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A Literary Hybrid: Artistic Alienation and Cultural
Consciousness in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother
Jero*

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ABSTRACT

The Trials of Brother Jero is a play published in 1963 by Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka, although it was first performed in Ibadan in 1960. Nigeria had just achieved its independence from British control but it would not take long before a military coup in 1966 turned into a Civil War, fuelled - amongst ethnic rivalries - by religious tensions. Soyinka's plays aim to deconstruct these conflicts into satires for edifying purposes. The play centres on Jeroboam, an ambitious Beach Divine who strives for recognition as an ecclesiastical figure and the consequent exploitation of his followers. Religious and political symbolisms can be extracted from this short, light satire. The structure of the play and the language used evoke Western influence as well as the inclusion of elements of Yoruba tradition. This dissertation argues that Soyinka's hybridity, although aimed to approach the two cultures closer, results in the alienation of both.

Key words: *Wole Soyinka, Brother Jero, Post-Colonial literature, theatre, Nigeria, African identity, socialism, Nigerian English.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The unending question in Post-Colonial African studies surrounding national identity has been under examination since the occupation of the colonized nations. The duality the natives faced during the Empire's settlement regarding the value and individuality of their cultures has been growing exponentially and continues to this day, even after decades following decolonization. Post-Colonial writers in Africa are thus faced with the dilemma of whether to write for an African audience – in an African language – or adopt a more Western approach. The latter seems to draw more writers than the former, even if those authors are reluctant to admit it themselves.

In fact, “several African writers find it hard or humiliating to accept this fact even though a casual look at most of the works shows a deliberate effort to please a non-local audience”(Egejuru, 1979: 52). This is not reduced to a criticism over the European language chosen to write their literature, but the way in which it is presented as well. According to Egejuru, “one only has to look around in Africa to see the alarming rate at which the educated and semi-educated chase after foreign values” (1979: 54), which in turn, results in a debate about class. The economic and social background of these authors is intrinsic to their identity, and their use of English (or French) establishes them as an elite detached from the average African. Nonetheless, this is not a view shared by all critics. In reply to Egejuru, writer and scholar Balogun argues that the intended audience of African writers can be dual, i.e. European and African. Moreover, the introduction of elements of African oral tradition and the adoption of folklore narrative devices and themes implies the inclusion of an African audience in the African writer's mind (1981: 33-34).

Wole Soyinka is a writer well-known for the incorporation of Nigerian mythology and oral tradition in his plays, most of which deal with classic Nigerian themes.

Furthermore, he mixes English with the West-African Pidgin variety for literary and aesthetic purposes, as well as a social critique. Notwithstanding, he writes from a place of privilege most of his counterparts do not have access to. This dissertation argues, through the works of Wole Soyinka, and in particular his play *The Trials of Brother Jero*, that the hybridity most African writers pursue in their literature is unattainable from a position of privilege.

2. SOYINKA'S NIGERIA

By the end of the 19th century the British Empire claimed international recognition of their control over West Africa and it would not be until 1960 that Nigeria would achieve its independence. After a long period of British influence over the region, beginning with the prohibition of the slave trade, in 1885 Britain officially occupied the area. This occupation was validated in the 1885 Berlin Conference, when other European powers acknowledge the territory of present-day Nigeria as a British domain. “The history of what eventually emerged as Nigeria started with the Niger Expedition of 1841 and the formation of the Royal Niger Company (RNC), a trading company that monopolized trade in both the interior and the coastal regions” (Chimee, 2014: 19). Thus, Nigeria was not a consolidated nation before the British arrived. However, it would be during this era of British influence when the Efik, Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa regions as well as the Sokoto Caliphate and parts of the former Bornu Empire and other independent communities would be consolidated as one single region: The Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. This amalgamation of once-independent territories and different cultures and religions under one ruler would lead to ethnic tensions that would eventually trigger a civil war and are still present in the country today (Bamidele, 2015).

The introduction of the pound sterling was one of many British measures to take economic control over the territory. Previous to the colonisation of the country “different cultures used a variety of items as means of exchange [which] included cowries, manilas, beads, bottles and salt amongst others.” (Central Bank of Nigeria). Due to the misuse of the currency during the country’s civil war the Central Bank of Nigeria began issuing the Naira, still used to this day. This measure was imposed in 1973, ten years after Soyinka’s first publication of *The Trials of Brother Jero*. This has meant that later adaptations of the play have been forced to make the decision of whether to change the dialogue to reflect the currency at the time or preserve the original text. There’s an instance where Amope is scolding the Prophet, shouting “Listen, you bearded debtor. You owe me one pound, eight [shillings] and nine [pence].” (I.2: 6) This same line was reinterpreted as “You owe me 23,500 naira [£48.89]” in Ada Adeseke’s adaptation (2019) for a production of Theatre and Media Arts at Ekiti State University.

2.1. Nigeria’s Independence and Post-Colonial Nigeria

Aside from the catastrophic impact that British colonialism had on Nigeria in terms of political development, the region had been facing instability since the pre-colonial era (see Figure 2 in Appendix I). The coexistence of various tribes under the same territory had been a source of conflict for centuries before the British, and it was only exacerbated by their arrival and subsequent departure. In recent years, these tensions have centred around Nigeria being one of the few countries in Africa with a balanced number of Christians and Muslims (see figure 3 in Appendix I), “a balance that will soon reach a tipping point because of the larger population growth in the Islamic north” (Kinnan et al., 2011: 9). This division has existed for some time in the country, with the largest population of Muslims inhabiting the Northern territory (where the Hausa-Fulani

live) and the majority of Christians in the South (where the Igbo and the Yoruba live). This is only one of many divisions in Nigeria, but one that played a part in the Nigeria-Biafra War (see Appendix I for further evidence on the key factors of the divisions afflicting Nigeria).

On October 1, 1960, Nigeria became an independent country. On October 1, 1963, Nigeria became a Republic. That meant the retreat of the British from the territory and the creation of a new state. However, the conflict was far from over. The three major ethnicities of the country – the Hausa-Fulani (north), the Igbo (east), and the Yoruba (west) – all feared no form of democratic government would be fair to them. The disputes between the three meant that whoever ended up in power would have control over the other two and would only look out for their own interests. Thus, “the contestations of power and resources by members of Nigeria's three major ethnicities constitute[d] the wider political conjunctures that led to the collapse of Nigeria's First Republic (1963-66) and, by extension, the onset of the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-70)” (Maiangwa, 2016). In 1966 Igbo and Yoruba military men orchestrated a coup d'état against the Northern politicians. As the Igbo took power, things seemed to stabilize, but the north now feared it was all a ploy to take control of the country. There was a second coup and as the conflict progressed some civilians unrelated to the events became casualties too. The ensuing migrations of some ethnic groups across the country and the political and military instability led to feelings of animosity towards everyone who was on the other side.

