

# What is inside the Mask: White or still Black? A Post-Colonial Musing on Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

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**Abstract**— To read Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is to contemplate on the consequences brought up by colonial hangover rooted in decolonized Nigerian society. This article examines the events and actions, mainly of the compradors, to explore the lingering efflux of colonialism and finds it as the stumbling block for the progress of decolonized. The emerging elites, political leaders, high personnel of Nigerian society take western culture as a weapon to dominate common people, who seek progress and prosperity of their nation. They prefer western norms and values to their own and continue corruption in order to gain individual benefit forgetting rich cultural values of Nigeria. Soyinka communicates with the independent Nigerian society in order to show the decolonized world to be aware of neo-colonialism and its agents for the autonomous progress and prosperity of the country.

**Keywords**— neocolonialism, decolonization, comprador class, hegemony, colonial legacy.

Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* presents the scenario of Nigeria after her independence from British colony in the 1960s. Even after decolonization, as most of the other colonised countries, Nigeria under goes a transitional period. A comprador class takes charge of the government and continues the colonial legacy as if they were appointed to rule the nation as colonizers. Soyinka sketches the consequences left by colonialism in Nigerian society, culture, politics and economy and puts forward the effects of colonial hangover in bureaucracy, elites, and political leaders of Nigeria through the narratives of the interpreters and cultural mediators Sekoni, Sagoe, Kola, Bandele and Egbo, the university graduates, who have returned their home country after the nation's independence, with the mindset to reconstruct and bring changes through their related field of study. But they fail to accomplish their plans due to the corrupt and colonial mindset of bureaucracy, elites and politicians.

This article deals with the major issue of colonial mentality of the Nigerian nascent elites and politicians

even after her independence. The interpreters' narratives within *The Interpreters* present their dream for prosperous Nigeria which has been derailed by the activities of the compradors. The interpreters try to engage themselves in the reconstruction of their nation through their academic excellence but those efforts go in vain. The failure of such excellent people leaves an unanswered question on the contemporary Nigerian politics and bureaucracy. The bureaucrats and politicians believe that no one is better than British, and no native can execute the development works as efficiently as the Britishers do. The independence of the nation has been padlocked in the colonial mindset of the elites, bureaucrats and politicians guided by the legacy of Western norms and values left by British colonization. To depict such issues Soyinka presents the representative characters from different fields like politics, medical institutions, bureaucracy, media houses, and academic institutions. Though they are Nigerian people belonging to different professions, their actions, behaviors and words seem to be the replica of the former colonizers, or the ones with black skin wearing white masks.

Soyinka incorporates the wide range of representative characters to expose the newly independent Nigeria under the clutch of comprador class. The society is highly contaminated by the corrupt bureaucrats, politicians, elites, who are ignoring the general expectation of the people and are irresponsible to their native land. Unlike Derek Walcott, in his *Omeros*, who “. . . urges St. Lucians to search for counterculture to Western modernity, not to let their cultural heritage be contaminated by modernity and preserve their ancestral culture and identity,” (Baral and Shrestha 2020; p 16), the compradors imitate the colonizers. They remain as the barrier for the energetic skilled manpower who dedicates themselves for the betterment of the society. They distrust the native expertise. It is important to look at the shattered progressive dreams of the interpreters because of such elites, bourgeois and politicians who continue the same project of colonization by disguising within white masks. Therefore, this paper aims to dissect the neo-colonial mindset of the comprador class after the decolonization of Nigeria.

Most of Soyinka's writings evoke the post-colonial scenario of Africa and concern about “the need of sacrifice for purification of the society” (Moore 46). Most of his literary works are contextualized in Yoruba myth, culture and rituals. In his works, he attempts to show a contradictory vision about human life and action based upon Nigerian culture and politics. His characters evoke political, religious and other forces of Nigerian cultural practices. His works not only criticize the post-colonial African government but also satirize the post-colonial Nigerian regime based on their mentality governed by the colonial hangover left by British colonization.

Soyinka's *The Interpreter* interrogates the political and social scenario of Nigeria affected by colonial hangover after decolonization. It begins in the Club Cambana Cubicles where the five main interpreters—Kola, Egbo, Sagoe, Sekoni and Bandele are introduced. The story progresses and ties together the plot with gradual movement and incidents happening in the lives of these interpreters and the growing consciousness of their circumstances. After a brief get together at Club Cambana Cubicles, the interpreters set out along with Dehinwa. On their travel, Egbo narrates his lineage, the grandson and heir of a tribal chief. In next meet in the club, Sagoe informs his friends about the decadence of his chief Sir Derinola due to his association with the corrupt politicians. Furthermore, the story introduces Sekoni, a qualified engineer who constructs a power station, but his project becomes worthless because the Village Head rejects his work considering it a junk. Surprisingly, Sekoni gets

arrested and The Commission of Enquiry pushes him to a mental hospital which leads to his death.

