

**INTER-CULTURAL DIFFUSION AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE
'WEST/AFRICAN' IDENTITY: THE PERSPECTIVE OF
JAMES ENE HENSHAW**

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RESUME

i

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Inter-Cultural Diffusion and the Evolution of the ‘West/African’ Identity: The Perspective of James Ene Henshaw

From the bastions of Islam in the Middle East to the receptive liberal nations of West Africa including Nigeria, the West’s cultural values in terms of music, fashion, language. etc have cast a spell on the rest of the world.

Nduka Otiono

In this paper, we shall examine two works of art – *This is Our Chance* (1956) and *Medicine For Love* (1964) – written by Nigeria’s foremost modern playwright, James Ene Henshaw. Henshaw, a surgeon, stands out distinctly as a pioneer African writer who has consistently used his art to graphically portray the debilitating impact of western civilization on African culture and worldview (Omobowale, 1999). In carrying out this onerous task, Henshaw has also highlighted the need for an integration of positivist elements derivable from western civilization into African culture as a means of elevating the ordinary African above the level of mediocrity and backwardness, which western bias and prejudices as well as the African’s lack of self-esteem have consigned him for almost five years. Joseph Bruchae’s description of Henshaw’s writing philosophy is very apposite at this stage. According to Bruchae:

James Ene Henshaw has been criticized for the simplicity of his plays...Part of the reason may be found in his statement that he was chosen to write “to the African audience”, feeling that the problem of how to get African countries or tribes to understand each other is far more important than “explaining the African to the non-African’... True. Henshaw’s plays do not delve into the psychological depths or the metaphysical speculations of Soyinka’s... he knows his depth and keeps to it, writing competent, well-staged sophisticated comedies (246).

Does it therefore mean that – because Henshaw’s play’s do not “delve into the psychological depths or the metaphysical speculations of Soyinka” for instance – he is an inferior playwright? One finds an element of ambiguity and contradiction in the critiques of Henshaw’s works by some critics. For instance, while a critic like Akanji Nasiru sees Henshaw’s plays as “not serious and an over-simplification of life” (68), he goes ahead to contend that they are “well-contrived and entertaining” (65) and that:

His first two volumes, *This is Our Chance and Children of the Goddess* are remarkable for their folk-tale-like straightforwardness and simplicity. Henshaw has in fact modified some popular African tales in plays like *This is Our Chance*, *The Jewels of the Shrine* and *Magic in the Blood*. All he has done is to transplant them (just as any brilliant traditional story-teller does) into fairly contemporary times so that they have relevance to communities undergoing changes as a result of their contact with foreigners and foreign ways of life In each case, Henshaw brings in some element of modernism so that the moral of the play is applicable to a developing community faced with the problem of the choice of a way of life... Henshaw has a moralistic intention in these plays. (63-64)

In an interview this researcher had with Henshaw in July 1999, the playwright, contrary to Nasiru’s population, affirmed that he was not influenced by African folktales when he wrote his plays. According to Henshaw, his primary objective as a writer was to use his works of art to inform, educate and entertain his reader to the best of his ability. Even Nasiru acknowledges that Henshaw has performed this role creditably in his “remarkable” plays. According to him:

As the earliest Nigerian playwright to be published, Henshaw fulfils an important objective – to provide plays dealing with the situations and characters familiar to African audiences. (65)

As implied in the excerpt above, Henshaw's plays chronicle some of the different phases in the evolution of the modern African society as we shall see in our subsequent analyses of *This is Our Chance* and *Medicine for Love*.

Structurally, *This is our Chance* is a very simple play. As a hilarious comedy, its plot structure is not complicated and it affords the reader the opportunity to understand, quite easily, the thematic preoccupations of the playwright in this very interesting work of art. It is also a work of art where Henshaw's professional background as a medical doctor exerts a lot of influence on the ideas subsumed within the ambits of the play, some of which have been derived from medicine. The setting of the play is Koloro, a rural community in West Africa. Koloro, symbolizes the African continent in the late nineteenth century, when it was an embodiment of undefiled simplicity and innocence. That Koloro symbolizes the whole of Africa becomes obvious at a stage when Damba, chief of Koloro pours libation to the ancestral gods of this rural village and refers to them as Tunde Damba, Kofi Damba, Asuquo Damba and Okeke Damba. Tunde is a Yoruba name from the Western part of Nigeria. Kofi is a Ghanaian name, Asuquo is an Efik name from the South-Eastern part of Nigeria while Okeke is an Igbo name and it is also from the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. Koloro is therefore an amalgam of several African cultures. The fact that these different names are ascribed to Koloro's ancestors establishes right from the beginning of the play, one of the major themes of this play, which has been variously identified by many critics, including Oyin Ogunba and Chris Nwamuo and which is Henshaw's call for tribal and cultural integration of Africa's diverse ethnic groupings. That the play is an invocation to all Africans to unite is also implied in the title *This is Our Chance*. The imperative tone of the title is quite obvious

and Henshaw uses the collective pronoun 'our' to associate and identify himself with the communal interests of Africans as a whole and the desire of African nationalists in the 1940s and 1950s to move the whole of Africa forward from the throes of cultural and political backwardness.