On May 30, 1967, three eastern Igbo regions declared independence from the country, under the newly created Republic of Biafra. This rebellious act set in motion the beginning of a civil war that would result in thirty months of fighting, more than a million deaths and the surrender of Biafra. On January 15, 1970, the war ended. The lasting

damage of these events granted Nigeria a score of 95.6 on the *2007 Failed State Index* (the result of the addition of a series of instability indicators), placing in the 17th most likely to fail among the 60 countries ranked, in spite of being “an oil-rich country with the largest population in Africa and a top-20 economy” (Kinnan et al., 2011: 10). The apprehension and discomfort of many Nigerians towards the religious and ethnic situation is still felt today, as they are more likely to identify themselves by their religion or ethnicity than their Nigerian nationality.

2.2.Soyinka’s involvement in the war

Soyinka’s work can only be understood in the context of the aftermath of a highly divided Nigeria. His writings are intended to be a means for social change. Nonetheless, his involvement in defending the rights of Nigerian citizens does not limit itself to the written page. At the time of the first military coup Soyinka was working at the University of Ibadan. As the events of the coup unfolded, he met with the military governor Ojukwu, who would later be in charge of proclaiming the independence of the Biafran nation. As Soyinka tried to prevent the civil war from unravelling, he was forced to go into hiding due to his connections and involvement. When the war finally broke out Soyinka was imprisoned without trial and spent 22 months incarcerated. During that time, he wrote a collection of poems named *Poems from Prison*, later retitled *A Big Airplane Crashed into the Earth* (1969) and *Idanre and Other Poems*, and a memoir, *The Man Died: Prison Notes*, published in 1972. The latter manuscript criticised the involvement of the Federal Government of Nigeria in the war and contained a detailed description of the events that led to his unlawful arrest and all efforts made to incriminate him, as well as the mental struggle he had to endure in his confinement. He also translated from Yoruba *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons: A Hunter’s Sag*, by D.O. Fagunwa (1968, originally 1938), the

first full-length novel written in the Yoruba language and widely considered the first one written in any African language (Vanguard, 2016).

3. SOYINKA’S LIFE, LITERATURE AND THE LANGUAGES OF NIGERIA

When we talk about literary tradition in Africa, it is understood that this literature emerges as authors begin to write it down. Hence, Nigerian literature can be said to have begun in the 1950s with Amos Tutuola’s *Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952). The same decade was marked by authors like Cyprian Ekwensi and Chinua Achebe, whose prose was composed in English (Vavilov, 1987). According to Vavilov, “the works of Ekwensi and Achebe show that African writers were coming to master a genre new to them – the novel” (434). These authors were defining themselves as African writers and thus would come to be a referent for modern West-African literature. Nevertheless, their literature cannot exist separate from their social and historical context and, to some extent, there was a need for these authors to encompass Nigerian (and African) culture thoroughly.

Writing in English can be assumed to be a purely stylistic choice. *Heart of Darkness* (1899) writer Joseph Conrad was in fact born Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski. He chose to write in English even though he learnt it in his twenties (he spoke Polish, French, and German). Conrad decided that English was a more suitable language to express the themes of his works (Ekundayo Simpson, 1979). Bilingual writers such as Conrad can be a good referent of multicultural literature, as they bring a different approach to the language. Nonetheless, literary (written) tradition in West-Africa had very little history at the time authors like Ekwensi and Tutuola were writing. This poses two problems: On one hand, African English-language literature fails to represent the complexity of the continent’s linguistic diversity (closely tied to its religious, political,

and cultural heterogenous nature) to non-African audiences. On the other hand, it fails to appeal to African audiences, as it excludes those who do not have access to their level of English.

Chinua Achebe, author of *Things Fall Apart* (1958), has expressed guilt over his literature being composed in English while at the same time vindicating the use of the language as the means of communication that he has been given (Okppewho, 2003). Likewise, it is not Soyinka's responsibility to feel ashamed of his extensive and cultivated knowledge of the English language. His plays are composed with a subtle and ingenious use of the language, incorporating various forms of Nigerian English, most of which are evident in *The Trials of Brother Jero*. A good example of the contrast of different levels of English is the first interaction between Chume and the Prophet in the third scene, when the former joins Jero in prayer. Religious chants are seen in the play as the inner-most expression of the self and one's deepest desires, which is why "Soyinka has his characters use [Pidgin English] principally because they can express deeper meanings in that medium" (Obilade, 1978: 438). Thus, Soyinka portrays this depth in the use of language, as Chume is introduced as a concise and brief but eloquent-enough speaker and yet subverts to a primeval state when he is praying. The following scene exemplifies the disparity between the different registers of Nigerian English:

“CHUME [*getting more worked up.*]: Help am God. Help am God. I say make you help am. Help am quick quick.

JERO: Tear the image from my heart. Tear this love for the daughters of Eve...

CHUME: Adam, help am. Na your son, help am. Help this your son.

JERO: Burn out this lust for the daughters of Eve.” (10)

3.1. Classifications of levels of English in Nigeria

Oko Okoro makes an analysis of the different classifications of Nigerian English across the years. At the time Soyinka wrote his plays, Brosnahan's classification identified four levels of Nigerian English (1958). These range from Pidgin to Standard English, and are mostly divided on account of the level of education of the speaker, i.e. from no formal education to a university education. According to Brosnahan (and later classifications agree with him), most speakers belong to Level II, which is "spoken by those who have had primary school education". Soyinka, however, with his university education, would belong to Level IV, as speaking the English closest to the standard (i.e. British English), regarded "as the acceptable standard Nigerian English" (Okoro, 2017: 31).

In 1971, Banjo introduced new concepts attached to these levels, understanding four varieties which included "variables of international intelligibility and social acceptability." (Okoro, 2017: 31) This classification makes it harder to place Soyinka in the Nigerian-English spectrum. The fourth variety still applies to him for the most part, especially linguistically speaking. Nonetheless, Banjo makes the inclusion of narrowing this category down to "a handful of Nigerians born or brought up in England." (Okoro, 2017: 32) The third variety, which includes less than ten percent of speakers, would be more accurate. The most distinguishing trait between the two is that Variety 4 is considered socially unacceptable. A more recent reclassification by Udofot (2004) divides the spectrum into three varieties: Non-standard, Standard, and Sophisticated. In this allocation, Soyinka would fit the latter variety.

