

CONFLICTS AND CULTURE MUTATION IN DIPO KALEJAIYE'S, *THE CHOSEN BELOVED*

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Abstract

Human beings exist in a diverse world. There is a high tendency for complexities, resistance, and variations in setting boundaries between actions and inaction, leading to conflict. To define and maintain stability in society, conditions and causes for mutations in culture become an apparatus for centralizing human conflicts. The Chosen Beloved, written by Dipo Kalejaiye, is the yardstick used in this paper to measure the causes of deep changes in cultural dispositions when one culture is transported from its original location to a foreign land. This is an expository study of how changes in cultural perspectives affect relationships across all human existence spheres.

This study identifies how this situation could become a source of conflict. It examines the conflicts in *The Chosen Beloved* that were based on the transportation of Yoruba culture to the United States of America's (USA) setting. This paper found that some Yoruba cultural aspects were not well represented in the play.

Introduction

The totality of the individual reflects the culture of that society. The totality of the individual—birth, environment, history, growth, values, and beliefs—is all embedded in his culture. Therefore, culture is the totality of what and who we are. It is the summation of our lives, food, drink, dress, love, hate, and life. It is what a person is. Culture is the bridge through which constant changes occur. These may occur through information diffusion, innovation, and knowledge spread. Humans have always migrated from one location to another. Many factors are responsible for migration: political, economic, persecution, education, war, and the need to improve one's life situation. As people migrate from one part of the world to another, they go with their cultures. This leads to enculturation, culture hybridization, culture mutation, culture shock, and intercultural communication and interactions. This issue is interrogated using *The Chosen Beloved*, an unpublished play of Dipo Kalejaiye (a Nigerian) who moves

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to the USA along with his African culture. However, there is a need for conceptual clarification of culture, conflict, and culture mutation.

Culture

Culture has been viewed as “a notoriously difficult term to define” (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Kroeber and Kluckhorn critically reviewed concepts and definitions of culture and compiled a list of 164 different definitions (Spencer- Oatey, p.1). As one scholar pointed out, despite a century of efforts to adequately define culture, there was in the early 1990s no agreement among anthropologists regarding its nature (Apte, 1997, p. 200). Since 1867, attempts have been made to define culture, first by Matthew Arnold in his book *Culture and Anarchy* and later by Edward Taylor in *Primitive Culture* (1870). According to Taylor, culture is “that complex whole which include knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a human being as a member of society” Apart from Taylor, there have been many definitions of culture (Kreeber and Kluckhorn, 1952 p. 181 cited by Adler, 1994, p.14,) Schwartz, 1992, Hofstede, 1994, Matsumoto, 1996, Spencer- Oatey, 2008). Culture as the summation of a people’s life and state of being has certain characteristics (Spencer-Oatey, p.3). These include being manifested at different layers of depth, affecting behaviors and interpretation of behavior, because certain aspects of culture are physically visible while their meanings are invisible. Indeed, “cultural meaning...lies precisely and only in the way these practices are interpreted by the insiders” (Hofstede, p.8). To anthropologists, culture is a continuation of human existence through their way of life. Sociologists see culture as a tool for the transmission and reinforcement of social structure by institutions that are answerable to the structure. From the perspective of humanists, culture is the source of new ideas by gradually altering an aspect of its feature until it gains semblance to its original state despite a change in meaning or connotation (Wenglinsky, 2018). These views sum up human culture as a combination of attitudes, ideas, ideologies, artifacts, and behaviors transmitted among individuals over a period of time. In Amadi, Imoh-Itah and Obomanu’s (2016) submission

... Africa has powerful cultural heritage, including traditional kingdoms and cultural relics encompassing traditional dances, folklore, costumes, sculpture, pottery, body painter jewelry made from cowry shell berries, metal work, sculptures, feathers, masks, deities, ancestors, spirits, myths, artifacts, early Neolithic rock carvings, wood carvings, brass, crafts, leather art works, languages, religions, cuisine, dressing, hunting, and the Egyptian wonders a (pp. 27-28).

Culture has universal and distinctive elements, can be learned, is subject to gradual change, and its various parts are interrelated to some degree. It is a descriptive rather than an evaluative concept. In conceptualizing culture, some ideas about it are inadequate. These are the beliefs that:

- culture is homogenous
- culture is a thing
- It is unfairly distributed among users of a group
- It is an individual possesses a single culture
- Culture is custom, and
- Culture is timeless and changeless. (Avruch, 1998, p. 19)

These six points above are related and mutually reinforcing; and when used, they greatly diminish the utility of culture concept as an analytical tool for social action, that is, in conflict and conflict resolution. Therefore, on this premise, it can be deduced that culture is all around us and is one of the main tools of understanding human beings.

