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Self-Preservation as a Tragic Paradox in *Death Not A Redeemer*

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ABSTRACT

Death, a universally acclaimed violator of existential order, famous for its capacity to sustain a plurality of truths and half-truths, has dominated academic discipline including the arts. Death, a perpetual punishment to mankind, is the most dreaded and feared of all phenomenon of life. It is the inevitable end which ensures a mystifying monotony of grief among the living. Death, whose angel in its fervent collapses the boundaries of race, religion and culture and initiates a paralyzing hypnosis which benumbs humanity's sensibility, is the major focus in Hope Eghagha's play, *Death, Not A Redeemer?* In interpreting the play, this paper attempts to determine the paradox inherent in sacrificial death as a condition for the continual existence of humanity. It also delineates death as a life sustaining verity and completely divests any death that complements life the paraphernalia of a tragic event. In this way, we argue that sacrificial death that guarantees the peaceful passage of the dead, the continual and peaceful existence of the living, any death that promotes human consciousness and complements life, that cleanses and purifies, that is deemed to redeem a whole community, that ensures fertility and the protection of the unborn can be exonerated the accolade of tragedy.

Keywords: Death, Tragedy, Life, Sacrifice, Humanity

Introduction

Eghagha's artistic and literary talents are at least six-fold: playwright, poet, novelist, autobiographer, critic and editor. It is basically as a poet, academic and dramatist that he is widely known and acclaimed. As an unrepentant critic of bad governance, social inequality and economic despoliations, the playwright deploys his art in addressing anomalous outlines in Nigeria's multi-layered socio-economic and political realities. As a satirist, Eghagha, using Chief Karia's hypocrisy in rejecting sacrificial death to save his people but submits to Christ who died to save humanity, lampoons the political class who have failed to put down their lives symbolically in order to ensure the progress and fulfillment of the populace but rather, junket to Europe, America and Asia for holidays and Medicare where leaders have laid down their lives to guarantee adequate existence for the populace. Before continuing with the exegesis of the play, a critical examination of the tragedy and death as existential phenomena in art and in real life is necessary.

Death is a cornerstone of tragedy both in art and in real life. It bestrides the tragic summit as its heir presumptive but consistently renounced and conveyed in a solemn tone by humanity. In art, death is incisively captured in a somber and portentous style which has led many to erroneously conclude that it is synonymous with tragedy. Tragedy in its entire praxis duplicates itself both in art and in real life which calls for strict adherence in terms of appreciation and exposition. Viewed from the prism of daily existence, tragedy encompasses sad experiences in opposition to fulfillment, happiness and sundry accomplishments that define the exuberant nature of man. As an art form, tragedy is basically aesthetic where its meaning transcends sadness, death or

misfortune. This view rehearses Terry Eagleton's admonition that "for a host of exponents of tragic theory, there can be no more shameful naivety than confusing tragedy in art with tragedy in life." (14) In art, myth and culture, the cosmos and the supernatural all play a key role in the hands of the artist who deploys them. In *Oedipus The King*, Sophocles recreates the myth of King Oedipus in ancient Greece who the Delphic oracle had predestined to kill his father Laius and marry his mother Jocasta. In spite of his zeal and determination to avert the tragic fate bestowed on him by the oracle, Oedipus inadvertently fulfills destiny and in doing so, Sophocles elevates the supernatural to an honorific status and as important element in the exalted real of tragic art. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare recounts how Macbeth, a Scottish general was led into inordinate ambition and arrogance by three witches who prophesy that he will be king of Scotland. Driven by ambition and spurred on by his wife, Macbeth murders King Duncan and takes over the throne of Scotland as King and eventually dies in the position. The occurrence of the supernatural and the cosmos in these plays have formed to some extent the basis of tragic representation from Greek to Elizabethan periods. However, tragedy in Greece and England has variously been interrogated in literary criticism with each prescribing its own scope and dimensions. In Africa, Wole Soyinka validates diverse cultural and historical prerogatives in the continual search for the meaning of tragedy in this epigram;

