists of large bulk of "deities", and

“Oludumare” has absolute power over them. Indeed, the community split into tribes with distinct deities, “Orishlala” and “Odudua” were charged with the creation of the other minor gods, Ogun among them was the most popular known as the god of iron and the first who succeeded to pass the bridge between the realm of Gods and that of human. Indeed, being shaped by the faith in Gods, divinities, ancestors, and spirituality make the basis of the Yoruba community.

It has been mentioned earlier that Ogun was the first who succeeded to traverse the two realms; indeed, such sacrificial adventure becomes a ritual rooted in the native religious beliefs, a sacred testament that should be maintained and preserved. Basically, Yoruba people citizens must be ready to devote their blood to maintain ancestor's traditions and the mystical continuity of their society. In Yoruba law, the individual has to choose to pursue his egotistical wills and live in dishonor or to put a line to his life when necessary to sustain the affinity with the worshipped. Though, death for the Yoruba people is a passage to another spiritual world and not an end. As Anderson claims “Religious thought also respond to obscure intimation of immortality, generally by transforming fatality into continuity”².

Ultimately, Soyinka has embedded all the previously mentioned beliefs in his masterpiece *Death and the King's Horseman*. In fact, the presence of British colonial power in the play slightly draws readers' attention to the contrasts between the two cultures, yet, Soyinka warns from apprehending the scene as an image of a clash of culture since the real essence of the play is metaphysical as Soyinka admitted:

The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe of the Yoruba mind - the world of the living - the dead and the yet unborn, the numinous passage which links all: Transition [...].³

Actually, *Death and the King's Horseman* deals with the ritual suicide of Elesin Oba, the horseman of the dead king, who must fulfill his duty and accompany his lord to the

world of the ancestors. At the very beginning, Elesin was eager to achieve that duty toward the nation and the ancestors, a point that we can notice in his conversation with the praise-singer and the women particularly when he points out: “My rein is loosened. I am master of my fate”, “I go to keep my friend and master company”⁴, also through reviving the Not-I bird story, foreshadowing his courage as the one and lonely who accepts to die. In Elesin’s words: “I, when that Not-T bird perched Upon my roof, bade him seek his nest again. Safe without care or fear, I unroll My welcome mat for him to see”.⁵

Soyinka has emphasized the rite of the passage as another constituent of the native ideology and the most important phase of the transition. Indeed, the woman prepared the horseman for the ancestral ceremony, believing that he deserves to be honored for his courage and devotion. Another endeavor to imply the native religious beliefs in the piece was principally by referring to several Gods including “Esu”, and the god of divination “Fawomi” when Elesin states : “And take my good kinsman Ifawome his hands were like carvers, strong and rue(...) One day he cast his time smoothed apele across divination broad”.⁶

On the other hand, William Butler Yeats has also reflected the ancient Celtic beliefs in his works, his engagement in the revivalist project motivated him to restore the religious traditions and revive the Celtic mythical past intending to captivate people's interest in their inherited legacy. Hence, national consciousness would be the fruit of such endeavor.

As formerly mentioned, the Nigerian religious community is identified by the omnipresence of Gods, spirituality, and sacrifices equally to the Irish community which believes in the presence of spirits everywhere around them, thus, all that they observe in nature trees; hills; earth; the sun, is worshipped. Having faith that such environmental factors are provided with divine powers, they tended to show their compassion and devotion through giving sacrifices. In so doing they maintain order and obtain benefits from nature. The Celts are very religious people; they have a complex and unique system of thoughts rooted in the

worship of ancestors and spirits. Indeed, their dead buried in a particular manner, and their tombs were assumed as religious places of cult. Conforming to the Yoruba system of thought, the Celts also admit that death is not the final phase of existence; however, it indicates the birth of something more astonishing in the afterlife.

Indeed, William Butler Yeats's attempt to depict an image of a rich ancestral past through the revival of the story of Deirdre. The play is rich in religious details that we can notice through Yeats's introduction of nature as a spiritual element that manifest principally in Deirdre's words: "The hot Istani stone, and the cold stone of fanes that have power to stin over those at enmity to love."⁷

In addition to this, Yeats depicted an image of Deirdre as a beautiful, wise, prophetic woman. It has been argued that "The solemnity of her language serves to activate and intensify that burning nonhuman power living within her, and to transcend the limitation of the mortal person."⁸ Such view illustrated within the play through the first musician description of Deirdre:

And nobody to say if she were human, or of the Gods or anything at all Of who she was and why she was hidden there, but she'd too much beauty for good luck.⁹

The play also portrays the Celtic beliefs in signs of nature, for instance when Deirdre predicted Conchubar's treachery by attesting: The Gods turn clouds and causal accidents into omens.

b. Rituals and celebrations:

Rites and celebrations have long been the mirror that reflects the national identity and religious beliefs.

