

## THE HEROIC TRADITION AND NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN WOLE SOYINKA'S OGUN ABIBIMAN

ANYANG-AGBOR SARAH

### ABSTRACT

*Twentieth century African authors possess a growing consciousness of cultural identity, and are turning to explore their own oral traditions, to inform non Africans about their cultures. Part of these exploration of oral tradition is reflected in the focus on the heroic past leading to the publication of heroic narratives and epics. These epics and heroic narratives are imaginative and cultural document that foreground supernatural human beings.*

*In this paper I intend to explore the Yoruba heroic tradition in Wole Soyinka's Ogun Abibiman. Ogun Abibiman is an example of heroic epic. Our premise here is that Soyinka thematic preoccupation in this epic is brought out through the narrative structure of the text. Secondly, African mythology, legend and oral tradition are pervasive in this epic poetry and this authenticates the history of the people. Soyinka in Ogun Abibiman has immersed himself in the cultural and mythological realities of his African society. He uses the traditional art of storytelling which makes him historically and culturally located in the center of his creativity.*

### INTRODUCTION

Heroic epics are imaginative narratives and cultural documentations. Examples are The Ozidi Saga by J.P. Clark, Sunjata: Three Mandinka Versions by Gordon Innes and Ogun Abibiman by Wole Soyinka. These epics or heroic narratives among the Africans to engender a substantial pride and sense of honour and dignity derived from the deeds of one's forebears, but these deeds are at the same time the yardstick against which the individual must measure his or herself. Wikinfo, an internet encyclopedia elucidates that:

The epic is a broadly defined **genre** of poetry, which retells in a continuous narrative the life and works of a heroic person or group of heroic persons either historical or mythical.

Moreover, Isidore Okpewho in his article entitled "African Mythology and Africa's Political Impasse" informs:

One of the most exciting areas in the growth of African oral literary study within the last two decades has been the specialized interest in the continent's heroic epics: stories about great warriors, empire builders, and culture heroes like Sunjata among the Mandinka of Mali, Lianja among the Nkundo of Zaire, Shaka among the Zulu of South Africa,

Ozidi among the Ijo of Nigeria's delta country, and many others ( )

Ogun Abibimani is an example of heroic epic poetry. Ogun Abibimani as Wole Soyinka explains is a revolutionary *joie de vivre*: a celebration of human responsibility and agency (Soyinka, *Six Plays*, xviii). It celebrates President Samora Machel's decision to end a fruitless process of dialogue with the white minority regime in former Rhodesia –present Zimbabwe and his declaration of war against that atrocity. In a brief author's note Soyinka emphasizes: March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1976. Samora Machel, Leader of the People of Mozambique, announced to the world a symbolic decision which primed the black fuse on Southern Africa: the Mozambique nation has placed itself in a state of war against white-ruled Rhodesia. The poet emphasizes on the inconsistency in human decisions a fact witnessed by Machel's historic reversal: the signing of a non-aggression pact a few years after the declaration (*Six Plays*, xxi, n2). Soyinka sees Machel's declaration as the beginning of the end of apartheid South Africa

Moreover, I am of the opinion that only the broad and demonstrably universal characteristic of epic poetry can be helpful as a basis of general definition. Hence, I may say that an oral epic is basically a relatively long poem with legendary and heroic features. M.H. Abrams (1993) defines two general types of epics, based on Western models:

- (a) "Traditional epics" are written versions of what were originally oral poems or songs about cultural heroes developed in a warlike age: e.g. Iliad and Odyssey of ancient Greece, Beowulf of medieval England;
- (b) "Literary epics," like John Milton's Paradise Lost (17<sup>th</sup> century England) are composed in writing and meant to be read (rather than performed) to imitate "traditional epics."

Isidore Okpewho (1979) offers an African definition:

An epic is fundamentally a tale about the fantastic deeds of a man or men endowed with something more than human might and operating in something larger than the normal human context ... It is usually narrated or performed to the background of music by an unlettered singer working alone or with some assistance from a group of accompanists (34).

Okpewho's definition illustrates better the African conception of the term epic. This definition emphasizes the fact that the epic hero is a human being and gives an insight into the intrinsic poetic features of the epic genre. It is on the premise of Okpewho's definition that I will base my argument that there are distinctive structural and stylistic characteristics to be found in African heroic tradition- with the example of *Ogun Abibimani*.