The persistent search for the meaning of tragedy, for a re-definition in terms of cultural and private experience is, at the least, man's recognition of certain areas of depth-experience which are not satisfactorily explained by general aesthetic theories; and, of all the subjective unease that is aroused by man's creative insights, that wrench within the human psyche which we vaguely define as 'tragedy' is the most insistent voice that bids us return to our own sources. There, illusively, hovers the key to the human paradox, to man's

experience of being and non-being, his dubiousness as essence and matter, intimations of transience and eternity, and the harrowing drives between uniqueness and Oneness. (140)

From the above quotation, it is apparent that Soyinka recognizes the potential of tragedy to embody multiple meanings in private experience which are not explicitly captured in academic provenance. Even where numerous definitions of tragedy abound in theories and critical essays, it points to a loose and vague explanation of the concept which leaves a wide room for further elucidation and investigation. Indeed, tragedy at the level of personal experience penetrates the human psyche to reveal his helplessness in the face of an emasculating cosmos and impervious supernatural lineaments. Faced with forces and circumstances beyond his control, man's fallibility is exposed which ultimately leads him to a tragic end.

Given its panoply, tragedy straddles the various genres of literature but with drama providing a more fertile platform for its gestation and maturity. This close knight relationship between drama and tragedy perhaps informs Anne and Henry Paolucci's remark that "drama-and tragedy particularly-presupposes a genuine paradox". (42)

Tragedy has over the years elicited various definitions by scholars and critics who in their critical output on the subject reflect their own socio-cultural and historical inclinations. Among all the many definitions of tragedy, the Aristotelian precept on the subject commands an overwhelming centripetal force from where other definitions and explanations derive. Aristotle in his *Poetics* explains and engages more with the effects of tragedy rather than with its occurrence so that such ingredients as catharsis and sympathy become very important. With regard to Aristotle's position, there is a sense in which we can say that tragedy is better represented in art where its impassive acquiescence is upheld through the buoyant instrumentality of dialogue and action

especially in the genre of drama. In drama, the tragic hero is easily isolated, his hubris and flaw inevitably revealed through words, ignorance and misprision.

For Jonathan Dollimore, “tragedy is invariably about fatalism, resignation and inevitability”. (xviii). According to Francis Barker, “the situation in which we who inhabit a seemingly common earth do not all do so with the same space, validity and pleasure may properly be described as tragic”. (213) Barker’s assertion above rehabilitates the opinion in many quarters that there are circumstances, misfortunes and calamities among individuals and peoples that transcend the agony offered by the death of a person and which can truly be called tragic. Indeed, Paul Allen’s definition of tragedy as a “story with an unhappy ending” (4) initiates a paradox which invariably calls to question the proper categorization of a work of art where at the end; death occurs but serves to liberate the living, the unborn and a whole community. Will such a work be termed tragic given that it galvanizes and sustains human existence?

Although death is an aspect of tragedy, there is an influential vein of thought that tragedy is not death and cannot be circumscribed by it. While certain kinds of death can be regarded as tragedy, other kinds of death cannot be regarded as a truly tragic event. The difference between the two concepts, tragedy and death is evident because tragedy bulks large and occurs in a more encompassing sphere of cosmic fatality where other strands of misfortune, suffering and agony are included. Death is easily recognized as the arrow head of tragedy but tragedy can certainly occur without death. Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* can be classified as a tragicomedy that is, a blend of tragedy and comedy. If we attempt to isolate the tragic aspect of the play, death does not feature but rather, we are confronted with the despair, frustration and hopelessness of the two vagabonds, Estragon and Vladimir which are all revealed through their verbal exchange as they continuously and fruitlessly wait for a mysterious Godot that never comes. While some