Culture Mutation

Culture mutation is a gradual (modification of a cultural item of one feature at a time until a complete metamorphosis occurs and a totally different but recognizable product emerges. Goncalo and Jonathan (2010)

explained that the word “mutation” is synonymous with genes and cultural traits. In a study related to bird species in natural habitats, they further identified a type of culture mutation as “modification of memes – to directional cultural change using an amenable study system...” (p.1). Pinker 1997; Henrich, Boyd, and Richerson (2008) explain cultural mutation as a modification of existing cultural traits or the creation of new cultural traits entirely in a new way. In a similar opinion, Amadi and Akena (2015) posits culture mutation as “...culture contact and domination resulting in dislodgement, alien practices and lifestyles which gradually calcifies – hence a new identity” (p. 16). Thus, cultural mutation will be taken as unplanned caused by a prevailing circumstance, which gives way to new ways of living, new ideals, and new ideas. It alters an already existing mode by modifying life and living in a society through inventions, discoveries, innovation, technology, or contact with other cultures. By implication, once a substantial amount of cultural mutation is involved in cultural change, other evolutionary mechanisms such as selection and drift, might be less important. Culture mutation allows for a realistic assessment and modifications to current rates of cultural evolution realistically (Laland et al, 2000). Amadi et al (2016) highlighted the modes of globalization-induced culture mutation

- Current globalization of and expansion in market consumption (of culture and information).
- The increasing dominance of communication industries over content industries
- The power of ICT’s (digital) over cultural and informational practices.
- Maintenance of content industries but emergence of common inter-industry characteristics (p. 29).

Worthy of note is that culture mutation “results to identity loss and culturally disoriented personality arising from novel attitudes alien to the norms and values of a people” (Amadi & Akena, p. 24).

Conflicts

Conflict is thought to arise from opposing interests and expectations involving scarce resources, goal divergence, and frustration. Barki and Hartwick (2004) elaborated upon these efforts by defining conflict as “a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals” (p. 234). Researchers have tended to define conflict in broad terms. For example, Jehn and Bendersky (2003) defined conflict as “perceived incompatibilities or discrepant views among the parties” (p. 189). According to De Dreu et al. (1999), conflict involves “the tension an individual or group experiences because of perceived difference between him or herself and another individual or group” (p. 369). Folarin (p.4) listed types of conflict as intrapersonal conflict—a sort of “man against self” (Lamb, 2008); interpersonal conflict—a sort of conflict between the desires of two or more persons (Nikolajeva, 2005); and man against society; man against nature—a type of ‘conflict when a man stands against a man-made or practice (Morell, 2009). The others he listed also include family, intergroup, intra-state, interstate, and global conflicts.

Authorial Background

Professor Oladipo Kalejaiye received his B.A. in Dramatic Arts from the University of California, Berkeley, California, in 1976, his M.A. Theater Arts from San Jose State University, San Jose, California, USA and a PhD in Theater Arts, from University of Ibadan in 2010. He is a poet, playwright, play director, and a recipient of the Ina Coolbirth Prize for Poetry, the Phelan Literary Award for Playwriting, The San Francisco Full Circle Theater and the Prince Community College Award for the Bridge Project. His working trajectory spans Nigeria and the USA. His working life took him to the United States, where he lectured at Prince George’s Community College, Largo, Maryland, USA, from 1998 to 2013, a period of 15 years. He worked as a lecturer at the University of Ibadan, 1979-1980, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria, 1980-1984 and Lead City University, Ibadan, where he was the first Professor and foundation head of the Department of Performing Arts and Culture from 2014 to

2015. He was also a Deputy Director/Head Academic at the National Institute for Cultural Orientation, Lagos, from 2010 to 2014.