The heroic narrative or epic poem is normally narrated or performed to the back-ground of music by an "unlettered singer working alone or with some assistance from a group of accompanists" (Okpewho, 1979:34). Isidore Okpewho in *The Epic in Africa* emphasizes on "personality" of the hero. This personality in Okpewho's discussion of the image of the epic hero includes his "outstanding good looks" (94) and physical presence or "physical force," which can "frequently" be "matched by strength of mind" (95). Ogun and Shaka are distinguished with these characteristics.

The heroic concept is one way in which the heroic tradition has been expressed in Africa. J.P. Clark (1978) in his definition of the hero emphasizes that:

A hero is a man of super-human  
qualities favoured by the gods, a  
demi-god. He is an illustrious warrior  
... a man admired for achievements  
and noble qualities (2).

One concept that remains constant, in the definition is that of the quest for excellence. Okpewho affirms that the foremost value that the heroic image aims to emphasize is excellence or the quest for it. He further buttresses that

by excellence is meant everything  
that makes a man more than just an  
inconsequential little being, ... (1979:120).

Thus, the hero is representative of the community and the hero's action is centered on events. Moreover the events are more significant than the individual as instrument of events. Mazizi Kunene (1980) in his review of Okpewho's *The Epic in Africa* asserts that the African epic often begins from the assumption that individuals in society inherit a set of fundamental social principles or laws that when violated cause the society to degenerate until a hero comes along to reassert them. He advances that "this idea is different from the western approach in which the hero of the epic initiates the Golden Age that ultimately leads to a state of perfection (civilization)"(555).

It is important to note that heroism qualifies the exploit of heroes who use their strength utterly for their own selfish gratification and also qualifies the exploits of heroes who use their strength to defend the interest of others, especially in their communities. Okpewho depicts this duality in the nature of the hero "The hero is frequently formidable, self-centered and disruptive; but he also ... feels love and concern for his fellows" (77). In essence, the hero is also human and not a perfect being. Even if he is a god or a demi-god he is not perfect. This could be seen in Soyinka's *Ogun Abibiman*, where we realize that the fraternity between Ogun and Shaka is that between two imperfects:

If man cannot, what god dare  
claim perfection? (*Ogun Abibiman* : 14)

Significantly, the hero must be punished if he violates the requirements of reasonable revenge because the community remains all-powerful. Shaka was assassinated, and, Ogun disappeared underground. Thus, the African epic seeks to teach some of the norms, morals, culture and highest value of society and one of these involves the sacred idea of balance.

An investigation of heroic tradition in Africa shows that the heroes are from noble or ruling houses of their communities. Ogun is said to be the “first son of Oduduwa, the founding father of the Yoruba race” (Afam Ebeogu 1980:84).

Moreover, the epic is always based on myth, legend, or history. Ogun Abibiman, The Ozidi Saga and Sunjata are deeply embedded in an ethnological, historical context, the understanding of which is crucial to their exegesis. Ogun in Ogun Abibiman is a mythic figure while Chaka is a historical legend. There are varied versions of the myth of Ogun. However, Afam Ebeogu (1980) asserts that all the versions agree that Ogun was the first son of Oduduwa, the founding father of the Yoruba race. His story was that of wild exploits. Ebeogu says:

He was a highly tempered man  
jovial and kind; a protector  
of the weaker elements amongst  
his kinsmen (84).

Another version of the myth of Ogun sees him as one of the original primordial divinities with Olodumare before the earth was created. E.A. Biakolo (1987) writes that “after the creation of earth, he set out with other divinities to possess the earth and take up their allotted offices” (109).

Another feature in the heroic concept is the belief in the miraculous birth of heroes. The elements of supernatural powers is predominant in the African heroic tradition. Okpewho affirms that supernatural intervention occurs in two ways in heroic works. Firstly, the hero may appeal to powers beyond him, gods or goddesses, to come to his aid when he is faced with supernatural powers he cannot contend with all by himself. This supernatural intervention may be through the use of sorcery and witchcraft in the epics – The Ozidi Saga (Oream and Ozidi) and Sunjata. In the second case, it is the hero himself who wields these powers, which does not necessarily make the epic hero a Shaman and does not make him any less heroic – Ogun in Ogun Abibiman is a mythic god. B. Malinowski (1954) asserts that the supernatural element is employed simply “to ritualize” his optimism (90).