critics have argued that certain kinds of death, the death of a villain, a notorious armed robber, a military dictator or ruler with enormous capacity for sadism or one who offers to die in order to save humanity cannot be termed tragic, other critics have maintained that death, irrespective of its cause, mode, locale or situation is a tragic event. Even though it is apparent that tragedy, among other happenstances in human experiences also includes death, there seems to be a preponderance of opinion that not all death can be termed a truly tragic event. In this respect, the tragedy in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* lies more in Willy Loman's failure to realize the American dream rather than in his eventual death which fails to benefit or inspire humanity. If we situate tragedy as any event that purges the emotions, instills fear and sympathy as Aristotle famously describes it, then the response to the following posers will enable us categorize certain kinds of death as either tragic or not. Can we truly say that the death of one person that ensures the continual existence of millions of people is a tragic event? Can any death that occurs to restore cosmic harmony be termed tragic? Terry Eagleton perceptively points out that "from a normative standpoint, only certain kinds of death, strife, suffering and destruction, treated in certain ways, qualify for the accolade of tragedy." (8) We may ponder over Ola Rotimi's *The gods Are Not to Blame* and consider what is truly tragic in the play. Is it the death of King Adetusa and the eventual plundering of the land of Kutuje by the marauding people of Ikolu? Is it the royal incest or is it the plague that befalls the people of Kutuje where several people lost their lives as a result of the incest in the palace? Is it the eventual knowledge of the incest and King Odewale's self-banishment from the land of Kutuje with his four children? Though a grotesque mental image is quickly presented by the above events, the occasion of the death of King Adetusa and the deaths in the land of Kutuje following the plague easily assume an intense tragic dimension basically because loss of life, albeit untimely, is involved. Other events also

qualify as tragedies especially the involvement of the gods in King Odewale's eventual fall from a lofty position to a ridiculous and shameful status. However, inasmuch as we sympathize with King Odewale's fate, we may not consider his eventual blindness and banishment as tragic because it restored normalcy to the land of Kutuje hitherto ravaged by mysterious ailments.

The ontological notion of death in its all-inclusive continuum as an aspect of tragedy varies from race to belief systems, traditions and cultures across the world. Tradition and culture, closely related concepts used interchangeably to underscore the totality of a people's way of life and belief system, both constitute a substantial part of the African heritage and historical imperatives. Thus, symbolic occasions, embedded in Africa's psychosocial milieu that constitute the observable processes of human existence and its continuity such as marriage ceremony, child birth and naming ceremony, death and burial ceremony, new yam festival and diverse cultural practices all contribute to give relevance to the African cultural and traditional experience. Although, it can be rightly stated that some degree of uniformity relating to tradition and culture does exist within the balkanized groups that make up the continent of Africa, and indeed the world at large, certain world views and belief systems are varied and multiple. The notion of death and the eventual procedure of burial fall within this latter category as there are diverse cultural and religious practices associated with death and the ceremony of burial.

The idea of death as an enigma in human existence oscillates between regions and culture. While it is believed by some cultures that man's death is only an exit that initiates a new entrance into another realm in the after-life, other cultures welcome the idea of death where it is symbolically viewed as safeguarding the living and the unborn. This latter idea captures the intrinsic hypothesis that **death is life**. Death serves multiple purposes in Africa but more importance is placed on the agency through which it takes place. Sometimes, the gods can kill a man who has

committed a taboo; it could be through thunder and lightning, snake bite, tree fall, or even through a sudden mysterious illness. In some parts of Africa, when a man dies by the hands of the gods, the remains are thrown into the evil forest to propitiate and appease the gods and also to sever any contact with the living. Suicide, another form of death is abhorred in many parts of Africa and is indeed a taboo for a man to take his own life. Societies that are steeped in the metaphysics of birth and death uphold the cultural practice where one who dies by committing suicide is never buried by his own people. In such places, the remains of one who dies by suicide is buried by strangers. This is the case among the Ibos in the Eastern part of Nigeria as aptly captured by Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* after Okonkwo committed suicide at the end of the novel. While staring at the dangling and lifeless body of Okonkwo, Obierika his bosom friend informs the white man:

‘Perhaps, your men can help us bring him down and bury him’ (149)