Synopsis of the Chosen Beloved

The Chosen Beloved was written in 2002, during the sojourn of Dipo Kalejaiye in USA. The play addressed Africans in the Diaspora and their struggle to gain grip or come to terms with their cultures. Two groups of Diasporas are identified here. The first are those represented in Good Mama with her Afrocentric ideas who simply transported an African practice to the United States from its original soil in Nigeria. In an attempt for acceptance, a crisis erupts within the circle of the women's organization (The Chosen Beloved) and her family (her sons). The second category addresses Africans who have integrated so well into Western culture but still appreciates their 'Africaness'. However, they have lost touch with their core culture and so infuse a new culture via modernization, globalization, and technology. These two divides try to meet and create a balance that would sufficiently project their ideas and ideologies. In the process of creating equilibrium, a crisis breaks out, resulting in conflicts that in untold ways changed the course and direction of the lives of the characters in the play. Therefore, the play is a true reflection of souls in diverse states of confusion, uncertainty, denial, and a quest for control, scheming, and intrigue; it is a re-discovery of man's underlying selfish nature in manipulating actions and inactions to their advantage. *The Chosen Beloved* situates a metaphysical aspect of African culture (witchcraft) amid contravening perceptions through the spiritual essence of man (religion), which is core to his existence.

Conflicts in the Play

In *The Chosen Beloved*, Kalejaiye explores interpersonal, group, and generational conflict. Generational conflict is reflected in the conflict between Good Mama and many characters within the play. Good Mama's altercation with her daughter-in-law is a true reflection of a conflict that spans generations and cultural divides. Good Mama's concept and expectations of a good housewife and an African one include the ability to be a domesticated woman, cook good African food for her husband, do not share the household chores with her husband, and be respectful. Sharon does not meet all these expectations and not only has that, according to Ade, Good Mama hated Sharon.

Ade: She absolutely hates my wife, Sharon. Complains about her manners. Sharon cannot cook, she cannot shop, Sharon's earrings are too big, and she uses too much makeup. Why does Sharon wear high-heeled shoes all the time? Time? Why is Sharon not working? Sharon talks too much on the phone. (TCB, p.20)

The conflict between the mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law reflects the different perspectives of the roles that a woman in a patriarchal society like Africa is expected to play and the roles played by the modern woman in an advanced and westernized society. This conflict extends to Ade, her son who brought her to the USA in 'order to give her a better life' but she came to US and starts to turn everything in Ade's life 'upside down'. Good Mama started a club that meets at midnight in Ade's house, where she can talk, eat, sing, read Bible passages, and sing original compositions. They also recite incantations.

The Chosen Beloved kept Ade awake all through the night, and their activities affected Ade, the surgeon, who was expected to go 'into surgery room to perform 12-hour operation'. It was just a matter of time before this conflict came to a head, and Ade decided to put his feet down and take the unthinkable action of giving his Nigerian son to his mother.

Apostle: Then, what are you thinking?

Ade: I am thinking of sending her back to Nigeria... if possible on the next flight.

Apostle: You cannot send a dog back to its vomit. She left Nigeria solely to expand her church group, The Chosen Beloved. You must not send her back. Because your wife is complaining. That will be callous. (TCB, 2002, p.72-73)

Ade, a now westernized Nigerian-American, does not feel any qualms in sending his mother back to Nigeria to have peace in his home, retain his wife and have a settled home for him to carry out his responsibilities as a

surgeon to the generality of the patients. All the Nigerians in this play thought this was a high-handed act and not fitting for a mother to commit. Mope, the Apostle, and the Good Mama.

Good Mama: Sending me back to Nigeria will be trivial compared to what I will unleash like a poisonous snake.

Ade: Mama, you cannot scare me with that kind of talk. Just tell me; why did you do it? (TCB, p.55)

The conflict within the family and that between tradition and modernity percolated into Good Mama's group. The Chosen Beloved has become a big group that differs from the church/coven group that Good Mama brought from Nigeria. They have become big, have a website, are making more money, and are expanding to the UK and Europe. The organization has grown beyond Good Mama and her traditional concept of the group, which led to the conflict between Mope and Good Mama. Good Mama's running of the organization, her handling of the club's money, her secretive nature and refusal to open up on the processes of the group and the mystical elements of the group pitted her against Mope.

Mope: You have heard me. I say she is not fit to be our leader. She embezzles our club's money. Think of how big we have become. Money keeps pouring into our club. (TCB, p.72)

This led to the final battle between them. Even after Good Mama brought Mope's daughter back from the land of the dead. This confrontation led to Good Mama's demise.

Ade: A mysterious death. I feel no pulse. Mama, answer me... Please

Mama, answer me...

Tameka: I'm sorry Mope... I understand.

Good Mama: S...top masquerade. (Good Mama dies).