The use of magic makes the hero more heroic. G.S. Kirk (1970) explains that magic usage is

a special case of ingenuity, and  
exploits ... a feeling of satisfaction  
at the neatness and finality with which  
an awkward situation is resolved (38).

The essential mark of the heroic personality in many an African epic is its reliance on supernatural resources. Dan Ben Amos says:

The peoples of Africa, it has turned  
out do possess more than just traces  
of heroic poetry; rather, thriving  
epic traditions span large parts of  
the continent, and more are being  
discovered annually (1988:278).

Significantly the study of epic performances in Africa is an exploration into the cultural variables of maximal narration, searching the outer limits of narrative possibilities that are culturally acceptable.

The historical background of Ogun Abibiman demonstrate that the tradition also carries and accurate historical narrative. The words “Ogun Abibiman” are gotten from Yoruba and Akan languages respectively. Ogun is “He who goes first” (Ogun Abibiman: 23) while Abibiman means “the Black Nation, the land of the Black peoples; ... that which pertains to the affairs of black people” (Ogun Abibiman: 23). The Yorubas commonly refer to Ogun as the god of Iron. Ogun ranks high is status among the divinities of Yoruba land. He is universally acknowledged in the indigenous belief of the Yoruba as a most indispensable divinity in as much as all iron and steel belong to him. As the god of iron, he is the guardian divinity of all the professions that are connected with iron, such as black-smithing, hunting, farming, driving, mechanical engineering, etc. As such, everybody in any of these professions owe allegiance and tribute to him. Accordingly Bolaji Idowu emphasizes that:

All who make use of these tools  
... depend upon him ... especially  
before undertaking any new work like  
the opening of a smithy or a hunting  
expedition; or thanksgiving after an  
escape from such disaster as a motor  
or gun accident (1962:87).

Basically, the question arises. What is the origin of this god? There are two traditions of origin in Ogun myth. According to oral tradition he was a primordial divinity and a hunter. Before the earth was founded he used to descend by a spider’s thread upon the primordial marshy waste to hunt. But when the earth was founded he and a number of divinities set out to possess the earth. They got to a place of “no-road” and of all the divinities, Ogun was the only god who possessed the right implement to pave a way and he wrought a promise that the other divinities will recompense him with a worthy reward when the task had been accomplished. Thus, when they arrived at the “headquarters” – Ile Ife, they rewarded Ogun with the crown title “Osin-Imale” – “Chief among the divinities” (Bolaji Idowu 1962).

The second version speaks of him as a deified ancestor. This second version speaks of him as a son of Oduduwa, the founding father of the Yoruba people. He was a blacksmith; hunter and warrior who

helped his father fight against his enemies. In consequence he was made king over Ire in Ekitiland, starting thereby a dynasty and acquiring the appellation of "Ogun-Onire" that is, "Ogun, Lord of Ire." E.A. Biakolo (1987) observes that "a common denominator in the two versions is the connection between the towns of Ile-Ife and Ire in Ogun's terrestrial activities" (107). Awolalu Omasade (1979) further states that:

Even detractors of Ire such as Ilesa  
and Ondo who say disparagingly that  
Ire was not the home of Ogun but a  
place at which he once called to  
drink palm-wine only confirm this  
spatial connection between towns.

We discover also that the Ife has a varied version. Some versions say that Ogun went on a hunting expedition and did not return or that he simply vanished from the face of the earth. The Ire on the other hand, traces Ogun's origins to Ife and beyond (heaven), in order to establish a link with the spiritual capital of Yoruba land Ife.

Shaka (Chaka), on the other hand, is a historical figure in history. He was the great Zulu emperor, genius of a warrior. His life story has been created anew each generation, and his image has changed over the years. For many whites he represents barbarism: for many blacks both within and outside South Africa; he has become a symbol of power.