When the District Commissioner queries why they can’t take him down and bury him, another native responds;

It is against our custom. It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil and only strangers may touch it. (149)

There is another kind of death identified in parts of Africa and this is death by proxy, a situation where a friend, a lover or a relative offers to die in place of another person. This kind of death has gradually become unpopular in the 19th and 20th century given the rise of capitalism which has gravely eroded filial ties among people who unconsciously pursue the vanishing illusions of socio-economic amorality. The vicarious death presents a platform where a person offers to die

in order to save his community or his race. This kind of death is easily identified by people who adhere to the principles and doctrines of the Christian religion. The Bible, Christianity's compass for daily living, recounts how Jesus Christ, the acclaimed founder of the Christian faith offered to die on the cross of Calvary in order to save the human race from destruction. In this way, it is believed that Christ embraced death in order to give humanity life. In some cultural and traditional practices in many parts of Africa, there comes a time when a man is required to die in order to ensure the continued existence and regeneration of his community. This kind of death is usually through a ritual which comes as an input that serves to appease chthonic forces and ensure the continual regeneration of humanity. While death is universally accepted as the end of life, there remains a conflict in belief systems across the world as to the place of the soul of man in the after- life. In this quandary that man finds himself, ritual death therefore occurs to lubricate and maintain the gulf between the dead and the living, the gulf that Wole Soyinka gloriously labels the "fourth stage" the importance of which cannot be undermined in some traditional African societies.

Indeed, in many societies across the world, especially in Africa, the idea of death, the thought of it or its wayward intrusion into thought processes is quickly repudiated, abhorred and cast aside followed by a quick supplication to divine powers to extirpate the origin of such thoughts. Sometimes, the rejection of the death phenomenon especially by Christian syncretism is followed by a snap around the head and a vehement avowal such as *I reject it in Jesus name*. Yet, Jesus Christ embraced death in order to ensure the continued existence of the human race. Shall we then classify the death of Christ as a tragic event seeing that it redeemed the entire human race and ensured its spiritual regeneration?

The thematic substratum of Hope Eghagha's *Death Not a Redeemer* derives from Wole Soyinka's own play *Death and The King's Horseman* which draws its historical provenance from an actual event that took place in the Old Oyo Empire in 1945 following the death of the Alafin. Soyinka recreates that epochal incident where he squeezes history and the myth of ritual sacrifice to extract only the tangible as can serve his own ideological and artistic purposes. In Soyinka's play, Elesin, horseman to the departed king is required, according to tradition to die through ritual suicide in order to ensure that the spirit of the dead king makes unhindered journey in the afterlife. Derek Wright puts it succinctly, "Elesin's immediate task is to ease the passage of the late king's spirit toward his ancestors and ensure that it is not left aimlessly wandering in the pathway between worlds, cursing the living." (72) Failure for the horseman to fulfill this mission will mean that the spirit of the dead king will rove about in a Wole Soyinka's "fourth stage" without proper rest and this will ultimately result in calamitous consequences for the people. Initially, Elesin, the horseman accepts his fate and gleefully prepares to embark on a suicide mission according to tradition. He even indicates his willingness to be married to a young virgin who was already betrothed to the son of the Iyalaja. The horseman's argument to be amorously intertwined with a virgin hinges on the perceived opportunity to unburden his physical and carnal desire and make him appear lighter in his onward journey in the spiritual realm. In reality however, fruitful spiritual ascent emphasizes abstinence rather than indulgence. As Elesin, the horseman gets involved in mundane frivolities of humanity, the ritual death is delayed and the British Colonial ruler, Simon Pilkings wades into the matter and condemns the entire ceremony as barbaric, primitive and retrogressive. His attitude is in tandem with Eurocentric posture to always relegate African culture and tradition to diverse nebulous categories. Elesin's refusal to die through ritual suicide is perceived to portend evil for the entire