Generally, the before mentioned national artifacts are attended by divine sacrifices done for the sake of durability and regeneration. Concerning this Anthony D. Smith points out

in his work *Ethno Symbolism and Nationalism* “Some have even claimed that regular blood sacrifice of the nation's youth is essential to the creation and preservation of the nation.”¹⁰ Hence, the way of celebrating and ritualizing differs from one nation to another, it encompasses festivals, commemorations, music, dance and so forth. Obviously, this part will be concerned with rituals and celebrations of the two indigenous cultures manifested in *Deirdre and Death and the King's Horseman*.

Opening by *Death and the king's Horseman* in which Soyinka incorporated Yoruba customs and traditions, for him “Death and the king's Horseman, can be fully realized only through an evocation of music from the abyss of transition”¹¹

In fact, the Yoruba indigenous culture is well-known for its varied rites and ceremonies, including the daily commemorations and the most important are the rite of passage, and the latter is based on the burial custom held to accompany the king to the other world. The former is known among the Yoruba as the “Egungun festival”. According to them The Ogungun mask facilitates communication between the realms of the dead to the world of the living fearing retribution from angered ancestors.¹² That is to say the masquerade serves as a meeting point between the living and their predecessors.

Obviously, Soyinka's play is the most outstanding work holding native beliefs and rituals, indeed, the story descended from real events that took place in Oyu (Yoruba). It centers on the willing suicide of Elesin Oba, who should follow his dead king to the afterlife. In so doing, the former ensures the continuity of the mystical order of the nation. In this essence, Eugene McNulty maintains that:

This duty is seen as fundamental to the continuing well-being of the tribe it is in this sense a ritual function of the law, a purification that ensures communal cohesion.¹²

It is important to mention that the intensity of such duty is advocated all over the conversation held by Elesin, the women, and the Praise-singer particularly in this passage:

Praise-singer: there is only one home to the life of a river- mussel there is only one home to the life of a tortoise; there is only one shell to the soul of man; there is only one world to the spirit of our race. If that world leaves its course and smashes on boulders of the great void, whose world will give us shelter.

Elesin: It did not happen in the time of my forbears, it shall not in mine The heart of the ritual lies on the masquerade, which is a commemoration for the sinking man who must be clothed in the sacred Egungun costume, Soyinka advocates the importance of that dress through Elesin's words

Elesin : Words are cheap We know you for a man of honor Well tell me, is this how a man of honor should be seen? Are these not the same clothes in which I come among you a full half-hour ago.¹⁴

The above mentioned passage reveals that the women mobilized to clothe him appropriately for the great event. Actually, the previous is more than just a dress, it is the basis of the ceremony and the medium through which the individual could join the ancestors, its sanctification is illustrated through the native Amusa, who albeit being Muslim, was shocked seeing the British couple disguised in the costume of death. In addition to this, native music and dance are also present in the play. Music has a crucial role as it adapts to the unfolding of events through what is known as the Yoruba “drums” as portrayed in the following dialogue:

Olunde: Listen! Come outside, You can't hear anything against that music

Jane :What is it?

Olunde: The drums. Can you hear the drums? Listen

Olunde:There it's all over.¹⁵

It is worth mentioning that the central element among those above cited is the sacrifice ritual. In Soyinka's tragedy, Elesin broke the law and asks to marry a beautiful woman. Anxious, Layalaja and the women did not dare refuse the demand of the dying man. Indeed, the rite of passage was interfered by the presence of the British officer. Actually, the

use of rites also displays rejection of the British imposed rules; it is worth pointing out that Through the use of rituals in the play, *Death and the King's Horseman* is designed to demonstrate the possibilities of articulating resistance.”¹⁶

In the Irish context, rituals and festivals differ from the Yoruba rite of passage, albeit sharing the same intention of honoring their worship, the ceremonies being held for the occasion are not the same. Their dead ancestors are worshiped and believed to be everywhere in nature as spirits, yet primitive Celts give sacrifices for them, to maintain dignity, honor, and continuity. Such offerings are usually commemorated in wake nights of drinking, dancing, and singing, in addition to keening and lamentations.

Obviously, Yeats's ambition of restoring ancient myths and rituals was achieved through his remarkable version of *Deirdre*. It is the story of a beautiful woman described by the musicians in the play as nonhuman and from the Gods because of her supernatural beauty. She assumed her duty toward her lover; in so doing she purchased the transition from life to death to join her dead husband. Yeats also referred to the burial ritual when *Deirdre* beseeched *Concaubar* to allow her to do her duty toward her man saying that:

I shall do all you bid me, but not yet, Because I have to do what's customary
We lay the dead out, folding up the hands closing the eyes, and stretching
out of the feet and push a pillow underneath his head, Till all's in order; and
all this I'll do for Naoise, son of Usna.¹⁷

In addition to this, music performed by the chorus was used as a means of determining the course of the rite and a medium to communicate ancient stories about heroes and kings to instore them in the memories of the upcoming generations. for instance, in the tragedy, the musicians communicated the story of *Lugaidh Redstripe* in a form of a song. In fact, even the chess-game has ritualistic roots in Irish homogeneous culture, it demonstrates challenge and resistance.