Shaka's biography closely resembles that of other African leaders such as Sundiata (Sunjata) and of biblical heroes such as Joseph and Moses. Different versions of his life history describe the circumstances of his conception differently. Some versions state that his parents were not yet married; in others they were too closely related. Yet others describe the sexual relationship as immoral, because it occurred before his father was circumcised. History has it that cast out by his father; Shaka spent his childhood with his mother in search of a new home. After years of travel they reached Mthetwa, where Shaka joined the army and excelled as a warrior. Daphna Golan points out that:

Later (1816 or 1818) he went back  
to Zululand, fought his half brother  
who by then had become king and took  
the role of leader. Shaka ruled the  
kingdom in the period of its greatest  
imperial expansion and is known as an  
innovator in the fields of arms and  
military techniques (1990:93).

Consequently in his time and on his society his impact was shattering. Thus Ayi Kwei Armah (1992) says of him:

He was a man of tremendous multivalent  
energies, mental and physical, creative  
as well as destructive (10).

The methods by which he achieved this power were bloody and ruthless. Great numbers of people died either because they stood in his path or because their death was necessary for the achievement of his aims. Jan Vansina could not help but submit that

Many writers have explained the bloody wars which the Zulu fought under his rule as the outcome of his eccentric character (1985:89).

Shaka was killed by persons close to him among who was his brother Dingane, who succeeded him as the ruler of the Zulu kingdom (evident in Mofolo's Chaka). From the historical facts available to us, we must agree with Daphna Golan that while Shaka's early life was recorded only in the oral tradition; his death was already part of 'history'. Thus, his death, on a known date and in a known place was an historical event, and comes from different non-mythical external sources (1990:97).

Therefore, we can argue that Shaka's life story not only reflects the group's conception of state formation, but also mediates varying notions of the past. In Zulu society of the 1930s, Shaka became a symbol of Zulu power and accordingly, the anniversary of his death became a focus for political gatherings. Consequently, I submit that in oral traditions, his life story, and especially his early biography are maintained to record the symbolic and nomadic heritage of the past.

Significantly, Shaka was assassinated; while dying he was said to have uttered some meaningful words. In an early version, Flynn stated that Shaka had time only to ask; "What is the matter, children of my father?" (1888:97). Another version according to Ritter is that Shaka remarked before his death:

... What have I done, Dingane? ...  
Mhlangana, that you should kill me  
thus? You think you will rule this  
country, but already I see the  
'swallows' coming. You will not  
rule it while I am dead (1955:308-9)

I may to an extent assert that his dying words could be said to be a prophecy of what South Africans suffered in the hands of apartheid. Some scholars like J.K. Ngubane argue that as the most important leader of the century, Shaka's death dealt a most regrettable blow to African nationalism (1976:127-164). Daphna Golan further stresses that "not merely a despicable act of jealousy, the assassination was politically mistaken, for it stopped the progress of nationalism and let to the political and economic suppression of blacks by whites in South Africa" (1991:120).

Thus, in this epic celebration, two characters merge into one, as it were. One is Ogun, a god, the other Shaka, a human legend. No wonder Afam Ebeogu (1980) insists that "the mythical and the historical are invoked to participate in the urgent task of salvaging humanity in a particular part of the African continent" (93). Ogun is invoked to aid

Shaka in restoring the birthright of the Blackman in South Africa. This is the central idea of the chorus that is seen intermittently in the poem:

Rogbodiyan! Rogbodiyan	Turmoil on Turmoil
Ogun re le e Shaka	Ogun treads the earth of Shaka
Rogbodiyan	Turmoil on the loose
Ogun gbo woo Shaka	Ogun shakes the hand of Shaka
O di rogbodyian	All is in turmoil

(Ogun Abibiman : 9)

Therefore, we must consent that the biographies of Ogun and Shaka, earlier mentioned display similarities which, in themselves point to the possibility that Soyinka fused Shaka into Ogun so the latter could retrieve his curse. Moreover, Soyinka's fusion pivots to the central idea of his text, Ogun is invoked to aid Shaka in restoring the birthright of every Blackman. If as the poem says, "Shaka was all men", the gods action was to arouse self evaluation and evaluation of the past in all 'abibiman' so as to initiate freedom in all black peoples.

The declaration of war on South Africa by the former Mozambiquan leader Samora Machel provided the occasion for the writing of this long poem. Samora Machel, leader of the people of Mozambique, on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1976, announced to the world a symbolic decision which primed the black fuse on Southern Africa: the Mozambique nation had placed itself in a state of war against white-ruled Rhodesia. According to the preface of the poem (1976) Wole Soyinka writes that "the act of Samora Michel being more profoundly self-evident as the definitive probe towards an ultimate goal, a summation of the continent's liberation struggle against the bastion of inhumanity – apartheid South Africa". Hence, the poem celebrates the African will to be liberated.