community given that cosmic harmony has been disrupted with impending cataclysmic consequences. Derek Wright's observation that "this refusal to go forward, sacrificially, into another existence breaks the bonds by which the old existence is regenerated, thus endangering the lives of the unripe (Olunde) and the unborn" (72) underscores the grave consequences of the horseman's retraction from his divine duties and its larger implications even to the unborn. However, Elesin's son, Olunde who just returned from Europe where he studied medicine decides to take his father's responsibilities and die in his place in order to salvage the dignity and honour of his lineage and to restore order among the living. At the knowledge of his son's death, Elesin summarily commits suicide which bears no significance on the living and will condemn his soul to eternal damnation in the after-life. His death, propelled by despair, grief and frustration is a tragedy, wasteful and purpose-defeating. Whereas Soyinka portrays death by ritual suicide as a redeeming force capable of ensuring man's existence within the infinite procedure of life, sacrifice and renewal, Hope Eghagha in his own play interrogates the Judeo-Christian culture that permits Christ to die on the cross of Calvary to save humanity, a death which provides a sledge hammer for the extermination and annihilation of the African culture that also makes provision for sacrificial death. Christ is required to die to save humanity; Chief Karia is also required to die to save his people. Christ fulfills his destiny, dies and saves the human race thus, providing an eternal source of divine and spiritual revival among billions of people across the world. Chief Karia rejects his own destiny by refusing to die to save his people but rather clings onto Christ for strength in order to maintain his resolve not to die. This simplistic analogy throws up a conflict between Eurocentric sensibilities and Afro-centric consciousness and reveals the hollow chambers where the African cultural experience has been subsumed. Though we can safely contend that the circumstances of both deaths are different

from each other, the underlying principle is a sacrificial death that liberates and guarantees life. This scenario invokes another story in the Bible, from where the story of Christ emerged. Abraham is called upon by God to kill his son Isaac through sacrificial death. Both Isaac and his father oblige to make this human sacrifice only for God to intervene and provide a ram for the sacrifice instead of Isaac. It is the Judeo-Christian culture of human sacrifice and the African ritual and metaphysical experience which Eghagha recreates in his play *Death, Not a Redeemer*.

The play, set in the fictional Ijigbo land in post-colonial Nigerian society, recounts the story of Chief Karia, the ebullient servant of the late Oba Abednego Adamuda Okoromole the first. Chief Karia is demanded by the tradition of the land to commit suicide and die with the late Oba in order to continue to serve him in the great beyond, ensure a tranquil passage of his spirit to his ancestors, appease the gods of the land and maintain the peaceful and fruitful existence of the people in the community. However, at the death of the Oba, Chief Karia reneges on his mandate, clings to his new found Christian religion and refuses to die with the late Oba much to the chagrin and consternation of the Chiefs and his flirtatious wife, Avbero, daughter of the departed Oba Abednego. Chief Karia's son, Sankara returns from Europe where he had gone to study and vehemently opposes the idea of death by ritual sacrifice. He offers moral and ideological support to his father and encourages him to stand firm in his resolve not to become a victim of a barbaric tradition. Sankara takes Ijigbo elders to court to contest the tradition of ritual sacrifice. The court eventually rules that Chief Karia should not die through ritual suicide as such traditions have no place in the modern, civil laws of the land. For the people of Ijigbo land, the court's ruling is an illustration of justice in parody and a means of exposing western cultural and traditional misdirection. Eghagha's artistic alteration in this play ranges from a manipulation of the plot structure to reconcile Christian religious idiosyncrasies and a subversion of traditional African

values using Sankara and then, the law courts. There is an overt distillation of the myth of ritual suicide to accommodate Christian religious beliefs where the paradox of sacrificial death is highlighted. The plays tragic project suffers an immediate still-birth from the beginning with the vehement refusal of Chief Karia to honour the late Oba by choosing to die through ritual suicide as demanded by tradition.

CHIEF KARIA: Shut up announcer, what do you know about 'plans'?