C- Language in Death and the King's Horseman and Deirdre

Language according to Benedict Anderson is a very important feature that contributes to the construction of an individual's identity; it contributes also to the development of a culture. As well, Languages were used as means of defense by a given nation against foreign influences. Indeed, a feeling of nationalism among oppressed people was reinforced by sharing the same register.

Nigeria was under British occupation for several years as many other African countries who suffered from the harsh conditions of colonialism. The British colonizer tried to enforce the English language over Nigerians and to suppress theirs along with other features of the Nigerian traditional culture. Like many other Nigerian writers, Wole Soyinka wrote in English which he mixed with the Yoruba one in his works by using proverbs, metaphors, myths, and elements of the traditional theatre of his people, intending to transmit his Yoruba identity to the western society. In fact, Soyinka's mixture is a method used by post-colonial writers to reject, annul and undermine the imposed language of the colonizers. Actually, the former tried to convey a message of rejection and resistance through the use of English different from the standard one, they tried to transmit local culture, traditions, and beliefs through a mixed vernacular. The before mentioned method is called "Appropriation" and "Abrogation" in post-colonial literature

Through the characters of Elesin and praise-singer Soyinka tries to show that the English language is a tool which reflects the Yoruba native's cultural identity. The dialogue's language between Elesin and the praise-singer shows a code-mixing with the Yoruba one and the learned English from the colonizer. There was a reference to some Yoruba words such as "Huwu".

Praise-Singer: Elesin o! Elesin Oba! Howu! What tryst is this cockerel goes to keep with such haste that he must leave his tail behind?...

Elesin: when the horse sniffs the stable does he not strain at the bride? The market is the long-suffering of home of my spirit and the women are packing up to go. That Esu-harassed day slipped.¹⁸

In Soyinka's *Death and King's Horseman*, we can notice the presence of different levels of communication. The native Nigerian characters speak in appropriated English mixed with the Yoruba language such as Iyalaja, the mother and the leader of the market speak with English form different from the one English people use; she utilizes Yoruba words as 'Alari', 'Sanyan'. For instance, "the cloth of honor is alari, Sanayan is the band of friendship"¹⁹. Additionally, Elesin Oba, the king's horseman, speaks with the same appropriate English. Even though, he speaks with the colonized language but he doesn't abandon his native one. Throughout the play, it is maintained that Elesin's English is mixed with the Yoruba language. For instance, while speaking with praise-singer he said: "I am sure he called on you, Olohun-iyó. Did you hide in the loft and push out the servant to tell him you were out?"²⁰

Moreover, the British character as Pilkings Simon and his wife Jane speak a standard language. By these characters, Soyinka wanted to show the takeover of the colonizer's language. Simon and Jane come to impose their language in Nigeria, they even don't have any respect for the native's traditions and customs, they consider them as primitives and treat them as savages.

Jane: (after a moment's pause) perhaps I can understand you now. The time we picked for you was not really one for seeing us at our best.

Olunde: Don't think it was just the war. Before that even started I had plenty of time to study your people. I saw nothing, finally, that gave you the right to pass judgment on other peoples and their ways. Nothing at all.²¹

The indigenous cultivated Olund, speak the intellectual English; who is the son of the king's horseman, Elesin, he pursues his medical studies in England. He did not forget his culture even if he was in interaction with the English culture.

William Butler Yeats, like many other Irish writers, has a great interest in reviving the Irish literary heritage, his work incorporates Irish legend and stories. Indeed, his play *Deirdre* was an example of the Irish methodological figure retold in his work that is a tragic love story of a young couple. Yeats uses this play as a nationalist symbol to denounce the British colonizer and to communicate what happened with Irish culture and Ireland at that time. The struggle between Conchubar, Deirdre, and Naoise Yeats sees the fight between Ireland and England. As well, the character of Deirdre and Naoise Yeats represents the ancient Ireland which he idealizes.

In *Deirdre*, Yeats used some archaic expressions such as: ‘thrither’. It is of great importance to go back to our review of literature, Richard Taylor in his book entitled *A Reader’s Guide’s to the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, claims that Yeats use imagery and verse and that Deirdre’s language is poetic and unified. As illustrated with Naoise’s words: “What woman is there that a man can trust but at the moment when he kisses at the first midnight.”²²

d. Sacrifice in *Death and the King’s Horseman and Deirdre*

In Yoruba society, a ritual sacrifice is very important, the fundamental point is that somebody or something must be given out so that others may live and be blessed; they believe that it is something worthy of admiration and respect as well. In Yeats’s *Deirdre*, the Irish heroine commits suicide in order to avoid the humiliation of her love; she prefers to die instead of continuing her life with the murderer of her lover, Naoise.

