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The Symbolic Representation of the African Community 'Tree' and the Expression of Nostalgia for Culture Restoration in Six African Poems

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Abstract: *This paper seeks to ascertain the significance of the 'community tree' to the traditional societies of Africa. It is intended to also find out how African indigenes have generally reacted to the loss of the symbolic tree following their interaction with the West through colonization. This study is conducted in reference to six (6) African poems in particular and others in general. The paper has two sections: section one explores the physical and or spiritual significance of the 'tree' at the centre of the African community. Section two centres on the nostalgic feeling of the loss of the 'tree' and its impact on the communities' life and culture. The selected poems and others referenced in the study unreservedly attribute the destruction of the symbolic tree to the misconstruction of Africans' way of life depicted by the Europeans and the imposition of their way of life on Africans. These poets and many others lament the loss of African culture and seek its return.*

Keywords: African Culture, Community Tree, Colonization, Nostalgia for Culture Restoration

Introduction

In many African traditional societies, it is very common to find a special tree at the centre of a town, a village or a community, or sometimes, at a few distance from a settlement. In this paper, the term 'community tree' is preferably employed to distinguish it from multitudes of trees in the African forest in general. Again, the term 'community' is preferred for its sense of tribal settlements and township scattered across the continent prior to the colonial experience. Examples of community trees include the 'neem', the 'baobab', the silk-cotton, the 'palm' and several others, often located at the centre or vantage points in the communities/villages for their profound and varied significance. Such significance may be physical or spiritual to the life and existence of the individuals and the communities – the reasons for which the tribes establish their homes near or around the 'community tree'. The 'tree' therefore belongs to the whole tribe or village as indicated for example that "Savannah communities have made their homes near Baobab trees. Every Baobab tree is community-owned and wild-harvested. No such thing as a Baobab plantation". (aduna.com: Accessed on 08-07-2021 at 5:00pm).

However, the culture encounter between Africa and Europe, following the advent of the Europeans, suggests an apparent misconstruction of the relationship between the natives and these community trees by the Europeans. This sense is revealed in Kofi Awoonor's poems *The Cathedral* and *The Weaver Bird*. In these poems, the Europeans 'cut' the 'tree' and 'planted' in its place a ''senseless cathedral of doom" and 'built' their 'house' on the 'only tree' of the community, respectively. One question is: why did the Europeans not choose any other place than the place where the tree stood? Perhaps, the cause is attributive to a sheer disrespect for or misunderstanding of the African culture by the colonial masters. Each of these two possibilities, or even both, might precipitate the symbolic representation of 'the tree' by the post-colonial poets such as the Ghanaian Kofi Awoonor, and the Senegalese/Cameroonian David Diop and others, in the poems selected for this discussion, at least to re-assert the importance of the 'tree' to the natives who own it.

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This paper is presented in two sections: in the first section, an attempt is made to explore the physical and spiritual significance of the 'tree' at the centre of the African community. The second part however, focuses on the nostalgic feeling of the loss of the 'tree' and the clarion call for Africans to return to their root. Six African poems*: The Cathedral, The Weaver Bird* (Kofi Awoonor), *Africa* and *Vanity* (David Diop), *Abiku* (J.P. Clark) and *Vultures* (Birago Diop) are selected for analysis. In any case, reference is made to some secondary texts for the purpose of foregrounding. The main discussion is structured thus: The community tree: Its association and significance; The Europeans' attitude towards the 'tree'; and, the nostalgic effect of the cutting of the 'tree': the loss and the need for return.

The Community Tree: Its association and significance in African traditional setting

In this section, attention is focused on the practical usefulness of the 'tree(s)' often found within the settlements of African traditional societies. The physical and spiritual benefits of the 'tree' together with its metaphorical senses are explored.

According to Black, 1995, "to know something about a tree-about even one tree-is to know something important, something fundamental, something profound about the nature of the world and our place in it" (https://tresatlantic.orgAccessed on 14-07-2021at 2:45 pm). To Black then, when a tree or trees grow within or around human settlements the benefits derived from the tree(s) include improvement of air quality, carbon sequestration, cooling, energy conservation, securing water supplies, noise reduction and erosion reduction. Among the trees commonly found in African traditional communities are the 'baobab', the 'neem', the 'silk-cotton' as well as the 'palm tree'. In any case, there are several others with almost the same significance.