Do you know that it includes asking an able-bodied, strong man like me to take a plunge? (Hisses). Suddenly from the four corners of the world, 'Death' has become silk apparel with which I must make my sleeping gown, my Buha and Sokoto, and uniform for a long dance.

(Pauses) The Oba has joined his ancestors!. The Lion has gone to sleep.

So I must get ready to die! If the lion has indeed gone to sleep, then innocent ones like us must walk freely on the streets. After all, this is a democratic world! But the people, some people expect me to terminate my life. Death to redeem Death. Servant in this world.

Servant in the other world.Servant forever. (1)

Chief Karia's refusal to terminate his life throws the entire community into confusion as it is perceived that his new stance on the issue will jeopardize the lives of the living and incur the wrath of the ancestors while also leaving the Oba's spirit wandering aimlessly and restlessly in the great beyond. Chief Karia's position questions the proper place of tradition in defining the divine and metaphysical imperatives of the people of Ijigbo land. Ritual suicide in the play does not assume a symbolic status immediately after the death of the Oba; it was always a part of the people's cultural antecedent which has over the years guided their belief system, emotions and general outlook on life. Chief Karia was always a part of this tradition and had in fact, willingly agreed to pursue this line of action, first to demonstrate his loyalty to the Oba and again, to

ensure a continual regeneration of the living and the unborn. In appreciation of his loyalty, the Oba had given Chief Karia his daughter Avbero in order to keep him in the palace where he will ostensibly enjoy the royalties of office and consequent elevation of status. The plays tragic interpenetration is sufficiently distracted by Sankara who, apart from representing imbibed western culture further desecrates the values and belief system of his people by taking the matter to court, institutionalized outlet for imperialist erosion of African cultural leaning. Will Chief Karia's death through ritual suicide and by implication the restoration of cosmic harmony in the community sustain more our understanding of tragedy or will the chaos and general disquiet which his refusal to die correlate more with our knowledge of tragedy? Put in another way, if Chief Karia dies, the community is saved, if he does not die, the community suffers. Which of the two polemical positions satisfies our appreciation and deployment of tragedy, which is a more tragic event? In keeping with the aim and purpose of this paper, the refusal of Chief Karia presents a more tragic scenario given that it ultimately alters the tranquility of the cosmos in relation to the members of the community who hold ritual suicide in reverent awe. His refusal could enthrone cosmic entropy, violate the mutual spiritual ordinances of the people of Ijigbo land and put them in a precarious position with their ancestors whom they look up to for sundry supplications, rich harvest and peaceful co-existence. In spite of Western prejudices, traditional African societies have evolved in their beliefs and customs and attempts to violate them have attracted dire and fatal consequences. Perhaps, we may query the sudden and uneventful death of Chief Karia after the court had ruled in his favour and he relocated to a near-by town away from Ijigbo land. As far as the natives are concerned, the gods of Ijigbo land have rightly killed Chief Karia for his betrayal and desecration of the land.

The ambivalent Western orientation of sacrificial death in empirical contexts where, for example a pilot commits suicide to save the lives of people on board his airplane on one hand and ritual sacrifice in Africa to maintain a spiritual continuum on another hand demonstrates a crass indifference by the West to native African customs and the liminal threshold between the people of Ijigbo land and their ancestors. One death that occurs to save millions of lives cannot be explained as a truly tragic event. In his divine mission on earth to die and save humanity, Christ encounters obstacles in the person of Peter, one out of his twelve disciples who tries to dissuade him from fulfilling his earthly destiny. But He remains resolute in His resolve, calls Peter Satan and rebukes him to get behind Him. (See, eg. The Holy Bible, New King James Version) Eghagha presents Sankara as a Biblical archetype of Peter who tries to discourage his father from fulfilling his destiny. Unlike Christ, Chief Karia is not focused as he veers off his path of destiny by adhering to the homiletics of his son and nudged on by the courts, provided with ideological stronghold by the church, succeeds to subvert the entire sacrificial and spiritual essence of his people.