In Soyinka’s *Death and King’s Horseman*, Elesin has to commit suicide before the burial of the king so as to avoid harm and misfortune that the king’s spirit may carry to his society, and for the sake of making the whole community lives in harmony. In Yoruba society, the community is more important than the individual. Therefore, the practice does not concern only the person that commits it that is to say the horseman of the king, but it is all the

community that is saved if Elesin accomplishes his duty, or punished if he failed. In this context Elesin states that:

I was born to keep it so. A hive Is never known to wander. An anthill Does not desert its roots. We cannot see The still great womb of the world- No man beholds his mother's womb Yet who denies it's there? Coiled To the navel of the world is that Endless cord that links us all To the great origin. If I lose my way The trailing cord will bring me to the roots.²³

Elesin Oba believes that he is proud of being the king's horseman and ready to honor the dead king. Because if the king's horseman broke this religious ritual the king's spirit will bring harm and shame to his society. The ritual killing is a part of the African religious convictions. Indeed, Sacrifice is viewed as a sacred ritual that makes the basis of Yoruba religion, Anderson argues that "it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self -sacrificing love".²⁴

In Yeats' *Deirdre*, the young couple fell into the trap of the high-king of Ulster, Conchubar. Indeed, when Deirdre realizes that he has broken his promise of peace, she pretends to accede to Conchubar's desires in order to save the life of her beloved. Then, she sacrificed her life instead of living with her lover's murderer and to avoid the humiliation of her love.

Conchubar: How do I know that you have not some knife, And go to die upon his body? Deirdre. Have me searched, If you would make so little of your queen .It may be that I have a knife hid here Under my dress. Bid one of these dark slave To search me for it.²⁵

In the previous dialogue, we can notice that Deirdre tried to convince the high-king that actually she has changed and that she has no knife on her, effectively Conchobar imagined that she was tired of opposing him. In fact, she pretends to accede to his desire and she appeals to his vanity, asking him to look upon Naoise's body alone for the last time. Deirdre preferred to sacrifice her life instead of living with regrets, she knew that she will be reunited with Naoise and they will gain eternal life.

In Soyinka's *Death and King's Horseman* and Yeats's *Deirdre*, we can see the manifestation of the theme of 'self-sacrifice' which causes the death of the protagonists of the

two plays one for the sake of love, and another is due to a religious ritual. Yeats sees the conflict between Ireland and England in Deirdre's, Naoise's, and Conchobar's struggle, Conchubar is a man of unwavering actions, he considers Deirdre as a possession and a prize to be owned instead of a person he does not even consider that she might refuse that. He betrays his promise and Naoise was killed which pushes Deirdre to take her life in order to be reunited again with her lover.

In *Death and King's Horseman*, self-sacrifice takes great importance in the Yoruba culture and identity and represents an honorable act. Elesin Oba is connected to life through his desire for material and carnal pleasures. In fact, he rejects the communal Yoruba values by scarifying himself and this because of his selfishness. He even admits that he did love life so much. Iyaloja, the mother of the market, attempted to remember Elesin of the importance of completing the ritual suicide for the good and the durability of the Yoruba society. Elesin, at the moment of self-sacrifice, embodies the collective social and psychic aspirations of the Oyo community; he is a ritual scapegoat who mediates the worlds of the living, the dead, and the unborn.

E- *The capital of suffering in Death and the King's Horseman and Dierdre:*

Soyinka's *Death and King's Horseman* was written on the basis of real events that took place in Nigeria (Oyo) around 1946. The story consists of the ritual suicide of the Horseman of the king Elesin Oba prevented by the British officer Simon Pilkings which attests that the events that occurred during the colonial presence in Nigeria.

Actually, in the author's note Soyinka warns from apprehending the play as a clash of cultures, according to him:

The bane of themes of this genre is that they are no sooner employed creatively than they acquire the facile tag 'Clash of cultures', a prejudicial label which, quite apart from its frequent misapplication, presupposes potential equality in every given situation of the alien culture and the indigenous, on the actual soil of the later.²⁶

Here Soyinka wanted to stress the fact that themes of this genre are always apprehended in the essence of clash of cultures, but in the king's Horseman, he tried to avoid such attitude by promoting the Yoruba culture through injecting rituals and traditions of the native culture. However, one cannot ignore the presence of the alien culture which is trying to dominate. Actually, the colonial factor is present from the very beginning of the play as the events shifted from Elesin's failure to accomplish his duty toward his king and his community to something more complicated as the former was prevented by the British officer, in so doing he caused the deterioration of the Yoruba culture. Indeed, the native people suffered from countless attempts to eliminate their culture through interjecting the western civilization, their culture, and their way of life as they considered the local one primitive and barbaric.