The 'baobab' for instance, according to ADUNAH (aduna.com/pages/baobab-tree: Accessed on 8-07-2021at 5:00 pm), is a pre-historic species which predate both mankind and the splitting of the continent over 200 million years ago. Native to the African Savannah where the climate is extremely dry and arid, the 'baobab' has adopted to its environment. It is a succulent, which means during the rainy season it absorbs and stores water in its vast trunk, enabling it to produce a nutrient-dense fruit in the dry season when all around it is dry and arid. It can provide shelter, food, and water for animals and humans-the reason the Savannah communities have made their homes near 'baobab' trees. For this reason, it is described as "the tree of life". In Africa, there is no such thing as 'baobab' plantation for every tree is community or family owned and wild harvest, providing for several millions of households. Sun International (2014) indicates that apart from providing nourishment, the baobab features prominently in Africa literature and traditional folklores, with many stories making reference to its unique shape and meaning. It is believed that kings and elders held meetings under the baobab tree, with the belief that the tree's spirits would guide them in their decision-making. Even in relatively modern Africa, the post-colonial era, the 'baobab' commonly serves as a venue for community meetings or even as a classroom where people and children learn. It is believed that several spirits, good and evil indwell the 'baobab' tree.

The 'neem' tree is another tree the significance of which is briefly explored for the purpose of this paper. Ez Gro Garden (https://ezgrogarden.comAccessed on 14-07-2021at 6:27am) identifies the 'neem' tree as one of the most important trees in arid regions of the world. From its roots to its spreading crown, the 'neem' contains a plethora of vital compounds useful for animals, people and plants. It has numerous medicinal, cosmetic and agricultural importance bringing enormous benefits to countries both poor and rich. For this reason, the 'neem' tree is perceived as a "miracle" or "wonder" plant.

Even though this background information does not cover every single 'tree' located in the traditional communities of Africa, there is certainty that, it provides some explanation for the place of the 'tree' in the culture and tradition of Africans. Trees provided shrines, meeting places, information and entertainment centres, and a link between the living and the unborn, apart from the numerous physical benefits. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for example, the community *'ilo'* (the village common,

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where meetings, ceremonies (religious and social), and sports competitions take place) is the ground under the "ancient silk-tree" where meetings and entertainments such as wrestling take place. The ancient tree is sacred, and "Spirits of good children lived in that tree waiting to be born; on ordinary days young women who desired children came to sit under its shade" (p. 33). This, indeed, underscores the African natives' association and intimacy with the 'community tree' and its profuse representation in African poetry and other Thus, in *The Cathedral*, 'a tree' and 'that tree' symbolize the African culture, which was ruthlessly forms literature, usually as a metaphor. Thus, in *The Cathedral*, 'a tree' and 'that tree' symbolize the African culture which was ruthlessly attacked or destroyed by the Europeans; in *The Weaver Bird*, "our only tree" represents Africa herself, as a continent; in *Africa*, "that tree young …" symbolizes the young Africans scattered over the world who are growing physically and mentally strong. It seems to be against the above background that African poets celebrate the 'tree' in their work. In the ensuing paragraphs, six selected poems are analyzed on the basis of the above traditional significance of the 'community tree'.

The Europeans Attitude towards the 'Tree': The Ruthless Attack on African Culture.

The attitude of the Europeans towards 'the tree' may be explained in terms of the apparently sheer misinterpretation or misconstruction, by the Europeans, about the relationship between African communities and their environment. In the communities of Africa, like all others in other parts of the world, including the western countries, tradition embodies the "accumulative body of knowledge, know-how, practices and representations maintained and developed by the peoples with extended histories of interaction with the natural environment." (https://en.m.wikipedia.org, Retrieved on 17-08-2021 at 9:00am). Such interaction informs the people's set of understanding, interpretation, and meanings they assign to their practices, rituals, spirituality and general world-view. Obviously, African cultural practices are comprehended in the light of this perennial association with their environment. To understand the African culture therefore, is to understand the Africans relationship with their environment.