Mope: Still singing the dirge. (TCB, p.89)

As Tameka pointed out, The Chosen Beloved became a truly 'American club not this pseudo-African club it is right now' as Tameka mentioned. The questionand, however, is this true? Mope's control of the secret mystical aspects of the club, The Chosen Beloved, is still African but now in American plumes. The content of what makes the club African still exists, but a mutation has taken place. How did Nigerian culture mutate in this play?

Mutations in Culture in the Chosen Beloved

The Chosen Beloved by Dipo Kalejaiye exhumes some factors that produce cultural conflict. These identified factors will be discussed as conflicts arising out of cultural mutation in the play text.

- Generational cultural conflict between parents as found in Good Mama and her children
- Domestic culture conflict (among Good mama, Ade, Femi and Sharon)
- Conflicts in organizational culture (between Good Mama and members of her club)

These three sources of conflict are represented in the following model.

Formulation of Interlocking Culture Mutation Conflict Model (I-C-M-C-Model).

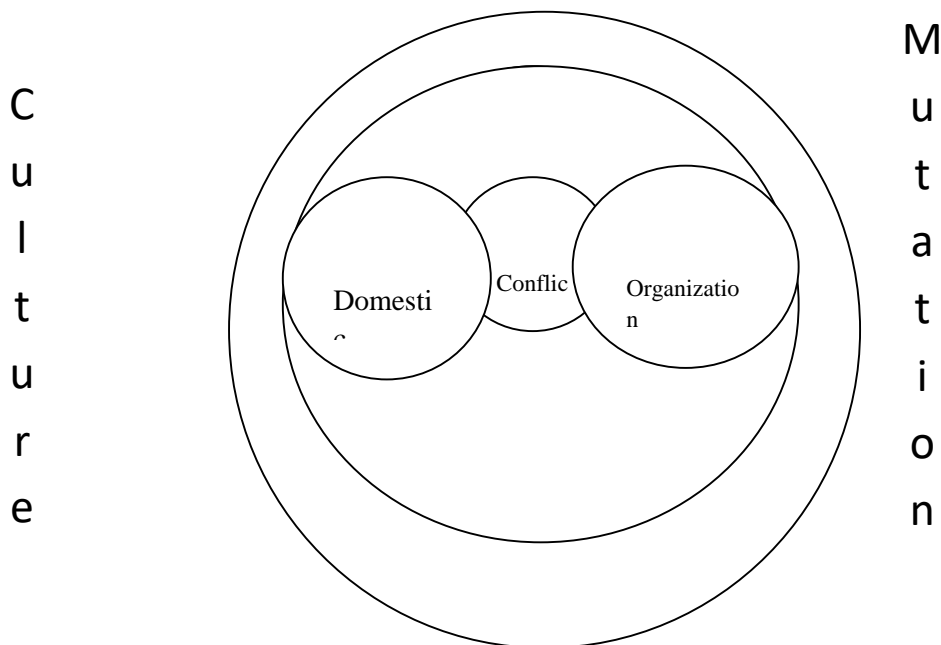


Fig.1:

I-C-M-C-Model Adedina and Adedina (2020)

The model conceptualizes the idea of the prominence of cultural mutation elements in plays. As a channel of communication, the play is created, conceived, and produced within a given cultural environment and veritable conveyor for play enactment to the audience. What is being expressed through the I-C-M-C-Model is that every play is created and produced through generational, domestic and organizational cultural conflict, which makes the play functional and purposeful to the audience and society at large. The outer circle is a representation of mutated cultures within a society; the inner and connected circles are the three identified conflicts caused by cultural mutations that touch base with the new culture. The connected center circle is the conflict that strings the other connected circles in a web. Discussions on conflicts caused by culture mutation will revolve around this model to explore and determine the extent of interactions as well as provide means of unlocking conflicts by disengaging and detailing causes of conflicts in the play text.

Culture is an integral aspect of conflict resolution. Unconsciously, culture influences conflict and imperceptibly resolves it. Each culture dictates what is right, normal, appropriate, or expected. However, once others do not meet these conditions, cultural expectations are different. These differences or diverse opinions may be taken in good or bad faith, bearing in mind that a rightly accepted norm to one group may be strange or wrong. By linking culture to identity in terms of making meanings of self and existence, culture in conflict is neither central, implicit, nor explicit. The Chosen Beloved in Nigeria is nothing but witches' coven. The mystical power of Good Mama, the incantations, the songs, the secrecy, the masquerade and its invocation, and the various rules guiding the group make it a witches' coven. The song, '*fún wa l'èni tó kàn làti inú ẹbí rẹ*' (give us the next person from your family) and the injunction for members not to cry;

Tameka: A taboo for a member of the Chosen Beloved to cry?