Admittedly, Soyinka has ignored some details in his own interpretation of the play, the thing that becomes plausible throughout the play, mainly through Elesin's words:

My powers deserted me. My charms, mu spells, even my voice lacked strength when I made to summon the powers that would lead me over the last measure of earth into the land of the fleshless. You saw it, Layaloja. You saw me struggle to retrieve my will from the powers of stranger whose shadow fell across the doorway and left me floundering and blundering in a maze I had never before encountered. My senses were numbed when the touch of cold iron come upon my wrists. I could do nothing to myself.²⁷

The passage above proves Elesin's vulnerability after being arrested and chained by Simon Pilkings, who prived him from fulfilling his duty. Certainly, Elesin has suffered from both the brutality of the colonizer and the shame that would destroy his image and that of his community as a whole, thing that was apparent in his conversation with Layaloja, mother of the market.

Elesin:

[.....]. It is when the alien hand pollutes the sources of will When a stranger force of violence shatters the mind's calm resolution, this is when a man is made to commit the awful treachery of relief, commit in his thought the unspeakable blasphemy of seeing the hands of the gods in this alien rupture of his world. I know it was this thought that killed me, sapped my powers and turned me into an infant in the hands of unnamable strangers. [...]

Layaloja:

Explain it how you will, I know it brings you peace of mind. The bush-rat fled his rightful cause, reached the market and set up a lamentation ' please save me !_ are these fitting words to hear from an ancestral mask? ' There is a wild beast at my heels' is not becoming language from hunter.²⁸

Here Layaloja blamed Elesin for not being able to continue the traditions of the ancestors, which caused him inner suffering. She has also revealed that he was not a man of honor. Elesin in turn was trying to justify himself by complaining of the rigid practices of the colonizer.

Besides, The chains that have been mentioned several times throughout the play symbolize the misery undergone by the indigenous people under the paths of the white man, the former served as a tool for Elesin's suicide as he strangled himself after hearing of the death of his eldest son who performed the rite of passage. In fact, Elesin Oba decided to put a line to his life after a long-suffering from shame, subjugation, and the loss of his son, providing a vivid example of the colonized Nigeria. From all this, we come to notice that the colonized identity was the capital of suffering of the Yoruba people.

In Yeats's play, Cathbad the druid prophesied that many men would fight for Deirdre because she will be the most beautiful woman in Ireland; and then he told the high king Conchubar that this unborn child should be killed to preempt disaster, "An excess of anything is deadly, and she will be the cause of so much trouble that she will split the red branch in two"²⁹, he said.

Indeed, Deirdre grew up and became the very beautiful young woman who ever lived. The high king, Conchubar who sent her away to be raised in seclusion, and Naoise, Deirdre's lover both fight over her because she is supposed to be raised as a fitting bride for the king but the young lovers fall in love and Naoise abducts her and they run away just before Conchubar is to marry her.

From these previous lines, we can notice that Conchubar is going to kill Naoise, the traitor who stolen his bride as he asserts: “The traitor who has carried off my wife No longer lives. Come to my house now, Deirdre, For he that called himself your husband’s dead.”³⁰ In fact, he is ready to take back what was already his and to fight for Deirdre to have her in his side for eternity, “I will not make a bargain; I but ask what is already mine.”³¹

The high king Conchobar has a lust for possession he wants to control everything in Deirdre’s life; he does not even consider her opinion, her feeling, and desires. In fact, he wanted to take Deirdre back to his castle and to marry her as he planned before even if she begs him a lot to let them go, he considers her as a possession and a prize to be owned even though he knows that she is married to another man and that they are in love.

From here, we can notice that Yeats wanted to pass a message by denouncing colonialism as well as presenting the possession, the greed of the British Empire over Irish people. In fact, Butler Yeats presented the spirit of ancient Ireland through the character of Deirdre. In addition, we have concluded that the struggle between the young lovers and Conchubar Yeats sees the conflict between Ireland and England.

Furthermore, both Soyinka and Yeats in their respective works aimed to denounce the British colonizer. In *Death and King’s Horseman*, Soyinka uses proverbs that represent the diversity of the Yoruba culture, and some Yoruba words as well. Elesin’s son, Olunde, was very attached to his tradition and community while he returned from England he was shamed by his father then he accomplished the religious ritual and fulfilled his father's duty. This honorable act is done by Olunde to ensure regeneration. The British district officer tried to prevent him from committing this suicide; from here we can notice the British colonizer’s

interference in the affairs of the Yoruba people they wanted to impose their culture and to suppress their traditions and beliefs.