The fact however, is that the Colonialists, together with the majority of the Christian missionaries, seem to either fail to appreciate the culture of Africans or resolve to destroy the foundation in order to exploit the continent. No one has so succinctly expressed the attitude of the Europeans to African culture than Egudu (1978) "… the early Christian missionaries came to Africa not to sow the mustard seed of the Kingdom of God in the African cultural soil, but rather to sow the 'fire seed' which would burn up the 'grasses' of African culture ….To ensure that this unholy act against the cultures was accomplished… incarnated in birds of prey, the eagles, invaded the habitat of the 'sunbird' and the 'twin gods' who constitute the bedrock of these cultures".(p.11)

In the six selected poems, together with other contemporary works, are found the reactions of many indigenous African poets and writers to the unfortunate cultural bias against Africa.

The first poet to consider is the Ghanaian Ewe Poet, Kofi Awoonor-a postcolonial poet-who profusely employs scatological imagery such as "excrement" to depict the western colonialism and culture, but uses the image of the "tree" and the "old shrines" to characterize the indigenous African religious culture. In his poems *The Weaver Bird* and *The Cathedral*, Awoonor satirically and scurrilously employs the theme of religion to register his vehement denunciation and repudiation of western colonialism and culture. In *The Weaver Bird*, the 'tree' is symbolic of Africa herself: "our only tree" (l. 2), and in *The Cathedral*, the 'tree' symbolizes the African culture (l.2). The 'tree', in *The Cathedral*, with its 'incense on the infant corn' (l.3), and the 'fires of a tribe' (l.5),is used as a symbol of the virile African culture. (Umar, 2014). Thus, the 'tree' represents life and breath of the African tradition or religious culture.

However, the white man disrespectfully desecrated Africa and destroyed her rich and healthy culture. The poet's employment of the image of the "weaver bird" as symbol of the colonialists and Christianity which they introduced along with them seems appropriate. As a poetic symbol, the "weaver bird" connotes

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plunder and dirtiness and every other thing that is extremely evil. Besides, the sense of dirt is carried by the scatological imagery: "excrement" of the "weaver bird" which has, not only made the 'tree' dirty but, worst of all, desecrated the 'old shrines', where the natives offered sacrifices and worship to their gods and ancestors. The use of the filthy imagery is suggestive of Awoonor's profound disdain and abhorrence of the western colonialists and their religion which had engulfed the indigenous population. No wonder that the poet dropped his English name, "William" to evince his rejection of the Western culture. The 'weaver bird' image moreover suggests the poet's cynicism and disappointment about the Western civilization. Umar, (2014) again suggests that the poet's placement of the two images, "excrement" and "dirty patch" in *The Weaver Bird* and *The Cathedral* respectively may not only be seen as companion piece in their ugliness, but also, they confer verbal seriousness and 'Virtuoso' on his (Awoonor's) lyricism.

Awoonor further intensifies his vehemence against the imperialist culture by thematizing conflict of culture recurringly in the poems. In both *The Weaver Bird* and *The Cathedral*, he shows, unlike Leopold Sedar Senghor for instance, that there is little or no room for reconciliation between Western colonialism and African traditionalism. Both poems end in finality or irreconcilable conclusions. Whereas *The Weaver Bird* ends with the 'old shrines' defiled from the 'weaver's excrement', *The Cathedral* concludes with "A huge senseless cathedral of doom". Awoonor's reverence for Africa and her traditions is carried in his romanticizing Africa: "a tree once stood/shedding incense on the infant corn;/its boughs stretched across a heaven" (*The Cathedral*[l.2-4]) and "…in our house/…our only tree//we look for new homes every day/ for new alters we strive to re-build". (*The Weaver Bird* [l.1, 2, 14, 15]). The images of defilement which he employs to symbolize the western colonialism evince his strong protest against the foreign culture and its pernicious effects.