In addition to the above, Soyinka partially identifies with the daring initiative of Machel and links his heroic decisiveness to the exploits of the Zulu king Shaka. He also finds a parallel to Shaka's heroism in Ogun's quest for justice. Beyond all doubt, this epic poem carries an accurate historical narrative.

### **THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF OGUN ABIBIMAN**

Okpewho, unlike Mbele, is more concerned with the formal aspects of epic. M. Mulokozi (1983) stresses that "basing his analysis on the Kambili and Mwindo epics, Okpewho tries to identify the structural artistic, and theatrical features of these epics" (288). Moreover, Okpewho compares these features to the formal characteristics of other epics. Among the formal features of the African epic mentioned by Okpewho are formulae, epithets, topoi, association, repetition, call and response, and digression.

Soyinka's epic poem has no rhyme, and of course, a good deal of modern poetry lacks this particular feature too. Thus, the poem can be linked with free verse in the modern sense. Ogun Abibiman is divided into three sections: "Induction", "Retrospect for Marchers: Shaka!" and "Sigidi". The element of structure is present in the division of the poem

into three sections and stanzas even though the stanzas do not have equal lines. One therefore reads each stanza as equivalent to the next. Reading through the text, one discovers that “Induction” is devoted to the activities of Ogun. “Retrospect for Marchers: Shaka!” to a soliloquy of Shaka and “Sigidi” again to Ogun, but now Ogun redefined as a unity of Ogun-Shaka.

The first section “Induction” begins with the upheaval in the land initiated by the Southward movement of a gathering of warriors:

No longer are the forests green, ...  
The boughs are broken, an earthquake  
... A crop of arms dethrones the ancient.  
They who violate the old preserves  
built tracks of steel ... borne  
Southward in His wake, to Veld and Cape  
For the hour of hour in-gathering (Ogun: 1-2).

In the midst of this turbulence is Ogun busy at the newly rekindled forge hammering new weapons of war, thus, “Ogun in vow of silence till the task is done, kindles the forge” (Ogun: 2). One may argue that Ogun’s “Vow of Silence” is a signal consecration of his vow to seek the freedom of all “Abibiman” (The Black World) as well as a contrast to the futile peaceful dialogues of the past among politicians.

In this first section one is informed of Ogun’s bloodthirstiness. Femi Fatoba (1971) states that “Ogun drinks more blood than any other Yoruba gods” (106). Ogun cannot be called a murderer because he had a cause – to “right a wrong” – and in the process “emptied reservoirs of blood in heaven”. He is the sacrificer, avenger and savior.

Significantly the picture presented in this section is that of decay, stagnancy:

Rust and silence fill the thatch  
Of Ogun’s farmstead. In corners of neglect  
Chods of dried earth, sweatrags, kernels  
A seed-yam futile springing ...  
A planting season lost (Ogun: 3).

Ogun seeing things as they are “goes to let ambrosia from profaning gods, to stir that claimed divinity of mind and limb whose prostrate planet is Abibiman” (5). Therefore, there will be rejuvenation to all abibiman (Blackman). Thus, the qualities and essence of Ogun: that of black-smith and warrior – is portrayed by Soyinka through the thematic narrative structure. The poet inculcates the creative qualities of the mythical or primordial god in the setting of the present.

In section II, Shaka is evoked. He resumes a human presence and speaks to the mustered black forces. We see a new Shaka. The first novelty is first indicated in the reference to Noliwe his first and only love, a character in Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka* whom he had to kill in order to give her blood to Isanusi, to make him powerful. Thus he says, “Lost in dreams of Noliwe ... whose naming was Breeze-that-cools Bayetes blood (9-10) is “roused” (9) by Ogun’s tread.

Shaka plunges into memories of his past – his wars and conquests, his assassination and his curse on his assassins while dying. Thus he says:

Memories of other times beset  
me yet (Ogun: 11).

There is the sense of regret, sadness and loss in his soliloquy. He remembers:

Oh brother spirit,  
Did my dying words raise echoes  
in your hills?  
When kinsmen matched broad blades  
With Shaka's shoulder? (Ogun:11).