On the other hand, the story introduces Ayo Faseyi and his wife Monica in the Embassy reception. Ayo Faseyi is going to receive the best radiologist in Africa. He feels disgraced of Monica for not wearing gloves and for drinking palm wine instead of champagne.

Another interpreter Sagoe sets out for the interview to join in *Independent Viewpoint* newspaper. The lobbying and monopoly of board members in selection process is reflected through the Chief Winsala words “the final word is with us” not with Editor-in-chief (85) to Sagoe. After his appointment in *Independent Viewpoint* newspaper he writes the reality behind his friend Sekoni's death, but it remains unpublished. Editor-in-chief, Nwabuzar warns him not to go against the governmental institutions and informs him that “journalism is just a business like any other” (95).

Kola looks at the craftsmanship made by Sekoni entitled “The Wrestler” and remembers him. After that he involves in his work “Pantheon.” Then the story shifts to Bandele's house, who is a lecturer. In the absence of Bandele, a student comes to submit her assignment. She meets Egbo there instead of Bandele. Through this meeting they go for outing and have a sexual relation. Later on, Egbo comes to know that she has visited to Dr Lumoye for abortion, Dr asked her to sleep with him and when she denied Lumoye spreads various gossips all over the place questioning on her moral ethos. In the course of story, Sagoe joins Egbo and Bandele in a party organized by Professor Oguazor where he meets Pinkshore who introduces himself as Professor Oguazor's son-in-law. Pinkshore reveals the faces behind the veil of high-profile people and presents the immorality of professor by disclosing the fact that professor cannot acknowledge his daughter because “he had her by the housemaid” (150). At the end of the story, all the interpreters work for the Sekoni's exhibition. To understand these relations among such characters and their activities, post-colonial theory is the handiest one.

Post-colonial theory deals with the various issues and problems created by colonization and its aftermath. It often deals with the consequences brought up by the colonization on native cultures and societies of colonized countries. It came in the academia towards the second half of the twentieth century when the colonized nations got independence or were in decolonizing process. Postcolonial theory studies the impact of colonization in colonized countries in terms of culture, ideology and economy. It deals with the literature produced in countries

that were once colonized and those literary writings that portray colonial issues as a subject matter. Due to the diverse effects of colonization, it has diverse approach to deal with these issues—hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry, racism, resistance, etc. In “The General Introduction” of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write:

Post-colonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. (2)

Postcolonial theory is the discussion of wide range of experiences of colonized people which include suppression, resistance, difference, representation and also includes the literary writings, which raise and represent such issues. Leela Gandhi defines postcolonialism in the same line, “Postcolonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath. It is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (4). This makes a point that postcolonialism examines the impact of colonialism and its aftermath on the native culture and society of colonized nations.

Colonialism is a form of illegitimate dominance in which a group of people is conquered by another. Colonialism is a European political project in the name of trade and civilizing process which remained in practice nearly for four centuries in African and Asian countries. Andrew Hiscock marks out the history of colonization as, “By the second decade of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese explorations of the coasts of Africa . . . Such initiatives led to a greater commerce in exotic goods such as ivory and gold and the establishment role in enslaving African natives” (180-81). This gives a glimpse that in the name of explorations and expeditions Europeans invaded the African nations. They exploit the natural resources of these nations and enslaved the natives for the various works. They impose their culture, norms and values and differentiated them as barbaric, uncivilized, irrational, dirty, etc. This project formally ends just after the Second World War and almost every nation gets independence from colonization.

Though decolonization process makes colonial forces to return, postcolonial societies are still colonized in one way or the other. Still the societies are undergoing the same problems as in the colonial period in new forms as discussed in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*:

All post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem. The development of new elites within independent societies, often buttressed by neo-colonial institutions; the development of internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations; the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous peoples in settler/invasion societies—all these testify to the fact that post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. (2)

Due to the emerging elites who act as the former colonizers, colonialism is still in practice in the form of neo-colonialism. The countries are independent only technically. Such forces make the victimized people or groups to resist against them. The emerging elites of independent nations are continuing the colonial legacy.

Though colonized nations get independence from the colonizers, the same problem exists in a newer form. Frantz Fanon argues that due to the colonial culture, it builds up a class of people which acts as former colonizers. Though the elites, bureaucrats and politicians of African nations belong to black skin, they adopt the white masks and started acting as Whites. In order to show themselves as superior being, these people imitate the western civilization and continue the colonial project in a new way. Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* mentions, “The black man wants to be white man. For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white. Long ago the black man admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man, and all his efforts are aimed at achieving a white existence” (225). To gain the position as white, these elites, bureaucrats and politicians imitate the western culture and feel fascinated towards the whites’ norms and values. They start to ‘Other’ their own native people. Edward Said discusses on the concept of ‘Other’ which evokes how the westerners make a distinction to Asian and African using certain vocabulary. Said argues such distinctions in terms of orientalism as, “orientalism is a style of thought based upon on ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (3). Through this argument Said tries to establish how the colonial government shows their positional superiority in

comparison to the positional inferiority of the east. Such tendency discussed by Said has been adopted by the native governing class to impose domination over their own natives too.

Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* raises the neo-colonialist approach of Nigerian elites, bureaucrats and politicians over their own people. They wear white masks and argue that natives are incapable. Through the narratives of the interpreters, Soyinka tries to show how the dreams of common people of decolonized countries shatter due to the colonial mindset of those corrupt politicians, local bourgeois and the elites who think themselves as the agent of British colonization. This paper illustrates how such elites, bourgeois and politicians with colonial mentality continued the same kind of ruling policies as colonizers even after decolonization.

Soyinka's *The Interpreters* presents the interpreters as the protagonists who interact and respond to the contemporary situation of Nigeria. Regarding the novel Kathleen Morrison presents that, "the five protagonists observe and comment critically on each other and on the corruption, materialism, and hypocritical pretensions of Nigerian society in the early 1960s" (753). Her argument refers to the situation of Nigeria and the role of the interpreters described in the text to expose the sense of corruption, materialism and hypocritical pretention of Nigerian society after her decolonization.

In the course of the novel, the interpreters encounter with one second self. Kathleen Morrison argues, "The alter egos in *The Interpreters* are latent or implicit doubles; that is, their resemblance to the first selves is psychological only, not physical, and the protagonists do not consciously recognize" (753). She argues that this second self or alter ego similitudes with their psychology rather to physical appearances of the interpreters of novel. The inability to understand their selves becomes the failure of their dreams to change the society.

The characters of the novel are described as the interpreters who tend to comment the existing system of independent Nigeria and try to bring changes in their nation but fail due to the presence of comprador class. But critic David Maughan has a different view on the development of Soyinka's characters:

The ineffectuality of the five interpreters result directly from the inability of their mode of interpretation, based on Soyinka's received notion of literary interpretation to break out of the cycle of repetition. They gain no knowledge of the society they pretend to interpret. The interpreters not only belong to a social elite but are

themselves elitist in the enthusiasm with which they embrace the tenets of the school of taste and use those tenets as the only analytical tools to interpret the society. (54)

Maughan comments on the interpreters' inability to interpret and bring some changes for the nation. He argues they themselves are the cause of their failure because their interpretations are superficial. They fail to play the role of observer rather they analyze the society through their preoccupied knowledge. They are detached from the then socio-political status of Nigerian society because of their social class.

Likewise, Femi Ojo-Ade takes the interpreters as merely dreamers who could not measure their activities and their impact in the changing scenario of Nigerian society which was still in transitional phase. Ojo-Ade argues:

The interpreter is the decoder of major messages, the medium through which the deepest elements of the mind are translated into palpable material for one and all. It is who clarifies and explains; he is the magician miraculously transforming darkness of night into dawn of the day. The interpreter is thus not only a critic, but also a creator. However, that is the dream. Reality reveals problems posed from within and without. (737)

The interpreters are the mediators between two groups, the governing and the governed ones. Being educated people of the society, they have to interpret and convey the message between these groups and draw a new space and find the outlet for the obstacles. This could have helped transitional period to lead towards progress but the interpreters of the novel fail to decode the major messages and bring change in the society. Their failure becomes the representative failure of the people who dream about the change in decolonized Nigerian society.

*The Interpreters* has used excremental images to present the politicians, elite misdeeds in the postcolonial nation as the unhealthy digestion. Soyinka represents the autonomous subject in distinctly excremental terms. Soyinka has redirected the symbolic association with the colonial discourse. Joshua D. Esty analyzes *The Interpreters* as:

Writers like Soyinka . . . altered, inflected, and redirected the symbolic associations of excrement inherited from colonial discourse, turning scatology to the new task of representing postcolonial disillusionment . . . Soyinka's satirical *The Interpreters*, the young, educated



protagonists view with revulsion their comprador elders who are marked by fat bellies and the stench of bad digestion. (30-31)

Esty mentions that Soyinka exploits excremental rhetoric on his writing to undermine the process inherited principle of novelistic discourse and inherited forms of personal and national identity. The interpreters view disgustingly towards the comprador class. They represent such group by excremental language. Writing an article entitled, "Excremental Imageries as the form of Resistance in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*," Raj Kumar Baral (2019) argues:

... with the images of shit and faeces hits at the cancerous effects of post-colonial hegemony in post-Independent Nigeria. His post-colonial project presents post-independent Nigeria of 1960s as same as white colonial administration since malfunctionings prevail as the legacy of colonial administration, however Soyinka seems sympathetic towards native Nigerians though dissatisfied with interpreters' incapability to cope in the new situation. (21)