Through Deirdre, Yeats passed a nationalist message which is represented in Conchobar possessive lust and the greed of the British Empire. Deirdre preferred to sacrifice her life and to die with honor instead of acceding to Conchobar's desire and continuing her life with the killer of Naoise. Additionally, Yeats through the character of Deirdre aimed to represent the spirit of an ancient Ireland that was meant to inspire a nationalist revival.

Endnotes

¹Anderson Benedict, *Imagined communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London of congress, 1983), 12.

²Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalis* (London of Congress, 1983), 11.

³*Contemporary African Plays* (Great Britain, 1999), 305.

⁴Ibid, 313.

⁵Ibid, 312.

⁶Ibid,

⁷*The Collected Plays by William Butler Yeats* (New York, 1934), 120.

⁸Bettina L. Knapp, *Yeats Deirdre: Celtic Feminist and Heroine* (Etudes Irlandaise, 1994), 23,

⁹*The collected Plays by William Butler Yeats* (New York, 1934), 113.

¹⁰Smith D. Anthony, *Ethno Symbolism and Nationalism* (London: New York Routelege, 2009), 97.

¹¹*Contemporary African Plays* (Great Britain, 1999), 305.

¹²Karimi Golnar, *Linguistic Imperialism A Study of Language and Yoruba Rituals in Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman* (Université de Montréal, 2015), 67.

¹³McNulty Eugene, *Before the Law(s): Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman and the Passages of "Bare Life"*, (St Patrick's College: Dublin City University, Postcolonial text, vol6, number 03, 2011).

¹⁴ *Contemporary African Plays* (Great Britain, 1999), 309.

¹⁵Ibid, 358.

¹⁶P.K. Sudha, *Soyinka's Vision of Life as Projected in his Major Works* (University of Calicut: Department of English, 2004), 246.

¹⁷*The Collected Plays of William Butler Yeats* (New York, 1934), 131.

¹⁸*Contemporary African Plays* (Great Britain, 1999), 307.

¹⁹Karimi Golnar, *Linguistic Imperialism: A Study of Language and Yoruba Rituals in Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman* (August, 2015).

²⁰*Contemporary African Plays* (Great Britain, 1999), 309.

²¹*Ibid*, 357.

²²*The Collected Plays of William Butler Yeats* (New York, 1934), 122.

²³*Contemporary African Plays* (Great Britain, 1999), 317.

²⁴Anderson Benedict, *Imagined communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London of congress, 1983), 141.

²⁵*The Collected Plays of William Butler Yeats* (New York, 1934), 132.

²⁶*Contemporary African Plays* (Great Britain, 1999), 305.

²⁷*Ibid*, 372.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 374.

²⁸Kamila Selby, *Deirdre, a Tragic Heroine in William Butler Yeats' Deirdre and in J. M. Synge's Deirdre of the Sorrows* (University of Pardubice Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, 2012),

³⁰ *The Collected Plays of William Butler Yeats* (New York, 1934), 131.

³¹*Ibid*, 128.

III: Myths and Cultural Memory:

In his work, *The Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson traced the origins of Nationalism and national-consciousness in addition to the conditions from which it comes into being. For him, the emergence of printing commodities promoted the spread of nationalist thoughts in the world such ideas inspired writers and intellectuals from oppressed nations and initiated cultural awareness among those people who in turn conducted revolutionary movements for the sake of political and cultural independence. Writers like W.B. Yeats and Wole Soyinka have turned their attention to their cultural artifacts striving to restore their traditions, rites, and values by engaging rituals, myths, and symbols derived from their ancient legacy.

Admittedly, the before mentioned items provided a solid background for the national imagining it has been assessed that: “communities can come to understand themselves through these myths that conserve a memory of this origins”¹. That is to say, myths and rituals serve as a mediation of past events and experiences that contribute to creating a collective memory of citizens that perceive themselves as a part of a community. Thus, they stimulate their sense of belonging and promote their national consciousness. They also attempt to shape the present by articulating resistance against cultural and political oppression.

Before discussing the factor of “myth” in the two plays we will provide a brief definition of the term as introduced by Joshua J. Mark in his article published in the ancient history encyclopedia:

Mythology(from the Greek mythos) for study of the people, and Logos for word or speech, (so the spoken story of people) is the study and interpretation of often sacred tales or fables of a cultural known as myths or the collection of such stories which deal with various aspects of the human condition good and evil, the meaning of suffering, human origins, the origin of place-names, animals, cultural values and traditions, the meaning of life and death, the afterlife, and the Gods or a God.²

Accordingly, myths are particular stories or beliefs gathered from ancient events, Gods, or ancestor experiences. Such tales provide a tie between the present and the past so people could envision the existence of different subjects with whom they share the same traditions, culture, and history which creates on them national consciousness and the sense of belonging to that community.