Mope: Yes, you must not cry even if your firstborn child died. Even if the Chosen Beloved kills your mother... You must not cry! You really mustn't cry. (TCB, p. 6-7)

The ability to turn the baby inside a pregnant woman into a stone and to fly through an incantation signalled the organization as being a witches' coven. In addition, their time of meeting, *ògànjó òru*, (midnight) that is, twelve to three, is usually the time witches meet in their coven.

Ade: Yes, or what else would you call it? A club meeting from midnight to three hours a.m.; singing, clapping, reading passages of the Bible aloud and ...and...reciting incantations? So, what exactly do you do at this em... club? (TCB, p.19)

An all-female club into which men are not invited and with the above and below characteristics is nothing but witches' coven. As the Yoruba call them, an '*àgbájọ ìyá mi Òṣòròngà*' (Mother witches). Good Mama's power to make a king abdicate and prostrate to her shows nothing but the overriding power of witches. However, by the time the group was transported to the USA through Good Mama and Mope, the mutation started. While still meeting at midnight—a fundamental rule for the coven—it became a church group. In America, The Chosen Beloved mutated into a more globalized, technologically driven and a philanthropic organization. The club is now being researched and studied by researchers.

Ade: Dr. Tameka J. Phillips she holds a PhD in Women Studies. She is from The University of California, Berkeley.

Apostle: Yes, yes, God be praised that Mama's Club is waxing strong in the United States.

Ade: Many more are coming. I have received a list. More researchers are coming From Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Cornell ... (TCB, p.27)

All the above developments and mutations created conflicts in the group and those impacted by the group. Ade's personal space is taken over, his wife is sent out, and his home is taken over by the members of the Chosen Beloved.

Ade: Well, I am sorry... every member of the club lives in my house. I realize that's a problem. (TCB, p.26)
The overcrowding of Ade's house—although he was paid for housing—by Dr. Tameka Phillips during her research—and the breakdown of relations between his wife and mother—are two of the impacts on the westernized Ade. The growth of the group and the rolling in of money also impacted Good Mama's first son, Femi, the Apostle. His mother sent him an evangelical philanthropy sum of thirty thousand dollars. The amount of money that came into the group, the spread of the club all over the world, and the interest in the club made Mope have ambitions.

Mope: Take over from Good Mama.

Tameka: Take over? How do you plan to do that?

Mope: Ask her to retire?

Tameka: Yes, she is too old anyway (TCB, p.72)

Authorial background and influence on *The Chosen Beloved*

Oladipo Kalejaiye reflected these centrifugal forces tearing the Chosen Beloved into pieces and the mutations occurring in the group through the characters he created. Good Mama as a traditionalist, dictatorial, secretive, scheming, and self-opinionated individual rules the club with heavy hands. She kept the most mystical aspect of the club to herself, and because she could not subdue Sharon because she was an incarnate of Osun, the river goodness and 'her head is strong', then she needs to uproot her from her son's house and plant a more pliable Nigerian woman- Abiku as Ade's wife. Ade not only rejected his wife being sent away but also resisted Abiku's advances. Mope, the fast learner, modernized but rooted in tradition is nothing but a better schemer than Good Mama and a strategist. The money and power of the re-engineered Chosen Beloved made her attempt a take-over of the club, which she did and defeated Good Mama, leading to Good Mama's death. Tameka, a researcher, intellectual, and later Mope supporter, is an American Professor of Women studies. She is genuinely interested in The Chosen Beloved as a club and inquisitive enough to find out what makes the club distinct and a source of power for women. As a former college mate of Sharon and a feminist, she opposes Good Mama's sending away Sharon, Ade's wife. She is a truly modernized American who is against the misappropriation of funds, and who would like the Chosen Beloved to become a more modernized club that appeals more to young Western women, if good Mama could only retire and leave the reins of the club in the hands of young women like Mope. Femi, the Apostle and Ade's elder brother, is one called into the mission and a conduct pipe for his mother, Good Mama. Kalejaiye created him as a representative of present-day Nigerian "pentecostals" whose stock in trade is acquiring material things rather than evangelizing and populating God's Church.