On the other hand, Soyinka is a renowned writer among the writers to use myths, rituals and spiritual values of the native cultures they dwell into. Soyinka highly uses the rituals and tales of Yoruba Culture in his writing. Femi Abodunrin receives *The Interpreters* as the exploration of myth and spiritual values and closely examines the motives of its writer as:

The Interpreters, however, 'shifts dazzlingly between satirical vignette and caricature, and the exploration of spiritual depths through stream-of-consciousness and the evocation of myth'. To put the series of satirical vignette and caricature together and make it yield Soyinka's intended exploration of spirituality and evocation of myth. (153)

Abodunrin brings in discussion the narrative technique of Soyinka to bring the Nigerian culture and society after decolonization. As aforementioned, he relates the narrative technique that Soyinka uses to present the spirituality in-depth and suggests the importance of mythical aspects.

Some critics analyse this novel in relation to the inadequacy of understanding the scenario of transitional period as the cause of failure of the interpreters. They furthermore blame the interpreters as the impractical ones as they were not expected to be. Though the interpreters whose narratives are included in the novel are 'west' educated, they fail to understand the need of time resulting their failure in their respective fields. The interpreters were

expected to be the mediators of the society in the transitional phase of decolonized nation on the basis of the kind of education they earned but their failure signifies the shattering of the dreams of those who dream the progress and changes in the society. Some critics analyse the novel in terms of religious, spiritual and mythical significance. They argue the intention of Soyinka is to explore the mythical values and spirituality through its narration. It is necessary to discuss over the other causes of their failure of such learned people that is the influence of the morally corrupt and dominant governing bodies of Nigeria. The colonial hangover and a kind of arrogance arouse in the governing bodies due to their success to decolonize the country from the dominant British colonization makes them morally corrupt and dominant over the natives. This paper tries to sort out the causes of the failure of the learned interpreters to execute their dreams of progression and change in Nigerian society.

Soyinka shows the state of mind of emerging elites (including political leaders, bureaucrats and high personnel) of post independent Nigeria and their behavior towards common native people. Such elites behave as if they were the colonial agents themselves. In the words of Noah Echa Attah:

Neo-colonialism is widely viewed by many writers as the survival of the colonial system in an ex-colony. It is one of the issues that have blighted sustainable development in Nigeria. In Nigeria, it can be regarded as a specific phase of her development characterised by its social formation. This situation was carefully crafted during the decolonization process by the colonialists in collusion with Nigerian elites. (70)

Through these lines, Attah argues colonial power has crafted such social circumstances which continue the lineage of colonialism. This suggests that the emerging elites of Nigeria are used as the colonial agents of British colonialism who continue the colonial project indirectly. *The Interpreters* portray such kind of scenario through the narrative of the then Nigerian community. The high ranked officials of decolonized Nigeria deny the existence of native people's intelligence and devotion. They consider the supremacy of British colonialism and its development works as the prominent one. In the novel, one of the interpreters, Sekoni builds a power station in order to contribute in the development of Nigeria. He feels pleased and whole-heartedly engages himself to the project for the better future of his nation. As he finishes his work, the Village Head rejects labelling it as "junk" (27). When Village Head enquires Sekoni about his presence at the project site, Sekoni replies "I came to t-t-test the plant"

(28). On response, Village Head expresses his doubts on Sekoni's capability and mentions that his power plant "will blow up the village with it" (29) and further adds:

If you want to test it, my friend, just uproot your funny thing and carry it with you. Go and test it in the bush, or in your hometown. Electricity is government thing, we all know that. The white men know about it, and one came here and told us. They know what they are talking about. (29)

These statements suggest the denial of the project by the Village Head and his conclusion is—whites can only do such works. He thinks the natives do not have the expertise which is possessed by the whites.

In addition, the disbelief of Village Head on Sekoni's power station and his way of presentation towards its denial suggests he is intentionally against it. He presents his colonial mindset by uttering the words like "The white men know about it" (29). On the influence of former colonization on the emerging elites of colonized countries, Frantz Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* argues, "a half acknowledgement of that Otherness which has left its traumatic mark. In that uncertainty lurks the white masked black man; and from such ambivalent identification – black skin, white masks" (xxii). As Fanon's words, Village Head seems to be in white mask; views Sekoni's work through the same lens and rejects the project before it has been tested. Village Head utters these words as if Sekoni were incapable for such work because he is not white. This rejection refers domination towards the native people by considering them inferior and unskillful in comparison to the former colonizers. This makes a point that Village Head shares ambivalent identification with black skin through white mask.