As far as *Death and the King's Horseman is concerned*, Soyinka has presented Nigerian patriotism and contributed to its spread by injecting components of native beliefs in the play, also by reviving the myth of "Ogun" as a form of resistance against oppressors' hostilities that could menace them, indeed, Ogun in the Yoruba mythology is the God of iron and war worshiped by the majority as he was the first to fulfill the legendary transition. Such transition was the source of the power of Yoruba cosmology. According to native people, the world is fragmented into the living the dead and the unborn. Indeed, the three were detached from the realm of the Gods. From all the Yoruba deities, "Ogun" was well known for his power, courage, commitment, and good deeds. According to Yoruba myths, the former was the first who paved the way to the other Gods from the spiritual world to the physical world, it has been maintained that: "Ogun, the first darrer into the abyss confronted the dark forces of the abyss and found a way through it with the exercise of his will"³. i.e Ogun was the first who achieved the long-awaited goal of penetrating the abyss, he challenged all the obstacles that have confronted him and encountered his tragic fate.

Admittedly, this sacrifice becomes a source of influence of the Yoruba religious beliefs and remains rooted in their religious rituals believing that it is the only way to maintain the community in harmony. Actually, the myth of Ogun has long been the core of African writings especially those of Wole Soyinka. In fact, his *Death and the King's Horseman* was the most prominent work based on the ritual sacrifice of Elesin Oba the horseman of the king, who should follow Ogun's paths and sacrifice himself for the well-

being of the nation, However, Elesin did not succeed to fulfill his duty contrary to his eldest son Olunde who cross the transition and sustain the cosmological order of the nation. It is worth noting that Soyinka's appropriation of the myth of Ogun demonstrated their rootedness in their mythical past and the cultural heritage as a form of resistance against the western imposed codes. Soyinka has also displayed the destructive effect of Elesin's failure to maintain the tradition. Certainly, the myth of Ogun played a crucial role in preserving ancient Yoruba descent through animating their cultural memory. Indeed, the former was their source of resistance against alien cultural and imperial forces.

In the case of Ireland, Irish scholars and intellectuals revived people's awareness and drove their attention to their motherland by introducing folk-tales, myths, and traditional legends. As a member of the revivalist movement, W.B. Yeats promoted the development of nationalism, he attempted to renew ancient Gaelic heritage through engaging early tales of peasants, kings, and heroes. It has been argued that “Yeats wanted to recreate a distinctively Irish literatue aiming to write about Ireland for Irish audience ”.⁴

Obviously, *Deirdre* is the most outstanding example of Yeats's attempt to maintain Irish citizen's relations with their legacy and unite them around their ancestral beliefs. Bettina L.Knapp asserts that:

In composing *Deirdre* (1907), Yeats turned toward a mythical past - - a period in Celtic culture filled with fabulous and heroic happenings. By reactualizing for his audience grat historical, philosophical, religious, and psychological truths, Yeats succeeded in integrating bygone days into a present reality.⁵

Deirdre originated in medieval Celtic mythology or what is known as the “Ulster cycle”, it is worth noting that the former is a group of myths and legends gathered from one of the Irish ancient sagas, in the reign of king’s Conchubar. It inspired many playwrights, who have introduced distinctive interpretations of the story, indeed, W.B. Yeats's version

turns around a beautiful woman who was born during king's Conchaubar's reign of Ulster, before her natality a foreteller from the royal court warned them of the coming of a girl whose beauty would initiate great wars. Intending to marry her when she gets into adulthood, Conchubar sent her to be raised by an old woman far away from the court. However, Deirdre fell in love with the nephew of Conchubar and escape with him and his two brothers. In Yeats's version, the story initiates with a chorus of musicians who introduced the story of Deirdre by providing details that are omitted from the play, as it begins from the arrival of the couple to the guest-house after seven years of exile, they were invited by the king under a false promise of reconciliation, indeed, Yeats presented Deirdre as a wise and strong woman who didn't trust king's call for peace and knew through the other women that he was preparing for his marriage with her. Unlike the original tale where Naoise was killed and Deirdre lives in the King's for many years, then he gave her to the killer of Naoise which lead her to commits suicide, in Yeats's one the protagonist immediately killed herself after her lover's death.

Moreover, Yeats sought to inject another mythological legend in the play which is the story of Lugaidh Redstripe and his queen as a comparison to that of Deirdre and Naoise, their conformity was illustrated when they found themselves in the same situation around a chess-table, waiting for their death after discovering Conchubar's treason. Chess reminds them of the fate of the couple who have been beheaded at the same place. Yeats also referred to another Celtic myth “ The wooing of Edain” as an attempt to provide a great work based on ancient mythologies in order to raise people's consciousness and perseverance to protect their cultural ancestry. Indeed, the story is about a stranger who arrived at king Eochaid's court. He faced the ruler around a chess-game and intentionally missed each round until his adverse has invited him to fix the award. Though Midir asked for the king's wife as he was wooed by her,

believing that he will certainly lose the former accepted, however, the prince has gained the round and left with Edain to another word.