Furthermore, nothing portrays ruthlessness and futility more than the images of destruction and robbery employed in these two poems of Awoonor. In *The Cathedral*, "… surveyors and builders/…cut that tree." They just "cut that tree". Why would they not build the 'cathedral' at a different ground other than where the 'tree' is located? Undoubtedly, they might know that place was the heart of the natives. Besides, they might conceive that the natives were engaged in the worship of 'useless gods' under the 'tree' and therefore, getting rid of the 'tree' would mean getting rid of the people's religion and culture, which, in the Western worldview, had rendered the Africans heathen, pagan, primitive, unscientific, superstitious and uncultured people. Or the colonizers might again guess that replacing the 'tree 'with the 'cathedral', the latter would attract the heart of the natives as the former had done. In *The Weaver Bird* on the other hand, the "weaver bird" comes back claiming ownership of the land, "And the weaver bird returned in the guise of the owner (l.6). What ingratitude! What robbery! Through this line, the poet foregrounds the greed, the ungratefulness and the destructive intention of the colonialists besides their disrespectful attitude towards Africa and her traditions. Colonization seems to denote disrespectfulness towards the colonized and all that they value.

The Nostalgic Effect of the Cutting of the "Tree": The Loss of Naturalness

In his poetry, like his other contemporaries such as David Diop and Birago Diop, Awoonor combines the poetic traditions of his native Ewe people and contemporary and religious symbolism to depict Africa during decolonization. He usually portrays western religion and culture as "lifeless" and African religion and culture as 'life' and 'health'. He does so through the use of imagery: 'tree' symbolizing African culture whilst 'cathedral', that is 'planted', represents the western culture. The reason for this portrayal or attitude of the poet is presumably the nostalgic feeling of loss experienced by the poet and the likes of him after the introduction of the European religion and culture. The poet cannot find the rich spirituality that Africans possessed prior to the advent of the new culture. This loss is heavily represented in *The Cathedral*, *The Weaver Bird* and Birago Diop's*Vanity*.

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The "cathedral" itself, for example, symbolizes not only the alien traditions of the Europeans which, in actual fact, are comparatively empty and meaningless and belong to the dead, but also, other changes that accompany the interruption of spiritual and commonly shared experience of the Africans with the 'tree'. Awoonor deepens the sense of loss of the experience with this 'tree', the true source of spirituality and the sense of communion with the ancestors, by contrasting the 'cathedral' with the 'tree'. Whereas the 'tree' is associated with numerous blessings to the local people, the Cathedral' is linked with a sense of "doom" and uselessness. For instance, "a tree once stood/shedding incense…." (l.3) reflects the richness of African religious tradition. In African religious culture, incense is a holy liquid useful for purification and perfuming which gives life and hope to the worshippers or the people (Okrah, 2014). The phrase 'infant corn' (l.3) depicts life and abundance of food, promise of growth, life and hope for the future. This same 'tree' which "stretched its boughs across a heaven" (l.4), indicates a large and fulfilling spiritual and physical existence and shield or protection for the natives. It is important to note that the poet registers the loss of all these blessings through the use of past tense. This presupposes that the benefits enjoyed by the people were uninterrupted, in the past, until the "surveyors and builders" arrived, who "cut the tree" (l.7)," planting in its place" (l.8) the 'cathedral'. The progressive and arduous nature of the effort of replacing the 'tree' is reinforced by the present participle, 'planting'. Then, the builders' effort resulted in "A senseless cathedral of doom" (l. 9). Again, the cutting of the 'tree' is associated with the "the last fires" (l.5). The 'last fires' is symbolic of the last meal of the physical existence or last sacrifice to the ancestors/gods. This represents an end to life or religion of the tribe (Africans) and thus, a loss of hope. The loss is further deepened by the sense that the 'tree', now cut or burnt and gone, has brought suffering, wars, conflicts and death to the people of that tribe (Africans) and, as well prevents them from progressing, as intoned by Abena Yeboah and Dargbazi (www.markedbyteachers.com Accessed on 24-06-2021 at 4.30pm).