By all these standards, Soyinka is considered an above-average speaker of English in Nigeria, closer to the British variety than the pidgin one. It is important to note that this

does not invalidate any point his literature may try to convey regarding language in Nigeria. Be that as it may, it does beg the question of to what extent is Soyinka a good representative of linguistic diversity in Nigeria. Soyinka's writing is a hybrid of both British and Nigerian traditions. However, it goes beyond that, as it tries to represent both realities; in appearance, written for neither a Nigerian audience nor for a British one. Soyinka tries to convey through his writing the way he perceives the world. The crux of his literary style is that he sees through the eyes of a well-educated Nigerian who has received part of his education in Britain, has played a part in the Nigerian civil war, whose plays have been represented across the world, and was the first African to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986. Overall, not an average person. Neither a reflection of a British citizen nor a Nigerian one. This can sometimes alienate his audience as well as give them a unique perspective. As with many respectable figures of the Post-Colonial era, Soyinka belongs to a group of highly educated activists and intellectuals, whose literacy is inevitably reflected in their speech (e.g. Nigerian neuropathologist Bennet Omalu).

Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* presents a clarifying image of the dichotomy between educated and uneducated characters. Sidi, the village belle, is chastised by Lakunle, the school teacher, for not "cover[ing] up her... shoulders" as "most modest women do." (1986: 4) Lakunle goes on to criticise Sidi's disregard for his intellectual ways and thoughts, going as far as to say that she "as a woman, [has] a smaller brain than [his]," which he attributes to science. A small back and forth ensues culminating in Lakunle's *victory* when Sidi "can't find the right words [and] chokes back." (5) Lakunle's superiority in this argument is not due to any virtue of reason or truth, but to his unrivalled

knowledge of the language and understanding of more *civilised* ways. His dominion over the English language is what allows him to present himself as better than “[her] race of savages.” (5) In *The Trials of Brother Jero* we find a similar situation with the Prophet and Chume:

CHUME: My life is a hell...

JERO: Forgive him, Father, forgive him.

CHUME: This woman will kill me...

[...]

JERO: Out Ashtoreth. Out Baal...

CHUME: All she gave me was abuse, abuse, abuse...

JERO: Hardener of the heart...

CHUME: Nothing but abuse...

JERO: Petrifier of the soul...

CHUME: If I could only beat her once, only once...

JERO [*shouting him down.*]: Forgive this sinner, Father. Forgive him by day, forgive him by night, forgive him in the morning, forgive him at noon... (12)

and so on. Jero’s religious eloquence reduces Chume to a subservient and passive state, which he cannot snap out of to allow him to regain control of his own thought process.

3.2.Criticism

A cultural argument against Soyinka can be found in the elite that opposed his 1960 performance of *A Dance of the Forests* at Nigeria’s Independence Day. According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr, one of Soyinka’s students at the University of Cambridge,

even then, the discordant relationship of Soyinka’s art to his nation’s image of itself was distinctly evident: the production was staged despite its rejection by the Independence Day committee, rejected no doubt because of its implicit refutation of a linear, naïve, romantic idea of time and human progress. Ironically, the play subsequently won the Encounter Drama Competition sponsored by London’s *Observer*. (2012)

Soyinka's view, influenced no doubt by a British approach, has been the object of criticism by various cultural groups. His literary style has generated animosity, particularly from African Marxist critics who claim he is "a bourgeois intellectual whose social analysis is uninformed by scientific materialist dialectic" and "a socially irrelevant writer who alienates his would-be audience by consciously cultivating linguistic obscurantism." (Balogun, 1988) Although harsh, these criticisms bear some truth. Soyinka's writing would be undoubtedly obscure for an average Nigerian, accessible only to those who have gone into higher education and have a skilful and extensive knowledge of the English language. This collective, already narrow nowadays, would be even more exceptional for Soyinka's contemporaries. Albeit, this 'conscious alienation' mentioned is not entirely accurate. Soyinka's use of the language may be convoluted and artificial to a Nigerian audience, not because of a deliberate act of alienation, but perhaps because of a misconception concerning his intended audience.

This is never more evident than in Soyinka's play *The Road*, published in 1965 (two years previous to the publication of *The Trials of Brother Jero*). Before the play begins, the reader stumbles upon a preface *For the Producer*, followed by the poem *Alagemo*. The latter describes the Agemo festival, a Yoruba celebration well-known in the Ogun State (southwestern region of Nigeria). The poem (and the festival) is linked to "a religious cult of flesh dissolution." (Soyinka, 1973: 149) This celebration is highly culture-specific and foreign to anyone from outside the region. The preface *For the Producer* makes the explicit demand of including the poem in order to give a wider view of the cultural context, as "the mask-idiom employed in *The Road* will be strange to many" (149). Thus, an introduction of this kind would only be needed if the intended reader was unfamiliar with the Yoruba culture. Further evidence can be found at the end of the play, which includes translations of Yoruba songs into English and a glossary of

Pidgin words, such as “dey: which; who”, “kuku: *used for emphasis like self*” or “na: it’s” (230).

On a larger scale, Soyinka is by no means the only author accused of neglecting his origins. Many African authors choose to write in the colonizer’s tongue, e.g. Ugandan poet Beverley Ngunjiri, Nigerian poet Ben Okri, Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Somali writer Nuruddin Farah, South African novelist Nadine Gordimer, Congolese writer Alain Mabanckou (French), etc., which is seen as counterproductive towards the decolonization of the mindset and culture of African writers. Other African writers, like Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, began their career writing in English but later committed to writing in their native tongue, in the case of Thiong’o, Gikuyu and Swahili. (Behrooz, 2018).

Albeit, authors like Soyinka and Achebe make use of Standard and Pidgin English in their literature, which has been the object of both praise and criticism. Given the linguistic diversity in Nigeria (over four hundred languages according to the second edition of *An Index of Nigerian Languages*), English and its Pidgin variety can be considered pan-Nigerian and thus “no ethnic group can claim native rights to them to the exclusion of other ethnic groups” (Onwuemene, 1999: 1055). Per contra, Jane Wilkinson argues in her essay about Nigerian Pidgin and comedy that, even though both authors employ this language for different purposes and in different styles, the end result is the same. According to her,

the phonetically based script adopted by scholars is hardly feasible for everyday or even literary usage, while the adoption of a more or less anglicized orthography (the form most frequently used by dramatists and novelists) has the disadvantage of presenting the language, once again, as no more than an inferior form of English. (1986: 617)

4. SOYINKA and THEATRE

Soyinka's plays, as with his use of language, intertwine both British and Yoruba theatrical traditions; they include dancing and colourful displays with evident traces of classic British conventions. This may explain why in Nigerian live representations of *The Trials of Brother Jero* the rhythm is slightly off. The key aspect of Soyinka's writing is that it is written in English, which was not common in Nigerian theatre at the time. And even though recent theatrical representations use English on stage, the language employed is colloquial, not comparable to Soyinka's formal and cultivated English. This throws off the actors' rhythm and accounts for a not-so-graceful performance (for a Western audience). At the same time, a British representation would feel disingenuous to any audience, as most elements in the play are culture-specific (a list of live representations from 2016 to 2019 of Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* can be found in the Bibliography). This failure to translate the written play to a live performance is not necessarily something to criticise. Albeit, tradition dictates that a play is meant to be represented, it can hold value in itself without the need of being acted out.