The artistic progression of the play achieves a paradoxical illumination from the beginning when Chief Karia, in his need for emotional strength turns to God in prayer:

O, God of salvation, God of Redemption, Ancient One,
the One who died that all may live, hear my cry. (1)

Chief Karia's supplications to divine powers, viewed from the perspective of the Christian religion instantiates a paradoxical position of his own situation and that of contemporary socio-economic and political reality in Nigeria. Perhaps, this is a strategy by the playwright, to reveal humanity's hypocrisy and the warring dualities that daily confront his estranged impulses. In relation to governance in Nigeria, death becomes a symbolic paradigm for self-denial, self-

sacrifice and commitment on the part of the political class to redeem the lives of the populace through viable policies. More tragic is the failure of the political class to embrace symbolic death and redeem the lives of the people through objective governance, thereby failing to guarantee a regeneration of the living and the unborn. First, Chief Karia, by beckoning on Jesus Christ demonstrates that he adheres to the principles and doctrines of the Christian religion and therefore is a beneficiary of the vicarious death of Christ on the cross of Calvary. Christ had died on the cross to save humanity from destruction. If we juxtapose the circumstance of Christ offering Himself to die in order to save humanity and Chief Karia's circumstance to die and save his people from calamitous consequences, it will be revealed that there is a thin, negligible line in both situations but while the Biblical idea of the death of Christ is elevated and revered, traditional African provisions for such deaths are berated by Western hypocrites and their alien culture of subjugation. Chief Karia refuses to die in order to save his people; retrospectively we may consider a scenario where Jesus Christ had refused to die on the cross of Calvary citing personal reasons or beliefs as excuses. Indeed, there would be no Christian religion today and Chief Karia would not have any divine powers to turn to for supplication. Eghagha has manipulated the character of Chief Karia and his refusal to die as a metaphor for contemporary demagogues in Nigeria who populate the political landscape. Having benefitted immensely from the plum vibrations of our economy, they refuse to save and redeem the people by offering visionary and purposeful leadership but hustle to other parts of the world where responsive and responsible leadership is offered. What they refuse to give, they largely depend on where it is given. Chief Karia refuses to die to save his people, but beckons on one who died to save humanity for strength.

Avbero, Chief Karia's sanctimonious wife is a tool in Eghagha's hands to question the honesty and sincerity of those who pretend to defend and protect our economy, values and aspirations. At the death of her father, Avbero quickly reminds her husband of the fate that awaits him even though she pretends to suffer heartbreak at the impending death of her husband. She cunningly and deceptively encourages her husband to embrace sacrificial death in order to preserve the tradition and culture of the people. Chief Karia is surprised at the sudden custodian of culture that his wife has become, however her intentions are cosmetic, self-serving and dubious as she secretly plans to elope with her lover Jolomi immediately after the death of her husband. Events in Nigeria have proved that there abounds a coterie of socio-economic plunderers who masquerade as protectors of our economy, our culture and our tradition while their real intentions is to go hand in glove with comprador bourgeoisie partners to primitively accumulate wealth and liquidate the Nigerian commonwealth.

The artistic achievements of Hope Eghagha's *Death, not a Redeemer* while grappling with the sacrosanctity of human life juxtaposes a conflict between Western culture and African culture and upholds the spiritual lopsidedness of both cultures within a metaphysical medium. The play may be said to inhabit the realm of tragic discourse but offers a novel perspective to our understanding and appreciation of what constitutes tragedy. While death is a nominated cornerstone in the play, it serves to redefine the redemptive transformation of the African cultural and traditional experience in that if there is a need to redeem humanity, the most potent and effective tool of that redemption must be sacrificial death as exemplified in the Christian religion. This casts an ironic glance on the title of the play, *Death, Not a Redeemer*. The animating impetus of the play hinges on its commitment in addressing salient issues in Nigeria's socio-economic realities with intent to identify and give direction in nation building. It points

towards the enthronement of an egalitarian social order where our leaders will embrace symbolic death to redeem humanity which is what objective leadership entails.

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