The poet's tone of anger and infuriation is portrayed by the choice of "dirty patch" (l.1) and "senseless cathedral of doom" (l.9). His anger is probably caused by the difficulty of grasping or figuring out why such a "senseless cathedral" should cause a lot of havoc to the people of the community. This sense is explicit in the last line (9) of *The Cathedral*, "the huge senseless cathedral of doom". This 'cathedral' brings 'doom' to the people in that it is the source and custodian of the colonial oppression and all its attendant evil. The "senseless cathedral" prevents Africans from practicing their own local culture and imposes coercively an alien culture on the people. This view is supported by Amanor (Cyber journal, 13) who explains that the Western missionaries failed to see in African religious thoughts and imaginations any spiritual content and any preparation for the Gospel of Jesus Christ and eventually presented to the natives a God who was alien. The alien culture has stolen the people's freedom of worship from them. The poet criticizes the "they" for bringing 'doom' to the people of the tribe. This view is strongly supported by Abena Yeboah and Dargbazi (www.markedbyteachers.comAccessed on 24-06-2021 at 4.30p.m) that "as at the 21st century religious differences is the world's number one cause of conflicts and war on African continent and others". This clearly underscores how important the 'tree', which unified the community at worship in the poet's native land, means to them (Africans). It has been pointed out that the European missionaries separated their converts from the communities and settled them at the new place called 'Salem' to prevent them from associating and eating with their relatives who were 'unconverted'. They were often 'conscientised' at the Salem school to regard the 'unconverted' relatives and friends as evil and barbarians. They were as well brainwashed into the European culture and unquestioning subservience to colonization. This is often-generated conflict and division in the communities. No wonder Awoonor describes the 'cathedral' as causing 'doom' to Africa. Similarly, the land on which the 'cathedral' is planted has lost its purity just as the 'tree' (Africa) on which the 'weaver bird' built its nest lost its beauty and cleanliness. It is now a 'dirty patch'. It has been desecrated by the casual 'planting' of the new religion and culture. How can anyone replace the ancient symbiosis of life and spirit that existed under that 'tree' from which the whole tribe drew their existence? The religion of

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the Africans means life to them whereas the imposed westernized religion means 'dead'. Through the use of scatological imagery, Awoonor impresses on the mind of his readers that there is little justification for the imposition of a Westernized religion and culture in the place or environment where the former freely grew. To Okrah (2014) the "cathedral" symbolizes not only the change in religious and spiritual experiences but also the purity of local fellowship (life) and freedom which was stolen by the imposition of the colonial government which brought their religion by building a cathedral', a symbol of imperialist and colonial oppression which Awoonor sees as "senseless".

In *Vanity*, Birago Diop, the Cameroonian/Senegalese who spent most of his life in France, expresses the loss of the African culture by explicitly lambasting the thoughtless exuberance with which Africans themselves embrace the European culture. To him, this behaviour leads to what he regards as self-degradation emanating from a loss of cultural identity. The abandonment of the indigenous tradition only leads to "torments" (l.29), 'clamouring' (l.30) and "sobbing" (l.31). In other words, the solution to the problems of Africa does not lie in the new imperfect culture but in the rich culture of the ancestors of the land; every effort of solving Africans problems or challenges by colonized method amounts to 'vanity'. The same sentiment is carried in David Diop's *The Renegade* in which he derides his fellow Africans who appear to imitating the white man at the neglect of their own culture: "My brother you flash your teeth in response to every hypocrisy/…with gold-rimmed glasses/…give your master a blue-eyed faithful look/…in immaculate evening dress/screaming and whispering and pleading in the parlous of condescension/we pity you/ your country's burring sun is nothing but a shadow/ on your serene 'civilize' brow…/…a face that is bleached/ By years of humiliation and bad conscience" (l.1 – 8, 10 and 11). Diop strongly feels that Africans cannot desert their 'Africaness' and obtain favourable attention from the Western eye; it is only a mockery to so attempt for Africans cannot find such attention outside "your grandmother's hut" (l.9). In *The Weaver Bird*, a parable about missionary intrusion and colonial under-development, Awoonor again highlights the relationship between the two ways in which the venally-minded constantly dressed up their foulest intentions in neat-fitting robes of benevolence. Fraser (1986), explains that the poet envisages a contrast between two religious systems; one securely earthed in the "old shrines" represented by the 'tree', and another which though proclaiming its presence in the language of God and enlightened self-knowledge, manages to bring in its train the yoke of tyranny. Of course, the latter is the colonizer, the 'weaver bird' desecrating the 'tree', Africa. Even though both religions appear on the surface to enjoy a basic sincerity of intention in terms of their 'prayers', 'communicants' and 'alters', it is clear that in the effect of their ministration, the sharply differing aims become overt. The Africans "cannot join the prayers and answers of the communicants" (l.13) in the new religious expression, and still "… look for new homes everyday/for new alters… to re-build" (l.14, 15). Obviously, this reality of loss of spirituality and satisfaction explains the heavy presence of many Christians still trooping traditional shrines and prayer centres for "new homes" and "new alters". This is because, as Amanor (Cyber journal, 13) observes, "When such were confronted with the need to find solutions to the existential needs of life, they found their religion powerless to help. The missionaries therefore persistently lamented in discovering the patronage of the church members of anti-witchcraft cult shrines, which rose in the depression of the 1900s." They seem not to have what they need in the foreign religious and cultural expressions. Africans deeply feel the loss of the 'tree' cut down by the 'builders' and desecrated by the 'weaver bird's 'excretion'.