Perhaps one of the best examples of "unstageable" plays is *Blasted*, by Sarah Kane (2011). The imagery that Kane's writing elicits is not comparable to a staged representation. The power that it holds as a *suggestion* in our minds when we read it loses its power when we actually see it. After all, the best horror movies are not those that show the most visceral images, but the ones that grip you with what *might* happen. In fact, directors have attempted to give life to Kane's outrageous stage directions, such as "eats the baby" (2011; 199). To assume that it will be more shocking to the audience to see an actor *eat a baby* than to read the line *eats a baby* is to underestimate them. This is not to claim that theatre is best read than seen. It is merely a defence of the text itself, which oftentimes is disregarded as secondary.

However, Soyinka's unstageability is due not to unrepresentable stage directions but to the artificiality of the text as regards his intended audience. As mentioned above, Soyinka's works have been condemned for alienating his Nigerian audience, but Gates himself, as a student of Soyinka, has stated that this inaccessibility to the text works both ways. In 1973, he was granted the opportunity of "listen[ing] to the first reading of [Soyinka's] new play [*Death and the King's Horseman*]. Gates reported that "for three hours [they] listened as Oxford accents struggled to bring the metaphorical and lyrical Yoruba text to life." (2012) Thus, it is hard to come to terms with the hybridity of Soyinka's literature, even with an easy satire as *The Trials of Brother Jero*.

4.1.Nigerian Tradition in Theatre

According to Soyinka, in ritual theatre "the stage becomes the affective, rational and intuitive milieu of the total communal experience, historic, race- formative, cosmogonic (1990; 43). As a matter of fact, Yoruba theatre is known for the inclusion of music and traditional drumming, as seen in Scene 2 (with the boy drummer who comes to pester Amope), as well as a combination of a "brilliant sense of mime [and] colourful costumes" (Britannica), also seen in many live performances at the beginning of the play as Brother Jero is introduced. Furthermore, *The Trials of Brother Jero* can be seen as a traditional Nigerian social satire, a typical theme in Yoruba theatre. The inclusion of biblical material is further evidence of Yoruba influence. (Nigeria's polytheistic) Religion has always been a predominant theme in Yoruba theatre thus biblical references have been adopted since the Christianisation of the country. At the same time, the language used in the play creates a gap between the culture it is trying to represent and the means it uses.

5. THE PLAY

The Trials of Brother Jero follows the well-deserved misfortunes, and their subsequent resolution, of Jeroboam, a false prophet with a thirst for power. He has established himself as a church leader and has built a congregation of followers who have been led to think that by doing the Prophet's bidding, they will be granted what they long for. His trusty right hand, Chume, although oblivious to the artificiality of Jero's religion, has helped him raise his little empire and is, in turn, his most devout follower. The plot revolves around Jero's exploitation of Chume's deepest desires, and his ensuing frustration derived from not fulfilling the latter. However, the plot only begins to make sense when the reader is made aware of the connection between these two characters and a third party: Amope. She is at the centre of it all. She is the cause of Chume's and the Prophet's misery, as the former's wife and the latter's creditor. The three of them are involved in a travesty of the classic love triangle, where Amope tortures Chume, Chume seeks the Prophet's blessing, and the Prophet runs away from Amope. While she pursues the Prophet, he takes advantage of Chume, who just wants to beat Amope. Their individual storylines come together in the end to the final advantage of Jeroboam, leaving Chume and Amope out of the picture.

5.1. Symbolism

The symbolism of *The Trials of Brother Jero* is built upon the aesthetics of the play, making extensive use of the language employed and the structure of the scenes. Anicet Odilon Matongo Nkouka says "the use of Pidgin English fits the exploration of the theme of corruption in a broader sense, and in particular, political and religious corruption" (2017: 92). What Matongo Nkouka argues is that Chume's use of Pidgin English is seen in both his ignorance and his final realization. That is, PE is employed in

Chume's transition from blind faith in the Prophet to his subsequent understanding of Jero's deception.

5.1.1. Religious Symbolism

Jero's religious hypocrisy does not merely come from an outright lie about being a God-sent prophet, but also about the true meaning of religion. He finds worshippers with materialistic, superficial needs along the lines of money, power, and status. What he calls "dissatisfied people". And the reason they are like this is "because [he] keep[s] them dissatisfied." (I.3: 9) He does so by promising to fulfil their needs if they become believers, without ever seeing to it. This force-fed ignorance of a deeper meaning is never more visible than when Chume is left to guide the congregation, and he quickly goes from "Father forgive her" and "Forgive am quick quick" to "Tell our wives not to give us trouble" and "give us money to have a happy home [and] to satisfy our daily necessities." (I.3: 16)

Furthermore, Jero tries to legitimize his failure to satisfy his customers' desires with half-baked orphic justifications, such as constantly denying Chume's wish to beat his wife on account of Amope being "[his] cross", "[his] heaven-sent trial" (I.3: 17). The falsehood of this pretext, if not evident from the Prophet's deceiving character itself, is made obvious when a higher need is imposed over Jero's desire to keep Chume unappeased: a way out of Jeroboams's debt. The three character arcs intertwine in the climax of the play when the relation between Amope and Chume becomes apparent to Jero, who sees a way of exploiting it to his benefit. The moment Chume reveals "only this morning she made [him] take her to the house of some poor man, whom she says owes her money." (I.4: 21), he is doomed by the superior intellect and manipulative skills

of the Prophet. And just as Chume gets thrown under the bus, another takes his place in the congregation as Jero's new right hand. Thus, the cycle begins anew.

5.1.2. Political / (Post)-Colonial Symbolism

It is interesting to note that Chume gets credited as a mad man by the end of the play. Jero goes to the extent of "getting him certified", which entails "a year in the lunatic asylum" (I.5: 31). Chume represents someone who does not question the establishment because he is too vexed with his own problems. And waking up from this subservient state is presented as literally maddening.

Even more interesting is the fact that at no point is Chume presented with the whole truth. He induces that an inappropriate relationship between Jero and his wife is going on, but does not understand the full nature of it. He is not actually questioning the authenticity of the Prophet's entire religion based on this one lie. Someone lit a spark and all of Troy burnt down. Because it is not a matter of to what extent he is able to comprehend the intricacies of Jero's fable. It is not a matter of what is true and what is not. Chume's reaction is not logical and meditated. It is visceral and emotional and raw. And so, this state of disbelief and rage does not come from being lied to *per se*, but from a break of trust.