Likewise, the foundation of materialistic value is the legacy left by British colonizers to the colonized political leaders and bureaucrats. British colonizers enforced "three major mediating agents in the process of cultural invasion of colonised countries by western mathematics: trade, administration and education" (Bishop 81). They use these things as the weapons to establish their supremacy in colonized nations. They exploit the culture and economy of the colonized countries merely for their materialistic pleasure. This influence the emerging elites of decolonized nations to be corrupt and materialistic authorities. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon talks about the crisis in national consciousness in new emerging elite class which was also ruling class of recently decolonized nation. Fanon introduces the gradual change in the nature of the leaders who defend colonial

powers honestly and with sincere declaration before decolonization. Fanon further argues:

His contact with the masses is so unreal that he comes to believe that his authority is hated and that the services that he has rendered his country are being called in question. The leader judges the ingratitude of the masses harshly, and every day that passes ranges himself a little more resolutely on the side of the exploiters. He therefore knowingly becomes the aider and abettor of the young bourgeoisie which is plunging into the mire of corruption and pleasure. (166)

These lines indicate how the new elites of colonized countries transform themselves as ex-colonizers. In *Interpreters*, Soyinka presents such corrupt leaders who impose their false authority over their natives. The representative politician, Chairman loses his moral ground and forgets his responsibility towards the society. Although he is a responsible person of his community, he solely involves for the betterment of himself. The narrator of the novel reports:

And the chairman – for his subsidiary company registered in the name of his two-months-old niece had been sole contractor of for Project Ijioha – cleaned out a few thousands in immediate compensation and filled claims for a few thousands more. 'I always say it, the Write-Off pay better than fulfilled contracts.'

And to Sekoni, 'the expert says that was junk. Engineer, junk.' (Soyinka 26-27)

The Chairman stands against Sekoni's project work. Sekoni builds the power plant but Chairman tags it as a 'junk' for grubbing immediate compensation for the project was registered in his subsidiary company. Chairman wants to loot as the colonizer from this project which cannot be successful if Sekoni's work is appreciated.

In addition, the corrupt and materialistic mentality of political leaders of the time is a form of neo-colonialism. In this issue Noah Echa Attah asserts, "the role played by the local bourgeoisie is crucial to the understanding of the synergy between neo-colonialism and underdevelopment in Nigeria" (70). In *The Interpreters*, Chairman not only rejects Sekoni's project but he ommands for his arrest. Narrator of the novel reports the further events as, "Surprisingly, he had allowed the police to lead him off without resistance. There was another Commission of Enquiry, but by then Sekoni lay in a mental hospital" (29) and dies later. These events suggest upon the new emerging elites' corrupt individualist and materialistic

mentality which blocks the path of economic prosperity of Nigerian society.

Furthermore, the supremacy of the comprador class can be seen through the response of Editor-in-chief towards Sagoe's attempt to reveal the hidden truth behind Sekoni's death. After getting job in *Independent Viewpoint* newspaper, Sagoe writes a report on Sekoni's death entitled "Who Engineered the Escapade?" (93). Editor-in-chief Nwabuzor suggests him not to reveal it by explaining how it will process as:

'Shut your mouth, I shut mine. Plain and simple. You have got the chairman out of some nasty jam.'

'I have what?'

'It goes on all the time. You see, it is part of the mutual protection. Before we public any revelation like that, it must go to our lawyers. And he in turn consults with the Chairman. It is out of our hands.' (95)

Nwabuzor advises Sagoe that there is no any chance to publish such kind of stories though it reveals sole truth of the corrupt official. Sagoe's story remains unpublished because "the paper itself was a party organ . . . patronage of local thugs" (71). This suggests the magazines of Nigeria serve as the mouthpiece of corrupt politicians like the Chairman. Nwabuzor narrates his own experiences about journalism in Nigeria to convince Sagoe as, "Sagoe, look, I have been in this game for thirty years. Believe me there was a time when I held these ideals. I moved one paper to the other, leaving in flurry of righteous indignation. But look man, journalism here is just a business like any other. You do what your employer tells you" (95). This makes Sagoe furious about government system and leaders. His rage can be observed when Bandele informs him about Minister Publicity Campaign as, "Drive them out who the hell do they think they are how dare they abuse our sovereign integrity with neo-colonialist reactionary misrepresentation deport the bastards Nigeria" (137). People like Sekoni and Sagoe could not carry on their dreams of prosperous and fair environment in Nigeria because the public domain has been contaminated by the corruption and the instinct of neocolonialism.

Sagoe aims to bring social reform and make people aware about the socio-political condition of the country through journalism but he fails due to the corrupt institutions and politician. He devotes himself to dig out the various loopholes of the society but his labour goes in vain due to the social structure which is on the clutch of unethical people. This fails him to reach in his destination

and the country unable to materialize the ethos of independence. Michael M. Ogbeyidi analyzes the Nigerian social, political and economic status as:

Nigeria, a country richly endowed with natural resources and high-quality human capital is yet to find its rightful place among the comity of nations. A major reason that has been responsible for her socioeconomic stagnation is the phenomenon of corruption . . . political leadership and corruption were interwoven and it is against this background that it explored the corrupt tendencies of the political leadership class in Nigeria since 1960 and its implication for socioeconomic development. (1)

Ogbeyidi concludes that post independent Nigeria is unable to accelerate the economy because of the corrupted politicians and system. He mentions that 'political leadership and corruption were interwoven' which fails to gain the economic prosperity. Soyinka highlights the same issue in *The Interpreters* to aware people about the failure of economic prosperity and materialization of Nigerian independence.