The Clarion Call for African/Cultural Home-Coming: Restoration of Lost Culture and Identity.

Generally, the Negritude movement has been noted for their expression of opposition to colonialism and assimilation, lifting up African values and culture. Many poets in the movement thus couch their messages in bitterness and pessimism to at least, register their nostalgic feeling for the African past and culture. Nostalgia depicts sentimental longing or wishful affection for a period in the past.

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In considering the strong nostalgia for home-coming and restoration of African culture, it is deemed apt to begin with David Mandessi Diop, one of the Negritude poets. Unlike several of his colleagues, Diop expresses hopefulness and comfort for exiles (actual and figurative) (Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2004). In the words of Wilfred CArtey, (cited in Encyclopedia of World Biography, 2004) "within the body of each single poem Diop counterpoints notes of exile with recurrent chords of hope and return. Although within each poem harsh and gentle statements, negatives may alternate, Diop closes, almost without exception, on a note of optimism". He overly rejects the idea that colonization had done anything positive for Africa and believes strongly that political freedom ought to take place before Africa could enjoy her own culturally and economic independence. Diop asserts Africa's obstinate endurance and power to survive. His poems therefore create "a movement away from the negative effects of oppression to the positive possibility of regeneration in the poetic discovery of truth …. Hope springs from combat" (CArtey). In his works, Diop usually represents separation from Africa with language suggesting agony, monotony, howls, metallic sounds and machine guns which Africa suffered under colonial rule. For instance, in *Negro Tramp*, a poem Diop dedicated to Aime Ceseire, a famous personality in the Negritude movement, he employs the image of the derelict man as a symbol for Africa under the colonial rule and as well expresses pity for Africans who have submitted to the colonial will "squealing and hissing and strutting around in the parlors of condescension" (L…)

Diop again expresses an exile's cry, the feeling of home-coming in *Africa,* which he dedicates to his biological mother. In this poem, he 'metaphorises' African continent as his 'mother': "I have never known you/But your blood flows in my veins (L.5, 6). In the above lines is found the expression of the Poet's eagerness to come home, to his native land, Africa, and thus to his native culture. Diop's confidence and hope for Africa's recovery from her untoward humiliation is strongly and explicitly expressed in this poem: "…tell me Africa/is this your back that is unbent/This back that never breaks under the weight of humiliation/ This back trembling with red scars/ And saying no to the whip under the midday sun/ But a grave voice answers me/ Impetuous child that tree, young and strong/ that tree over there/ splendidly alone amidst white and faded flowers/ That is your Africa springing up anew/ springing up patiently, obstinately/whose fruit bit by bit acquires/The bitter taste of liberty".(l. 12-24). The above lines of *Africa* constitute a dialogue or dramatic technique in which Diop appears to conjecture "Africa" as someone with a bent back breaking "under the weight of humiliation". However, 'Africa' the poet's mother; quickly reprimands him: "Impetuous child that tree, young and strong/that tree over there/…is your Africa springing up anew". No words or imagery so assuredly and succinctly repose confidence of renewal and triumph than those used by Diop. Though 'Africa' has endured pain and humiliation by the imperialists, she is obstinately renewing and regaining her lost glory-the 'tree' is developing new leaves and its flower wilting, giving hope of life and abundance. Restoration of her dignity and socio-economic glory is imminent.