This condition of disbelief and rejection mirrors the attitudes of the colonizers towards the natives, inasmuch as the former value their ignorance and uninvolved state. This allows those in power – which includes the British colonizers and the successive forms of (unstable) government – to freely manipulate the citizens. The essence of this 'technique' relies on building a connection of trust between the government and its citizens, so as to make them believe that the former has the latter's best interest at heart.

When the corruption of that connection is made evident to those involved, a point of no return is met. In *The Trials of Brother Jero*, this point is exemplified by Chume's madness.

5.2. Structure of the Text

This one-act play is composed of five scenes which clearly mark the limits between the various plots of the story as well as the interactions between characters. This structure, although usually taken for granted as the default format of plays, is not common in Soyinka's work. *Madmen and Specialists* (1970), *The Road* (1965) and *A Dance of the Forest* (1963) are divided into PART ONE and PART TWO. *Kongi's Harvest* (1965) is also divided in a similar fashion, with the addition of a prologue, "Hemlock", and an epilogue, "Hangover". *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) is divided into numerical chapters. *The Swamp Dwellers* (1964), *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973) and *The Strong Breed* (1964) has no introduction or divisions whatsoever. On the other hand, *Jero's Metamorphosis* (1973), a sequel to *The Trials of Brother Jero*, is structured in the traditional way (i.e. one act, three scenes).

The Trials of Brother Jero is a short play, spanning over the course of one day and taking place in the premises of Brother Jero's home and church. The design of the stage is simple, as Yoruba theatre tends to focus more on the costumes and characters than the design of the set. The plot does not require more than a few objects and instruments. However, this section will mostly be concerned with the isolated text, regardless of representation and *stageability*.

The play begins in the dark and the Prophet is literally put in the spotlight. The first scene serves the purpose of introducing us to Jeroboam and his entire character arc.

Soyinka is able to lay out Jero's motivations, skills, origin story, goals and flaws to the reader in no more than sixty lines in the form of a monologue, with occasional interjections from the Old Prophet, his mentor, who signifies Jero's past. Although this is the Old Prophet's sole appearance in the play, he is present throughout it in the form of an ominous prophecy Brother Jero himself feared would come true: "May the Wheel come right round and find you just as helpless as you make me now." (I.1: 2) This is more than a backstory for our main character. It is an existing presence that misdirects the reader's expectations throughout the story, as the reader is supposed to root for Chume, the not-too-archetypal hero. But as the plot moves forward the reader is reminded of the context of the aforementioned prophecy, and it becomes evident that, in the end, Jero will succeed. Therefore, the focus is put on how the plot *unfolds*, rather than how it is *resolved*. That is, the first scene is already introducing the reader to the whole structure, albeit briefly, of the play in a subtle manner.

The second scene is dedicated to presenting Chume and Amope. First as a couple, and then as individuals. Amusingly enough, in that order. After all, this is a light satire, and it makes extensive use of humorous devices to entertain its audience. [...] Chume's character is not offered much to say as Amope takes the stage and becomes the focal point of the scene. As it draws to an end, she encounters Jero, who is now presented to us in the light of an actual character in the play, rather than a narrator. This scene can be interpreted as the first one in terms of plot, since the previous one serves as a prologue or introduction.

The third scene dives into the mind of the Prophet and gives a deeper interpretation of his character, as well as his relationship with Chume. This scene brings the latter forward as a new protagonist. Unlike the Prophet and Amope, who display a clear personality regardless of the addressee, Chume has distinct identities depending on who

interacts with him. Chume is his most true self when he is at church, and hides his true character when reaching out to his wife. This scene is a good example of Nigerian theatre tradition, as it relies heavily on the action of the scene and its imagery, rather than its dialogue. The events of this part are explained through stage directions and act independently from the conversations and religious chants, as when “*the angry woman comes again in view, striding with the same gait as before, but now in possession of the drums. A few yards behind, the drummer jog-trots wretchedly, pleading.*” (I.3: 20) As a matter of fact, the scene could be interpreted exclusively by reading the stage directions.

The fourth scene is the climax of the story. Everyone's plot-lines converge at this point, whether directly or indirectly. Indeed, Jero is barely present for the unfolding of the events even though he is at the centre of all as Chume and Amope fight because of him. The scene concludes with the witnessed event (by the townfolk) of Chume's descent into madness and the ensuing realization of the truth about the Prophet. The fifth and final scene, just like the first one, can be interpreted as an appendix, for the plot has already come to a conclusion. The play closes with a ring structure, signifying the futility of Chume's character development as the one supposed to break the cycle. A new devout follower is recruited to substitute the soon-to-be locked up Chume.

This symmetrical composition of the play evokes Western rather than Yoruba tradition. In spite of the evident Nigerian elements in the plot, in terms of language, composition, customisation, music, etc. the emphasis placed on the plot's development detaches it from the colourful and symbolic spectacle that Yoruba theatre tends to focus on. In his essay *The Fourth Stage*, included in his book *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1990: 120), Soyinka states that “no matter how strongly African authors call for an indigenous tragic art form, they smuggle into their dramas, through the back door of

formalistic and ideological predilections, typically conventional Western notions and practices of rendering historical events into tragedy.” Thus, defending his hybridity as something not only present in Nigerian (and African) writing but a necessity to convey his modernized nation.

6. REPRESENTING THE TRIALS OF BROTHER JERO

Representations of *The Trials of Brother Jero* are faced with various issues. Primarily, the actors’ struggle with the dialogue, not due to their talent (or lack thereof) but due to the artificiality of the text. Although the play attempts to captivate British and Nigerian culture, it simultaneously alienates them both. British and Nigerian theatre tradition, at their core, are radically different. At the same time, they share more than would appear at first sight.

Western theatre can be traced as far back as Ancient Greece, although it most likely originated and evolved from religious rituals. Thus, religious symbolism was present at the beginning of Western theatre tradition –and was preserved for many years after–, and a worshipping of deities as a consequence. Elements of nature were also at the centre of the early stages of theatre tradition. Hence, these plays had a didactic purpose (political, moral, religious, etc.) rather than being a source of mere entertainment. Classic theatre was lost in the Medieval period and revived during the Renaissance, although Modern theatre rejects the classical structures, even though they set the basis for all Western theatre. One of the key aspects of modern and contemporary theatre is the wide variety of influences from different cultures that this tradition has undergone, which makes for a rich and diverse outcome, not unlike African theatre.