This rhetorical question evokes a sense of pity in the reader's mind. Moreover, the moving sense of loss and regret as he continues to grow and become more effective as he exclaims:

My task: Oh that the will  
Should far outrace  
Swords and sinews, human stress  
and loyalties (Ogun:12).

Moreover, one conceives the hopelessness of man's plight to control some of the situations that come his way. Sometimes man's will is suffocated by man's desire and rashness. The animal imagery and proverb

The termite is no match  
For the black soldier ant,  
Yet termites gnawed  
The houseposts of our kraals (Ogun:12).

drives home this weakness of human nature and contributes to the irony of human life.

Furthermore, there is a perceptive, dramatic presentation of the mood and character of Shaka. He reflects on the ugly consequences of his death and urges restitution of his pride, on the warriors. His voice reaches out crying:

Reclaim my seeds, restore my manhood  
... The manhood of a founder king  
... Shaka were also man,  
A leader yes, next to the imperfect god –  
Would I be Shaka if I asked for less? –  
... What I did  
Was Shaka, but Shaka was not always I ...  
(Ogun:13-15).

There is a feeling of remorse, I must mention. his vile temper causes him to set creative qualities beside the destructive. Hence:

Yet Shaka, king and general,  
Fought battles, invented rare techniques,

created order from chaos, coloured  
the sight of men ... Raised the city  
of man in the common wed ... (Ogun:15).

Thus, Biakolo argues that Soyinka presents a moral gap in the personality of Shaka. On the one hand is his creative ambition and vision, which is to unify the disparate clans and tribes into one nation; (amaZulu) while on the other hand, is the destructiveness of the wars of conquests and the slaughter of his own people in sickness (1987:186).

In section III, the poet repossesses the account himself. This can be seen in his use of the first person pronoun "I". Thus,

I name him – Usurer for all ...  
∴ Priest of Restitutions (Ogun:19-20).

and he also says "the poet now is given/tongue to celebrate" (20). "Sigidi" puts the world on the brink of "Mfekane" (Sigidi is Shaka's war cry, the song of the spear blade as it bites; I have eaten!" While "Mfekane" means a crushing:total war" (Ogun:24). The war is not to be fought for selfish reasons and vain glories – but must have as its aim justice and objectivity.

The imagery of labour and birth signifies a new life, regeneration, optimism and restitution:

Remember too, the awesome beauty  
at the door of birth.  
Labour is holy – behold our midwives ...  
Ministering to history, delivering the missing  
Chapter of the text (Ogun:21).

Thus, the imagery of labour symbolises pain and prelude to a new life, a new beginning for all "abibiman". As such there is a need for celebration:

Now is the hour of song, ...  
now, is true need  
Of song and lyric, of festal gards,  
Libations, invocation of the Will's  
Transubstantiation! ... (Ogun:12).

Hence, the poem from section I to III is a quest for justice and collective fulfillment in all abibiman. The objective (subject matter) of the work is the restitution of the black race from oppressors, and it's actualised by invoking Ogun and Shaka to join as one and fight the cause of the black man thus the title Ogun Abibiman.

This study avails us the opportunity of knowing more about the role and essence of heroic tradition in Africa. Wole Soyinka has brought to light the African aspects of heroic tradition and have contributed to the changing attitude to African heroic tradition. His text helps to correct some misleading anthropological theories about the savage and non-existent nature of African heroic tradition. With the works of these writer there seems to be a drive towards the acceptance of African heroic tradition as a literature worthy of consideration. Soyinka's text reaffirms

Soyinka's belief in the heroic individual act that can save society rather than in a society trying to or capable of saving itself through collective will.

A study of our traditional values will make fresh our memory about our ancestors.

Ogun Abibiman is a literary epic that develops from traditional epic. Soyinka according to Okpewho (1992) summons the forces of myth (Ogun) and history (Shaka) to Machel's declaration of war against whites in South Africa (320). In 1976 Samora Machel, president of Mozambique, announced that his "nation had placed itself in a state of war" with white-ruled Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Thus, we can agree with Okpewho that Soyinka's Ogun Abibiman is essentially a symbolic tribute to Machel as a (military) champion of the black cause (1992:319).

I would like to stress that though this epic displays many of the general features of the epic genre, yet it also displays features that emphasize its uniqueness as an African species of the epic. Amongst such features are: song, music and drums, proverbs, the preeminence of magic and witchcraft, the pouring of libations.