The poem *Abiku* by the Nigerian J. R. Clark is another literary piece which implicitly but strongly induces a sense of return to African culture. The word "Abiku" is a Yoruba term referring to a child who repeatedly dies to be re-born again and again. (https://afrilingual.wordpress.com/2013. Accessed on 21-06-2021at 10:00 am). Among the tribes in Nigeria, like several other tribes in Africa, an 'Abiku' is believed to be a 'spirit child' and there are many of their kind- living in the baobab tree. Literary, it is one of these 'Abiku' that the poet addresses, pleading with it to either decide to stay with the mother (the living) or "stay out on the baobab tree" (l.2).Generally, in traditional communities, the baobab tree is suspected to be the meeting place of all manner of spirits who work at night including the 'Abiku'. By asking 'Abiku' to stay out on the baobab tree, the poet is asking the child to stay in the spirit world and not be reborn. 'Abiku' should thus "follow" where he pleases his "kindred spirits" (1.3) if "indoors is not enough" for him (l.4). The poet's basis for asking the Abiku to choose one place is that the mother's body is tired of his oscillation and again, her tribe has been a "healthy stock" for many people "who reach to the sun" (l.12-14). Underneath the poem's simple message however, seemingly, is a subtle and more

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implicit impression. It is commonplace to find many Africans, predominantly educated, whose life and behaviour(s) are outrageously informed by the European culture at the neglect of African tradition and culture but who from time to time, at their convenience resort to the latter selfishly and fleetingly.

The poet is passionate and honest. He outlines the modest condition of Africa. It "leaks through the thatch" (l.15), a roof of grass and straw used as matting for the poor home built often of day. When it rains, "floods brim the banks". (l.6) At night also, "bats and owls tear through the eaves" (l.7, 8) making sleep unpleasant and difficult. Yet, the place has been a "healthy stock" for "several fingers" reaching to the sun. words such as "thatch", 'straw', 'clay', 'rains' 'floods' 'bats' and 'owls' are visual images representing poverty, hardship and vulnerability characterizing the Africa continent. The 'bats' and 'owls' which disturb the sleep of the people of the "poor mother's" home probably symbolize the European intruders and colonization of Africa. In addressing 'Abiku' this way, the poet appears to inviting similarly, the oscillating Africans to get settled in the continent and into its culture, since in it they can progress like the others who "reach to the sun" as Africa is a place "where many more mouths gladden the heart".

Summary and Conclusion

The discussion so far has revealed the dominant burden or concern of the poets of the six primary texts used. In *The Cathedral,* Awoonor laments the cutting of the 'tree' which is the symbol of African religious culture and condemns its comparatively "useless" replacement, the 'cathedral of doom', the symbol of European colonization. The same sentiment is carried by Awoonor in *The Weaver Bird* in which the 'tree' 'our only tree', the metaphor of Africa with its culture, is "desecrated" by the invader's "excrement", in their attempt to replace it with their "monument of tutelage" to inculcate Western colonialism or culture which is the white man's stamp of mental enslavement of Africa. In both poems, it is apparent that natives of Africa cannot find "meaning" and "sense" in the alien culture which replaces the "tree" and as such seek a restoration of their tree' and "old shrines". This search finds expression in *The Weaver Bird* thus: "we look for new homes every day. For new alters we strive to rebuild/ the old shrines defiled from the weaver's excrement". (l.15-17). In *Vanity* of Birago Diop is found the cause of this 'cry' for the restoration of the lost culture: 'our ears were deaf/ to the wild appeals" of our forefathers. Whilst David Diop's *The Vultures* expresses the poet's disappointment and the general seeming disillusionment of Africans in the European culture, and projects the strong feeling for return to African traditions, J.P. Clark's *Abiku* makes a strong appeal to Africans, who virtually demonstrate a loss of identity, to feel proud to return to their native identity or root. David Diop's role in *Africa* is to romanticize and project Africa in a most appealing manner.

It is concluded that the poets' use of symbolism in the selected poems has been so effective and forceful in their expression of the deep sense of loss of culture and the desire for the restoration of same.

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