However, theatre did not exist as such in Nigeria until the beginning of the 20th c. That is to say, there was nothing according to European standards that could be referred to as *theatre* in Nigeria when it was under British rule. Nonetheless, this does not imply by any means that the country did not have its own tradition, performances, and rituals. These, however, did not translate as *theatre* in Western minds, as it was mainly oral and there was no written record of it. Strictly speaking, *theatre* as understood nowadays, can be said to have developed in Nigeria around the 1940s. And this theatre, in turn, borrowed much from the country's traditions. As a matter of fact, Yoruba theatre evokes Greek and Roman (and even earlier) traditions seeing that, as mentioned above, in its origins, it centred around the worship of deities. This theatre descended from the Egungun masquerade, which was a "Yoruba ritual honoring the ancestors where otherworldly spirits communicate with us through untouchable masked dancers and send a breeze of blessing through the twirling of the flaps of the dancers' costumes." (Westlake, 2017)

Just like Western theatre in its origins, and throughout its history, has borrowed much from other cultures, to its benefit, so can (and has) Nigerian theatre. Soyinka's writing is heavily influenced by European tradition, which has allowed him to break from his country's own tradition to create something new. This, however, has brought Soyinka much criticism from various collectives as mentioned in the *LIFE, LITERATURE AND THE LANGUAGES OF NIGERIA* section. These accusations stem from a Post-Colonial view, which argues that the previously-colonised nations should reclaim and develop their own identity separate from the colonizers. This argument comes to life at any representation of Soyinka's plays in his country of origin, as they are interpreted in English by Nigerians. Their acting evidences the disengagement between the two cultures as they are unable to accurately and earnestly bring into existence Soyinka's essence.

6.1. Productions of *The Trials of Brother Jero*

The past decade has seen the staging of various production of *The Trials of Brother Jero*, as well as many other plays by Wole Soyinka. There are local productions, academy productions, and even non-Nigerian productions. In fact, Soyinka's works have an international component. Nigeria's struggle is not an isolated case. English is now the official language of many countries and regions (due to British Imperialism), but just like Nigeria, most of these territories had their own linguistic tradition. Looking at the south of Asia, India accounts for 447 indigenous languages, and only one of those (i.e. Hindi) is an official language, alongside English. Going to South America, we find the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, which recognises 10 regional languages aside from the official English and the vernacular Guyanese Creole. The latter's National Drama Company put together a stage production of Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* directed by Nicholas Singh and Ayanna Waddell (2017), where West African Pidgin English was substituted by Guyanese Creole. However, in terms of scenography, it followed similar conventions to Nigerian representations.

As a matter of fact, these conventions seem to bear some universality. Most evidently, all performances listed in the bibliography begin with a choreographed dance that evokes traditional theatre. This is sometimes performed by a group of (mostly) women, probably chosen to represent the "six dancing girls from the French territory [...] dressed as Jehovah's Witnesses" (I.1: 1), and sometimes by the Prophet himself, e.g. Ade Adeseke's (2019) production. Moreover, the dancing is always accompanied by instrumental music (drumming) and chanting. Interestingly enough, none of this can be found in the written play, where the only directions given before Jero starts speaking are:

The stage is completely dark. A spotlight reveals the Prophet, a heavily but neatly bearded man; his hair is thick and high, but well-combed, unlike that of most prophets. Suave is the word for him. He carries a canvas pouch and a divine rod. He speaks directly and with his accustomed loftiness to the audience. (I.1: 1)

7. CONCLUSIONS

As a whole, Soyinka's hybridity seems to disintegrate when trying to bring together the two cultures in its aim to enlighten his audience(s). Although widely praised as a brilliant and thorough dramatist, Soyinka has failed to please those who defend the same ideals as him, being the target of socialist and Marxists activists' assessment and critique of his portrayal of national identity. His use of the English language, found in other Post-Colonial writers (equally criticised by the same collectives), brings forth the argument of the intended audience of Soyinka, as he shows an appreciation for (and incorporation of) European culture and traditions. To those opposed to him, this symbolizes a rejection of the native in favour of the colonizer. Soyinka's life is further evidence of his detachment from the average Nigerian, as he has been granted an above-average education and lifestyle to which practically none of his contemporaries have access. Moreover, his works display a skill and craftsmanship unattainable to most, which leads to questioning his relatability as a writer defending his nation's identity, given his upper-class background and current situation as an elite writer.

These remonstrations, however, are reduced to a literary argument, as Soyinka has demonstrated his nationalistic pride and has been actively involved in the political and cultural affairs of his country, perhaps of great importance to the outcome of conflicts such as the Nigeria-Biafra War. His record testifies to his involvement with the nation and his desire to see it thrive and prosper. Even so, Soyinka's hybridity may not be what the nation needs in terms of representation, as neither a Western audience nor an African one outside the literary and scholarly world can fully appreciate and identify with his depiction of both cultures.

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APPENDIX I – Maps of Nigeria

The following maps show the evolution of the country, drawing on particular group disputes. The selected ones focus on religious, political, economic, educational, linguistic, and cultural divisions rooted in the historical evolution of the continent, migrations of tribes and expansions of civilisations. The following quote from *Failed State 2030: Nigeria—A Case Study* elucidates the diversity of the nation.

Prior to the arrival of the earliest European settlers, the area now called Nigeria was the home to a number of separate and distinct societies. The largest of these included the Kingdom of Borno in the northeast; the city-states of Katsina, Kano, Zaria, and Gobir in the north-central part of modern Nigeria; the Yoruba Kingdoms of Ife, Oya, and Ijebu in the southwestern regions; and the Igbo region in the southeast. Between these various regions, an extensive trading network developed, which stretched across the Sahara. (Kinnan et. al., 2011, p.10)