Ade is a westernized, sceptical individual who loves his mother enough to bring her to the US in 'order to give her a better life'. He now regrets the act because his mother, Good Mama, has upturned his house, sent his wife away, and schemed to give him a new wife. A more pliable wife than the woman he loved (Sharon) who incidentally, is not African enough for his mother. The incantations, songs, and the introduction of the masquerade of death in the play all reflect the hybrid background of his authors. A major question arising from the foregoing is how successful he has been in doing all of these.

To a non-Yoruba, the incantations, songs, and description of The Chosen Beloved and the characteristics of Good Mama will reflect how the witches are, and the songs and incantations will represent what they are meant to be. However, the incantations and songs depicting the Chosen Beloved at their meetings are not in-depth. They are

more of a creation meant to appeal to a westernized audience. For example, the incantations are incantations that non-initiate and not so adept believers in Yoruba traditional religion use. The deep and rooted incantation used in Ile Awo and in the meetings of the witches are not the ones used by Kalejaiye in his play and the songs. The introduction of the death masquerade during Good Mama's death scene is also incongruous and does not reflect the manner in which witches kill their victims. To a western audience, that Kalejaiye directs his play to, the activities depicted show the exotic culture and beliefs of Africa. Although they may appeal to a western audience, they are not deep enough to depict the mystical and mythical aspect of culture he is trying to represent. A reading of Wole Soyinka's many layered dialogs of Olohun Iyo in *Death and the King's Horseman*, placed side by side with the incantations in *The Chosen Beloved*, will bring out this point. However, one thing is clear: *The Chosen Beloved* is Kalejaiye's attempt to showcase his hybrid backgrounds, and he is successful in doing this.

Conclusion

It is clear in Kalejaiye's *The Chosen Beloved* that the cultural mutation arising from the migration of people to a new land different from their native land occurred. This is seen in the depiction of the Nigerians in the play who found themselves in the United States. Good Mama, a powerful Nigerian woman who brought a king to heel in Nigeria, was brought low in the United States because the situations in America are different from those in Nigeria. In Nigeria, for example, her own supporters would not have allowed Mope to have the upper hand like she did because they would have warned Good Mama even before she started her schemes. In the US, the only person Good Mama put her hope in backstabbed her because of power and money and did not spare her even when she saved her daughter, Abiku, from death.

For example, the altercation between Sharon and Good Mama would not have reached the extent of Ade confronting his mother. The reason being that in Nigeria, Sharon's parents would have been consulted and made to know of their daughter's misbehavior and taking Good Mama's reputation into consideration, they would have supported her against their daughter because what Good Mama is asking from Sharon would not be new to them. In addition, in Nigeria and Africa in general, both husband and wife are married to their partner's families as well and not just to each other, which is not so in the diaspora. Sharon's parents would also naturally expect her to behave in accordance with her mother-in-law's demands. More so, Sharon in a Nigerian setting would not have been in a position to provide conditions for returning to Ade's house.

In summary, Kalejaiye's *The Chosen Beloved* is a superb attempt to showcase what happens to a culture that moves to a different climate and environment. However, where there are well-delineated conflicts that explore the origin and impact of cultural hybrids, the examples of Nigerian culture songs, incantations, and cultural elements used in the play were not sufficiently deep. Although cultural mutations were well explored and defined, the need to use more authentic and deep Nigerian cultural elements, such as incantations, songs, verbal arts, and cultural activities, stuck out as a sore thumb. A comprehensive research into the various aspects of Yoruba verbal arts, such as àyájó, ògèdè and òfò (incantations and invocations) for example along with the practices in witches covens would have gone a long way in authenticating the depictions in the play.

The play structure needs to be tightened, especially the ending, to create a more plausible event that can happen in the witches' coven. If Good Mama's spirit had been summoned and asked to perform an act that leads to death, then it would have been similar to what usually happens in a witches' coven. The mixture and infusion of Egungun (Masquerade) cult in the witches meeting does not represent that aspect of Yoruba culture well. These are two different practices in Yorubaland that stand independently of each other. Masquerades may not be seen in witches' coven because of their functions. Overall, the play is a good attempt at showcasing Nigeria, especially Yoruba culture, to an American audience. The clear depiction of the clash between traditional Yoruba values and culture

and modern, globalized American culture, structure, and values in the play cannot be glossed over. Overall, Kalejaiye explored his hybridism and the effects of being in the diaspora on his culture through the play *The Chosen Beloved*.

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