Along with the corrupt leaders, Soyinka also presents different morally degenerated personnel of the Nigerian society. When Sagoe applies for a job in *Independent Viewpoint* newspaper and attends an interview with board members led by Chief Winsala, Sagoe courageously defends the interview. Winsala appreciates his presentation with straightforwardness and American tone. But Winsala signals about the power of board monopoly as, "I will tell you a secret and if you like we will bet it and see who is right. On Monday you will receive another phone call from your editor, telling you that the Board rejects your appointment. You see, the final word is with us. . . The job is there, but you have to secure it" (85). Winsala makes a point that Sagoe has to serve board member on any kind of vested interest. After that Sagoe encounters with Winsala in a hotel where he serves drink for the Chief. Next morning, he gets a call from Nwabuzor, Editor-in-chief of the newspaper, who responds astonishingly as, "Did you bring with you some spell from America? The Chairman says I must give you that job. Honestly, what did you do to him? Just tell me, what did you do to him?" (93). This response of Nwabuzor on Sagoe's job approval gives a sense that he has influenced Chief Winsala with some kind of vested interest.

In addition, Soyinka projects some other morally corrupted people who misuse the authority of their profession. Dr Lumoye is one of such representative

characters, who being a doctor, instead of providing medical services, engages in unethical work. He manipulates the patient who visits his clinic for abortion. In return of abortion, he asks them to sleep with him and if they refuse, he spreads rumors. Likewise, professor Oguazor who needs to engage in scholarly discourse makes academic sector as a medium to gain popularity and come in canon. His aim is to win the "Union Presidential elections" through "free speech" (205). In public arena he shouts "'The college cannot afford to have its name dragged down by the moral turpitude of irresponsible young men. The younger generation is morally corrupt' but he has an illicit daughter which 'he could not publicly acknowledge her'" (252, 150). Due to the morally debased people in the different institutions, the protagonists are unable to materialize the dream of prosperous society.

The colonial culture and practices are celebrated in the post-colonial societies as a high culture. Soyinka intentionally presents how the people of a post independent Nigerian society tend to valorize and continue the western culture instead of their own native culture. This kind of tendency has been termed as 'mimicry' in post-colonial theory in which colonized subject imitates the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values. Edward Kamau Brathwaite discusses on Jamaican context to show how colonized people imitate colonizer's culture:

'Invisible', anxious to be 'seen' by their masters, the élite blacks and the mass of the free coloureds . . . , conceived of visibility through the lenses of their masters' already uncertain vision as a form of 'greyness'—an imitation of an imitation. Whenever the opportunity made it possible, they and their descendants rejected or disowned their own culture, becoming, like their masters, 'mimic-men'. (153-4)

Colonized subjects mimic the colonizers' norms and values in quest of uplifting their position. To consider themselves similar to the colonizers, the colonized people take on the western habits, shadowing their native cultural ethos. In the novel, Ayo Faseyi, a renowned radiologist, is introduced as the imitator of the western culture. While entering into the Embassy reception, he notices that his wife has not put the gloves and feels disgraced by it. He commands her to put the gloves, but she replies, "Who do you see wearing gloves in Nigeria?" (38). It indicates that wearing gloves is not a Nigerian tradition. Ayo feels uncomfortable due to his wife attending the party without gloves although it is not part of the native culture. He makes the conversation with his friends on the same issue:

But the trouble is Monica. She would have made some careless slip and given herself away. Look, Bandle, be a friend. If you hear any adverse comments, let me know, will you. . . . Faseyi drew closer and whispered, 'about her dress.'

Bandle said, 'What are you talking about?'

'Don't you see she is improperly dressed?'

'I hadn't noticed.'

In Faseyi's eye sudden gleam of hope. (42)

Ayo is totally affected by western norms and values. He feels inferior, disgraced and uncomfortable when his wife does not practise western tradition. In the name of maintaining social class, he forgets his native norms and values and enjoys being a part of colonizer's culture.