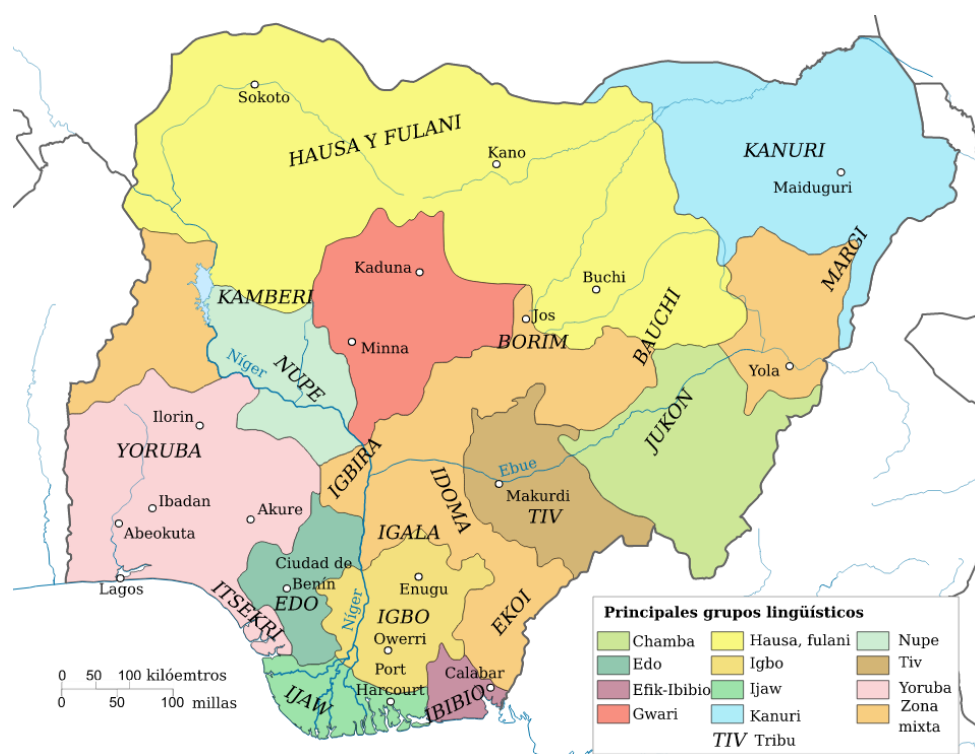


Figure 1. Linguistic Atlas of Nigeria – This linguistic map of Nigeria in 1979 describes 11 principal linguistic groups and the areas where they mix, showing the complex amalgam of languages existing in the country. Although English has served as a vehicular language

for the nation since its imposition by the British, these linguistic groups still hold power and are a source of conflict. Source: "File:Nigeria linguistical map 1979-es.svg" by Nigeria linguistical map 1979.svg: Hel-hama (talk · contribs) derivative work: Rowanwindwhistler (talk) is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

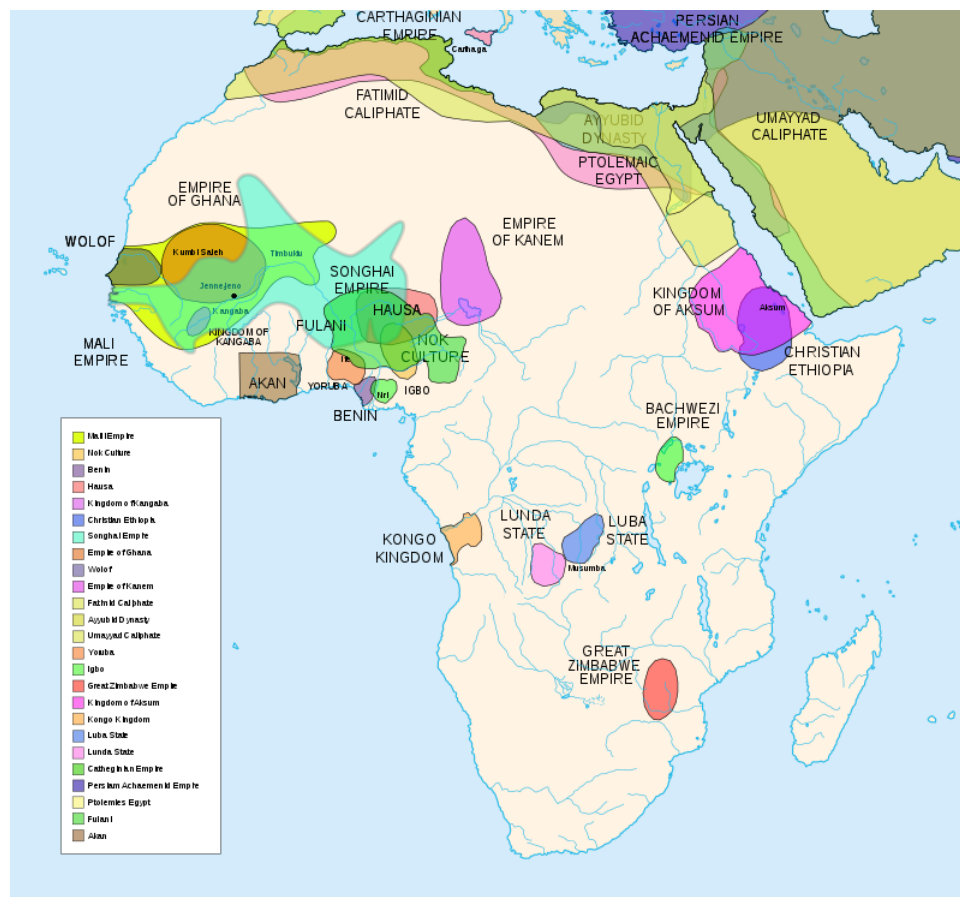


Figure 2. Pre-Colonial Africa and its civilisations – This map of the continent of Africa shows the expansion of various civilisations before being under colonial rule. It spans from 500BC to 1500AD. The territory of present-day Nigeria was the cradle of the conflict that would ensue years later as many cultures coexisted in a conflicting area. "File:African-civilizations-map-pre-colonial mk.svg" by African-civilizations-map-pre-colonial.svg: ZyMOS derivative work: Bjankuloski06en is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

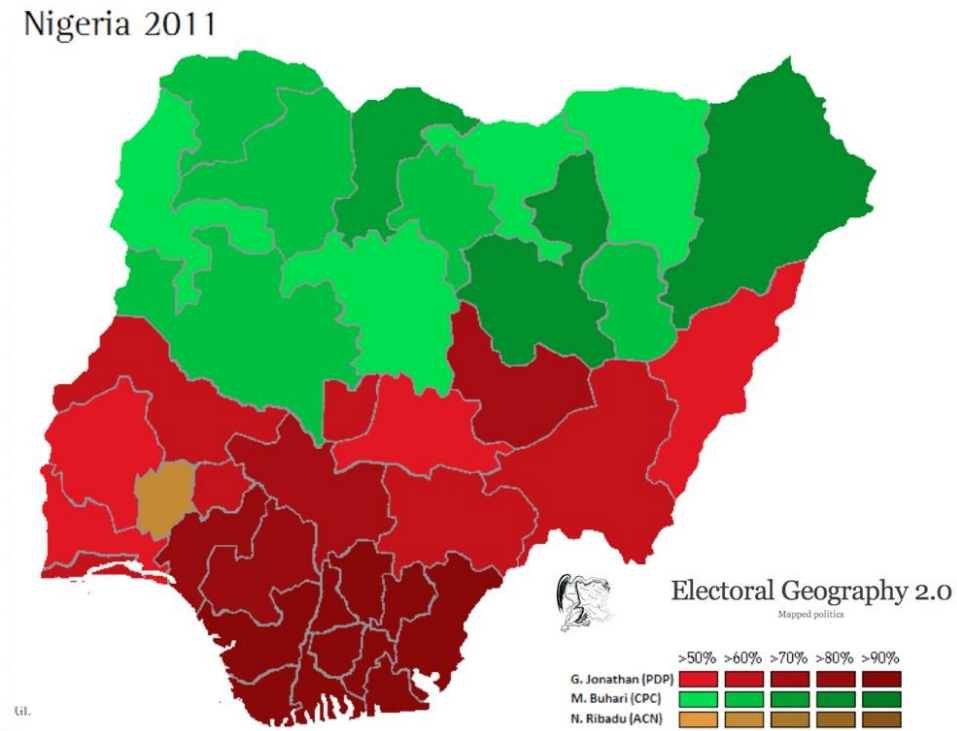


Figure 3. Electoral politics in Nigeria (2011) – Further evidence of the nation’s division is seen in this map of electoral results. This shows the lack of representation in the political domain, as the citizen’s alignment to a political party is not due to an affinity in ideals but closely tied to other factors such as religious and ethnic groups. Source: <http://www.geocurrents.info/cultural-geography/electoral-politics-and-religious-strife-in-nigeria>