Actually, Yeats intended to reintroduce the faded historical and cultural assumptions that disappeared through time, in so doing he cultivated citizen's attachment to their nation-state. Richard Taylor in *The Readers guide to the plays of W.B.Yeat's* asserts that: "The legend of Deirdre and Naoise is a very central one in Celtic mythology, it is a tragic love story of both cultural and individual significance".⁶

Basically, Soyinka and Yeasts' introduction of myths was fruitful in their endeavor to resuscitate their nation's basic components, so; the role of ancient tragedies and myths in stimulating people's interest in their traditions is undeniable. They finally become aware of the importance of their national artifacts, which arose in them the sense of belonging and the willingness to die for their communion. After all, myths and Nationalism are interrelated.

Endnotes

¹Vichi Roberto, *Mythology and Memory* (2015).

²Mark J Joshua, *Mythology* (Ancient History Encyclopedia: October 31, 2018), available from URL: <https://www.Ancient.Eu/mythology/>. Accessed on; March 26, 2021.

³P.K. Sudha, *Soyinka's Version of Life as Projected in his Major Works* (University of Calicut: Department of English, 2004), 254.

⁴VeldemanMarie-Christine, *Cultural Nationalism in the Late Nineteenth -Century Ireland, a Step Towards Political Separatism?* (2009), 147

⁵Bettina L. Knapp, *Yeats Deirdre: Celtic Feminist and Heroine* (Etudes Irlandaise, 1994), 23,

⁶Taylor Richard, *A Readers Guide to the Plays of W.B. Yeats* (St. Martin's press, Inc, 175 Avenue: New York, 1935), 53.

General Conclusion:

Cultural Nationalism is regarded as a national movement led by a given nation to maintain its cultural heritage and to establish and ensure a self-governing state. The Irish and African people lived under the oppression of the British colonial rule for many several years. These colonized people were marginalized from their cultural identity, and many injustices were exerted over them. Both playwrights Wole Soyinka and William Butler Yeats succeeded in defending their identities and reviving their language during these two significant literary periods. Indeed, our main interest was to show how these two respective playwrights employed the theme of Cultural Nationalism in both works as a weapon for Soyinka and Yeats to pass the message that their cultural identities are valuable and humble.

Actually, we have divided our thesis into three major parts, the first one was mainly a general introduction of the theme we have selected and an overview of the previous critics, the second one was methods and materials section in which we have introduced our theory and the materials we have used in our investigation. Then the third part or the discussion section was divided into two chapters, in the first one we have tried to demonstrate the similar ways which the two authors employed to denounce the brutality of British colonialism in the two respective plays. In fact, both Soyinka and Yeats experienced in a quite similar way the British oppression both cultures were seen as primitive and uncivilized one, as well as the Irish and African people, were marginalized in the way that their language and identities were not identified and recognized. In the next phase of our research, we have demonstrated that both Soyinka and Yeats shared many cultural aspects in their two works. In the first position, we have noticed that at the level of religion both playwrights referred to religion. Indeed, Soyinka in *Death and King's Horseman* portrays the religious faith and beliefs of Yoruba society; in Yeats's work also we can notice that the play is very rich in religious details that

are manifested in Deirdre's words. Additionally, we have noticed that the two authors used rituals and celebrations in both works these celebrations are a vehicle of preserving ancestral beliefs and ways of life. Concerning the second chapter entitled Myths and Cultural Memory, we have shown how Soyinka contributed and introduced ancient myths in their respective works. Concerning language, both playwrights Yeats and Soyinka use their native dialects in the two works by mixing their language with that of the British colonizer to reaffirm and impose their identities, to show that their cultures are precious and respectful as well. In addition, at the level of self-sacrifice love, we have tried to show the way the two authors employed the theme of self-sacrifice in their work. In fact, sacrifice takes great importance in Yoruba culture because it represents an honorable act. Deirdre on the other side sacrifices her life instead of living with her husband's murderer. Indeed, the sacrifice was made even though the British district officer tried to prevent Elesin Oba to commit this sacrifice and Deirdre succeeded to suicide too. The last concluding point of our research is the capital of suffering in which we have demonstrated how the two playwrights denounced British colonialism through the use of characters in the two plays. The scope of our research, finally, does not enable us to treat all the issues that gather both William Butler Yeats's Deirdre and Wole Soyinka's Deah and King's Horseman,

Therefore, we invite other students to discuss these two literary works from a different perspective, we may suggest analyzing the two plays the two literary works from a postcolonial perspective. We hope we helped the readers to a better understanding of the concept of cultural nationalism in the two respective works, used by these playwrights to reaffirm and protect their cultural identities.

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