Though the novel is set after Nigeria's independence from British colonialism, it reflects the native cultures are still hegemonized by ex-colonizer's cultural norms and values. The influence of a foreign culture contaminates the autonomous native cultures of ex-colonized nations because the ruling class of those nations undermines such local values. These dominant groups of the decolonized societies presuppose the western cultural norms and values as the high culture and keep the native cultures on the footing. To illustrate functioning of cultural hegemony in different societies, Antonio Gramsci argues:

. . . to fix two major superstructural "levels": the one that can be called "civil society", that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called "private", and that of "political society" or "the State". These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of "hegemony" which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of "direct domination" or command exercised through the State and "juridical" government. (145)

For Gramsci, hegemony is exercised in society in two levels; either by the dominating groups or through the State and 'juridical' government. With these two major structures, societies bear the domination upon norms and values, tradition, language, economy, politics, etc. Soyinka also presents western cultural impact on Nigerian through the depiction of an incident at Embassy reception. In the reception, Ayo, time and again, shows his dissatisfaction to his wife for not wearing gloves. He argues with his wife for making him down as, "'You see how conspicuous you've made us? Look around and see for yourself. Even those in native dress are wearing gloves'" (42). Furthermore, Monica Faseyi rejects ambassador's offer to take champagne and requests for palm wine. At this point,



ambassador mocks the drink she prefers and again Ayo appears displeased on his wife's choice. Instead of defending the local tradition, characters like Ayo and ambassador seek for colonizer's culture and costumes.

Although Nigeria acquires independence from British colonialism, the people within Nigerian society seem to be highly influenced by the western culture and lifestyle. The former colonizers consider their culture as civilized and sophisticated whereas other culture or people as savage, backward and undeveloped. This dichotomy is the result of orientalist gaze of the colonizers. In the language of Said:

European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. . . . European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self. (3-4)

Said suggests that the European culture gains supremacy through its interpretation of other cultures as Orient. The sense of Orient as savage, backward and undeveloped has created colonized people to ascend towards western culture and grab it as theirs too. The feeling rooted deep-down to the colonized people of being a part of inferior culture makes them to continue western norms and values even after decolonization. This makes them to enjoy western culture rather than their own indigenous native culture and lifestyle. In the novel, when Winsala identifies Sagoe's dialect is similar to American people, he becomes pleased. In response, he expresses his delight as, "You are more like American, straightforward. That is how I am too" (84). Ayo and ambassadors's response to Monica's inclination to her native cultural doctrines and drink in Embassy reception show the inclination of these people towards western culture and lifestyle. Due to the authoritative position and strength, Westerners are able to impose their dialects and culture in the non-western society and it further keeps its aura in decolonized societies because of the new elites' inclination towards it.

Nigerian lifestyle after decolonization exceedingly commemorated consumer culture. Consumer culture of Restoration England spreads all around the globe along with colonialism and imperialism. Lee Morrissey depicts the optimum point of consumer culture

as, "In mid-eighteenth century London, at the lowest end of the socio-economic scale, the consumer product was gin . . . Between 1720 and 1750, gin consumption exploded, as it was sold from the wheelbarrows in the streets, individual homes, even through pipes from bar to street" (234). Consumer culture works as the western value of modernization which is often not shared by the non-western societies. From the very beginning, the central characters of the novel Egbo, Sagoe, Sekoni, Kola, Bandele and Dehinwa are introduced in the Club Cambana Cubicles. These characters spend their time-consuming liquor in the extreme form as it practiced in 'mid-eighteenth century London' in the pretension of get together and get solace. The obsession of the consumer culture can also be examined through Chief Winsala's appearance after drinking too much alcohol as, ". . . , his huge frame shrunken, his confidence collapsed, waited in deep fog, resigned to the beginning of the shameful scene, degrading to a man of his position. To himself, for himself alone, a stream of belated saws came from his lips, muttered silently while his head shook in self-pity" (91).

In addition, decolonized society adopts consumer culture to maintain pride and superiority. The comprador class takes the command of decolonized societies and keeps on valuing the western way of pride and superiority guided by materialistic norms and values. Jean Paul-Sartre sets up the impact of colonialism and consumer culture as:

The concomitant of this colonial imperialism is that spending power has to be created in the colonies. And, of course, it is the colonists who will benefit from all the advantages and who will be turned into potential buyers. The colonist is above all an artificial consumer, created overseas from nothing by a capitalism which is seeking new markets. (11)

Sartre puts forward the motif behind the westerners' artificial consumerism as creating new markets for their products. They cunningly divert their colonial project in new form through consumerism. During the colonization, colonizers created and expanded the markets in their colonies. This assisted them to impose their goods and maintain imperialism even after the decolonization process. Such impact of consumerism can be observed through the decoration of the *Independent Viewpoint* newspaper's Managing Director's office. To highlight such obsession, Soyinka presents the description of Managing Director's room:

. . . air conditioner in the building, and the walls were wood panelled; hidden behind the panelling was powdering mortar, and there were small

curtains to match the wall which screened the cooling machines when they were not in use. . . . A gold-edged pad lay at each place, at scrupulous angles to the table edge. In one corner, an apoplectic radiogram . . . The radio had nine winking lights, all differently coloured, although no one had yet discovered what they proved. This was the pride of the Managing Director. (74)

Managing Director's office decoration makes a point the comprador class feel pride and superior by possessing the modern imported furniture and equipments. The delight of managing director while seeing the radio with nine winking lights at his visit to Germany indicates they are fascinated with western goods. Due to the impact of the globalization, Managing Director seems to be obsessed with the consumer culture and invests huge amount for the decoration of his office. He has been decorating his room with the imported items from different countries during his foreign trip. Consumerism becomes the part of pride and superiority for such elites.