This literary epic significantly emphasizes heroic tradition in Africa. Finally, the text stands out as an heroic text and signifies that heroic tradition as an art exists in Africa.

## **WORKS CITED**

### **SECONDARY SOURCES**

- Abrams, M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. 6th ed. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1993
- ABRAHMS, M.H. Glossary of Literary Terms. Fourth Edition, New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.
- ALBERT B. LORD The Singer of Tales. Massachusetts: Howard University Press, 1962 rpt. 1986.
- AMUTA CHIDI The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism. London: Zed Books Ltd., 1989.
- ARIKPO OKOI "Who Are The Nigerians?" Lugard Lectures Lagos: Ministry of Information, 1957
- BIAKOLO, E.A. Narrative Categories And Oral-To-Written Literary Transformation. An unpublished Thesis in Department of English, University of Ibadan, 1987.
- BIEBUYCK, D. Hero and Chief: Epic Literature from the Bayanga. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- BIRD CHARLES S. "Review of Gordon Inne's Sunjata: Three Madinka Versions" in RAL. Vol. 8, No. 3, Winter 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_ "Some Remarks on the Sunjata Epic". Manuscript. Indiana University Folklore Archives.

- BLAIR S. DOROTHY African Literature in French. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- BOAS FRANZ "Kwatiutle Cultures as Reflected in Mythology" in Memoirs of American Folklore Society, 1935. Primitive Arts. New York, Dover, 1955
- BOWRA, C.M. Heroic Poetry. New York: St. Martin Press, 1966
- CHADWICK, H.M. ET AL. The Growth of Literature III. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940.
- CHINWEIZU ET AL. Towards the Decolonization of African Literature. Vol. 1, Enugu: Fourth Dimensions Publishers, 1980.
- CLARK, J.P. The Oxidi Saga. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1991.
- CLARK, J.P. The Hero As A Villain. Inaugural Lecture Series: University of Lagos Press, 1978.
- CONRAD, DAVID C. "Searching For History in The Sunjata Epic: The Case of Fakoli" in History in Africa ed. David Henige, Vol. 19, Atlanta: African Studies Association, 1992.
- COULANDER HAROLD The Treasury of African Folklore. New York: Crown Publishers Inc. 1975.
- CULLER JONATHAN Structuralist Poetics. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.
- DORSON M. RICHARD "The Epic as a Genre in Congo Oral Literature" in African Folklore. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1912.
- EAGLES DOROTHY The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Literature. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985
- EBEOGU AFAM "From Idanre to Ogun-Abibiman : An Examination of Soyinka's Use of Ogun Images" in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature. Vol. 15: 1, August, 1980.
- EBEWO PATRICK CONRAD "Culture and Literature" in Culture and Civilization ed. Lloyd Thompson et al. Ibadan: African Link Books, 1991.
- EBGERIKE, J.B. "J.P. Clark's Izon-English Translations of The Ozidi Saga" in KIABARA Journal of Humanities. University of Port-Harcourth, Vol. II, No. 1, Rain Issue, 1979.
- EL-MISKIN TIJANI "The Kayawain Epic Tradition" in RAL Vol. 12, No. 3, Fall 1981.
- FANON FRANTZ Sociologie d'une Revolution. Paris: Francois Maspero, 1968.
- FINNEGAN RUTH Oral Literature in Africa. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Oral Poetry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