Education

Percentage primary and secondary school attendance



Source: Nigeria Bureau of Statistics

BBC

Figure 4. Distribution of school attendance (2013) – There is a clear division between school attendance when comparing the north (net attendance of 53%) and the south (net attendance of 61%). Education in the country is as much a concern as its religious, linguistic, and political struggle. In fact, according to UNICEF, “One in every five of the world’s out-of-school children is in Nigeria.” As a whole, this could be due to the country’s large population (half of West Africa’s population). However, the vast distinction between the northern and southern regions could be attributed to female school attendance (see Figure 5). Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47149528>

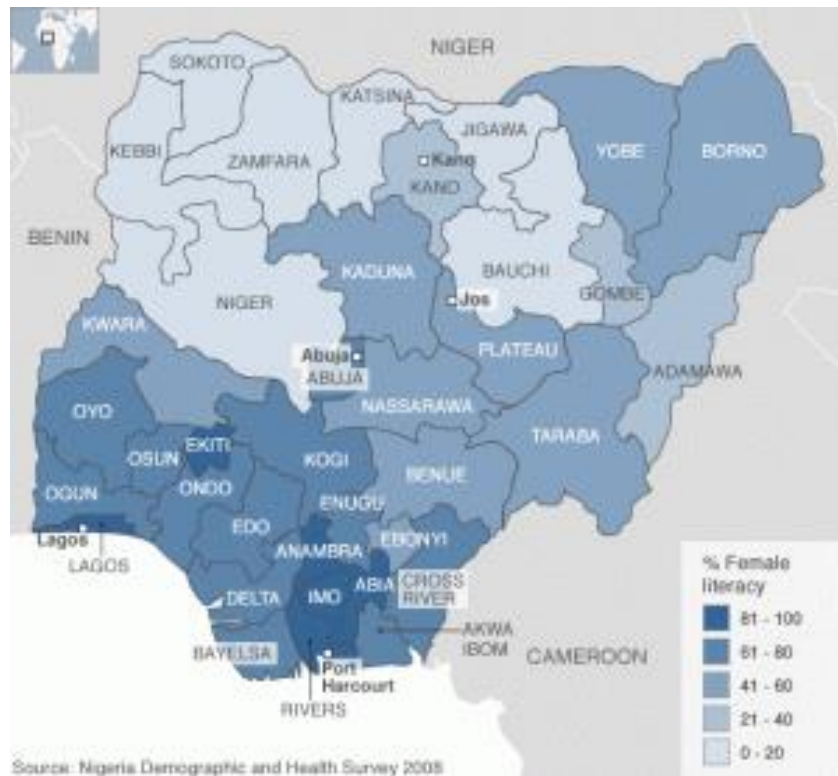
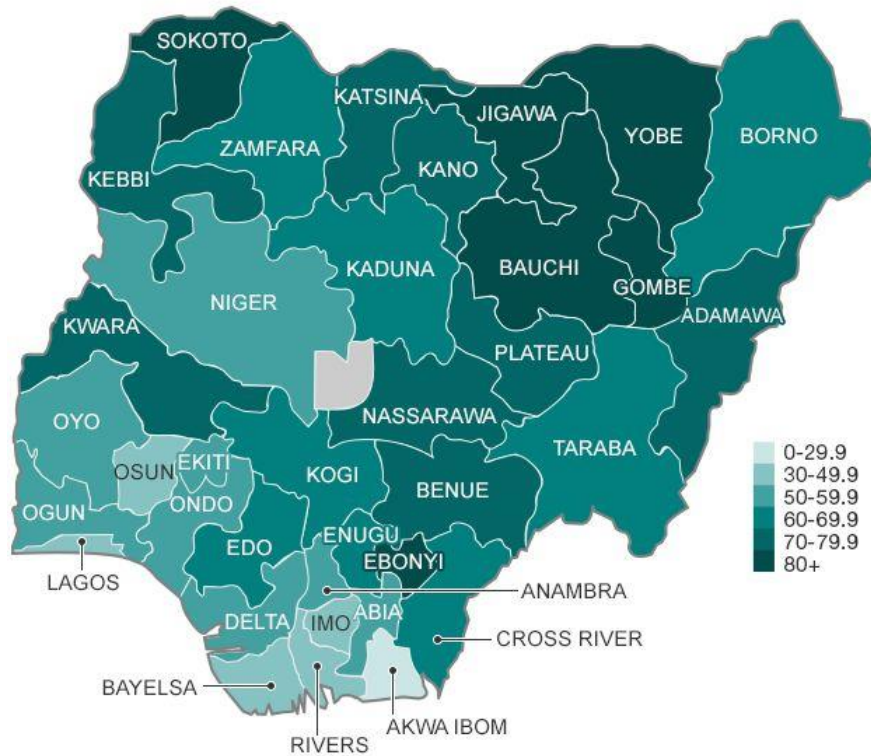


Figure 5. Female literacy rate in Nigeria (2008) – In this map, we see further evidence of the divisions in the country. When comparing this map with the one in Figure 4, we see the relation between the northern states with a low (0-20%) female literacy and the same northern states (specifically, the Kebbi, Sokoto, Jigawa and Bauchi states) with a low school attendance. These states belong to the Hausa-Fulani region, which is under Sharia Law, adopted by the Muslim states. Source: <http://fragilestates.org/2012/01/29/nigerias-potential-for-sectarian-conflict/>

Poverty

States showing % living in absolute poverty



Source: Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics

Figure 6. Percentage of absolute poverty in Nigeria – Understanding basic poverty as living without basic needs, such as not having access to safe clean water, food, or shelter, this map shows its distribution among the states of Nigeria (BBC, 2015). Notice that the northern regions are the ones affected the most, with states surpassing 80% of its population living in absolute poverty. The southern states in white or light blue are the ones with oil resources and pipelines. This map is even more shocking considering that Nigeria is one of the largest economies in Africa. Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31101351>