The obsession of consumer culture has made decolonized nations to underestimate their own art and culture. The concept of capital left by colonization makes the comprador class to misjudge their status as bourgeois. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon brings in discussion the concept of bourgeois and capital and argues over these concepts in underdeveloped countries as:

. . . , we have seen that no true bourgeoisie exists; there is only a sort of little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster, only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it. This get-rich-quick middle class shows itself incapable of great ideas or of inventiveness. It remembers what it has read in European textbooks and imperceptibly it becomes not even the replica of Europe, but its caricature. (175)

Fanon makes a point that the so-called bourgeois class is nothing more than comprador class who tends to continue the colonial mindset acquired from colonizers. Fanon depicts the wretchedness of such comprador class who are morally corrupt and replica of ex-colonizers. In the novel, for instance, the final scenes of Kola's painting exhibition depict the moral ground of these comprador class people. Most of the characters of the novel have been to the exhibition but they indulge into gossips and drinking wine rather caring for the painting, Pantheon. None of the character talks about the glorious paintings of Nigerian deities. The repeated lines from Egbo and Bandele as “*Sometimes I feel like a motherless child . . .*” throw light

upon the situation of the then Nigerian context having no any leader which can lead towards prosperity for the nation (246). At the same time Kola thinks, “if only we were, . . . we should grow towards this, neither acknowledging nor weakening our will by understanding, so that when the present breaks over our heads we quickly find a new law for living” (246). Such words of Kola make a sense that they have to seek for change anyway. But the then situation has been totally contaminated by morally corrupt comprador class which does not let these interpreters to think of any kinds of revolutionary acts. These events critique upon the ‘get-rich-quick middle class’ which mimic bourgeois and think themselves as the agents of ex-colonizers.

Differentiating people in regards of birth and colour is another aspect that has been left by western colonialism in most of their ex-colonies. Western societies highly practiced racism and stereotyped in terms of birth and colour. Robert Spencer introduces the Western way of observation to non-western people and societies as, “Wittingly or otherwise, they compress a dense and complex reality into an assemblage of abstract stereotypes that have the effect of painting the non-Western world as inferior, dependent, requiring and even positively beseeching the intervention and tutelage of more advanced powers” (397). Spencer argues that stereotype is a western concept which presents non-western world with certain attributes like inferior, dependent, submissive to demonstrate western world as superior to non-western. In *The Interpreters*, the exchange of words between Joe Golder and Sagoe illustrates stereotyping as a deeply rooted phenomenon in the mentality Nigerian people. Joe Golder, an American lecturer of History as well as singer expresses his western mentality over Sagoe as “You Africans, once you’ve told a lie you feel bound to stick by it. Even when you confronted with the evidence which even a child must see, you must lie, lie” when he refuses to understand about painting (194). This makes Sagoe enraged and replies, “You affect much scorn for British attitudes and now you stand there calmly asserting one. You try that superior stuff on someone else” (195). Sagoe shows his resistance towards the colonial mindset of Golder and warns him not to entangle with him. Again, Golder utters, “You Africans are so damned nationalistic” and also asserts “I hate violence” (195). Golder not only criticizes Sagoe's African birth and colour but mentions the colonial stereotyping that Africans are violent in nature. This misrepresentation of Sagoe by Golder shows that stereotyping in terms of birth and colour remains in Nigeria even after decolonization.

Soyinka, thus, evokes the impact of British colonialism rooted within the comprador class of decolonized Nigerian society. This class adopts western norms and values as theirs and totally underrates their own native culture. Soyinka incorporates this conflict of the decolonized society, informs that hybrid attitude acquired via dominant ex-colonial culture, politics and religion remains as a key affecting factor in the progress of decolonised nations, and finally makes the nations aware to remain vigilant to the probable effects of white masks worn on the black faces.

### CONCLUSION

Through the depiction of the interpreters, Soyinka, in this novel, traces the degenerate, corrupt Nigerian society, especially of the comprador class. The interpreters, coming back to their country Nigeria, try to bring changes in the society but the system, politicians and elites stand as hurdles in their path. Even after the independence of the nation, Nigeria still suffers from the effects of 'black skin, white mask' syndrome as the elites, politicians and bourgeois of the society perform the role of the former colonizers and manage to control the Nigerians on the behalf of their former rulers. This tendency of wearing a false mask has been critiqued by Soyinka in this novel.

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