- FYNN HENRY The Annals of Natal ed. J. Bird. Pietermaritzburg, 1988.
- GERARD ALBERT "Preservation of Tradition in African Creative Writing" in Research in African Literatures (RAL), Vol. 1, No. 1, 1970.
- GOLAN DAPHNA "Inkatha and the Zulu Past" in History in Africa ed. David Henige, Vol. 18, Atlanta: African Studies Association, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_ "The Life History of Kink Shaka and Gender Tensions in the Zulu State" in History in Africa ed. David Henige. Vol. 17 Atlanta: African Studies Association, 1991.
- IDOWU BOLAJI Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief. London: Heinemann, 1962
- IFIE, J.E. "The Tarakiri Ezon and their Gods in Ozidi Saga" in ORITA: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies, XV/2 December, 1983.
- INNES GORDON "Formulae in Madinka Epic: The Problem of Translation" in The Oral Performance in Africa. ed. Isidore Okpewho. Ibadan" Spectrum Books 1990
- JAMESON FREDERICK The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act. Ithaca: Conwell University Press, 1981.
- JOHNSON, J.W. The Epic of Sunjata: An Attempt to Define the Model for African Epic Poetry. A Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1978.
- JONES ELDRED The Writings of Wole Soyinka. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- KIRK, G.S. Myth: Its Meaning and Functions. Cambridge University Press and University of California Press, 1970.
- KUNENE MAZISI "Review of Isidore Okpewho the Epic in Africa: Toward A Poetics of the Oral Performance" in RAL Vol. 11, No. 4, Winter 1980.
- LEVTZION NEHEMIA ET AL. Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History. Cambridge, 1981.
- MALINOWSKI, B. Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays. New York: Doubleday, 1954.
- MBELE, J.M. "Sundiata: The Epic as an Ideological Weapon" Mimeo Literature Department, University of Dar es Salaam.
- MULOKOZI, M. "The Nanga bards of Tanzania: Are They Epic Artists?" in RAL Vol. 14, No. 3, Fall, 1983.
- NGUBANE, J.K. "Shaka's Social, Political and Military Ideas" in Donald Burness. Shaka King of the Zulus in African Literature. Washington, 1976.
- OBI MADUAKOR Wole Soyinka: An Introduction to his Writing. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991.

- OGUNBA OYIN The Movement of Transition: A Study of the Plays of Wole Soyinka. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975.
- OKPEWHO ISIDORE "Does the Epic Exist in Africa? Some Formal Considerations" in Research In African Literatures (RAL) , Vol. 8, No. 2, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Epic in Africa. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Oral Performance in Africa. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_ "African Literature and Culture" in Culture and Civilization ed. Lloyd Thompson et al. Ibadan: Africa-Link Books, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_ "The Ozidi Saga: A Critical Introduction" in The Ozidi Saga by J. P. Clark. Washington: Howard University Press, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_ African Oral Literature. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- African Mythology and Africa's Political Impasse". Research in African Literatures (RAL) Vol. 29, No. 1
- OLUMUYIWA FADAMITAN. Three Faces of A Tradition. The Ogun Festival in Three Communities, Ile-Ife, Oke-Igbo and Ore-Ekiti. An unpublished B.A. Long Essay in the Department of English University of Ibadan, 1989.
- OMOSADE AWOLALU J. Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites. Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1979.
- RENSE, H. Kisiba: Land Und Leute. Berlin (Typescript of English tr. by Mrs. Denne in the Library of the University of Dar es Salaam.
- RIMMON SHLOMITH Narrative Fiction Contemporary Poetics. London and New York: Methuen, 1983.
- RITTER, E.A. Shaka Zulu. London, 1955.
- ROBINSON JOHN A. "Personal Narratives Re-considered" in Journal of American Folklore. Vol. 94, 1981.
- SCHEUB HAROLD "Body and Image in Oral Narrative Performance" in New Literary History, 1977.
- SCHIPPER MINNEKE "African First Person Narrative" in RAL, Vol. 16, No. 1985.
- SEKONI ROPO "The Narrator, Narrative Pattern, and Audience Experience of Oral Narrative Performance in The Oral Performance in Africa. ed. Isidore Okpewho Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 1991.
- SELDEN RAMAN Practising Theory and Reading Literature. New York: Harvester Wheat, Sheaf, 1989.
- SEYDOU CHRISTINE "A Few Reflections on Narrative Structures of Epic Texts: A Case Example of Bambara and Fulani Epics" in RAL Vol. 14 No. 3, 1983.

- SPEAR THOMAS T. "Traditional Myths and Historian Myths: Variations on the Singwaya Theme of Mijikenda Origins" in History of Africa ed. David Henige. Vol. 1, 1974.
- UCHEGBULAM N. ABALOGU ET AL. Oral Poetry in Nigeria. Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, 1981.
- VANSINA JAN. Oral Tradition in History. Mandison, 1985.
- WIKINFO: An Internet Encyclopedia.  
"[http://www.wikinfo.org/wiki.php?title=Epic\\_poetry](http://www.wikinfo.org/wiki.php?title=Epic_poetry)" last modified 21:54, 24 Dec 2003.  
28/07/05