Central to the realization of the thematic concerns of Henshaw in this play are three characters. They are Kudaro, Princess of Koloro, Bambulu, Kudaro's tutor and Prince Ndamu of Mboli, who is Kudaro's suitor in the play. The romantic relationship, which exists between Kudaro and Ndamu, is quite similar to that of Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare's play of the same title. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the two principal characters who are in love with each other commit suicide, a tragic end precipitated by their parents' refusal to break away from tradition and give their consent to the consummation of the relationship. However, while *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy and while it may have served as a pre-text for the creation of the characters of Kudaro and Ndamu, the two plays are different because *This is Our Chance* ends happily.

In the first scene of Act One, we are introduced to Kudaro and her servant, Ayi. The dialogue, which ensues between them helps the reader to recognize a number of radical ideas presented by Henshaw in this play. Africa has always been a male-centred and very conservative society where women are relegated to the status of second-class citizens and it is obvious that Henshaw finds this marginalization of the African woman revolting. In the play, the first impression that the reader gets of Kudaro is that she is a proud, arrogant and self-centred woman as reflected in this dialogue between her and Ayi:

Kudaro: Ayi
Ayi: Yes, Madam

Kudaro: You have never told me that I am beautiful. (All the time gazing intently at her own image)
Ayi: No, Madam.
Kudaro: Why not?
Ayi: It is not a woman's place to tell other women such things. Madam
Kudaro: (Turning to her, enraged). And why not? Certainly they do it in Lagos, Accra and other big towns (10).

However at another level of interpretation, Kudaro's pride and impertinence become a positive asset if we consider the idea that Henshaw may have used her to create what he conceives should be the personality of the modern African woman who should be independent, assertive and exuding confidence at all times. Even Ayi falls into this category of an independent woman. She is not just the ordinary palace servant who shakes and shivers at the sight of her boss and who will do everything within her power to satisfy her Kudaro's whims and caprices. We see that she is not intimidated by Kudaro's seemingly domineering nature. Instead of being a cowering simpleton, she is a bastion of strength. In a very respectful manner, she shows that she is not afraid of Kudaro, nor is she intimidated by her mistress' status as Princess of Koloro. Through these two female characters, the African woman, whether she has an urban orientation like Kudaro, or she is domiciled in a rural environment like Ayi, is urged to always assert her rights.

The bone of contention between Ayi and Kudaro is the latter's desire to move away from Koloro and elope to one of the big towns with Ndamu, her suitor. Ndamu could be a pun of the Hausa name Adamu, which is itself a variant of the name, Adam, the biblical name of the first man created by God. In the light of this, Ndamu becomes a symbol for African men who Henshaw urges to always endeavour to assert their rights when confronted by odds, which threaten to destroy their existence. For Kudaro, a

village like Koloro symbolizes cultural backwardness, economic stagnation and political retardation. In her view, the people of Koloro are “dull” and her father’s decision to bring her back to Koloro from the city where she was receiving western education was unreasonable and she criticizes Damba, her father, for this:

There is no need for him to make anybody unhappy simply because it is his turn to get old ... How I used to sit in the parks in the big town and watch little birds chirping at my feet. Here, what did I find? I have to sit here and watch owls hooting from tree to tree. Ah, Ayi, you don’t know what you lose by remaining in this village (11)

In Africa, owls are symbols of evil and in the perspective of Kudaro, Koloro, where these owls reside is synonymous with evil. At this stage she informs Ayi of her affair with Ndamu, who hails from a village, which Ayi recognizes as the abode of Koloro’s enemies. As the conversation between Kudaro and Ayi progresses, the reader no longer sees Kudaro as an embodiment of pride but as a victim of circumstances, caught within the stifling, gripping web of tradition. As the Princess of Koloro, she knows that it will be a daunting task convincing her father to approve her marriage to Ndamu. However, despite this obstacle, she and Ndamu formulate a plan which she intimates Ayi with. According to her:

Since my father will not allow me to marry him and his father will not allow him to marry me, we have planned to run away – and get married. So, if you wake up one morning and do not find me, know that I have gone to get married (12).

We see Ayi move from the position of Kudaro’s servant to her confidant. The moral embedded in this part of the play is very poignant and it is directed not only at women but at men also. Any individual who wishes to earn the respect of others must first respect

himself, by being proud of what he or she is and most importantly an epitome of dignity. It is Ayi's dignified posture in her relationship with Kudaro that enhances her status and earns her Kudaro's respect and admiration.

As earlier stated, Bambulu, Kudaro's tutor, is one of the principal characters in this play and in fact contributes more than any other character to the resolution of the conflict between Koloro and Udura. Bambulu is the quintessential cultural hybrid, who has imbibed ideas derived from western culture and African civilization. He dresses in 'very well-made suit of English clothes' but works in a village where western civilization is almost anathema. Immediately he is introduced into the play. Bambulu's ebullient and sagacious nature becomes evident. He has just invented an anti-snake vaccine and he asserts:

This is the child of my brain, the product of my endeavour, and the materialization of my inventive genius. It is an anti-snake-bite vaccine. Western science has not succeeded in producing anything so potent. But 'I, Bambulu... have, without laboratories, without any help, produced this medicine from the herbs of his village... I am a Scientist, I am a Catalyst. You may one day find this anti-snake-bite vaccine very useful. It is a remedy not only for snake bites and various insect stings, but also for various canine and reptilian contingencies...(13).

At different stages of this play, like in the extract above, Henshaw calls for a symbiotic fusion of what we have described as positivist elements derivable from tradition (African culture) and modernity (Western civilization) into a cohesive whole. We see this position manifesting itself through the relationship between Ndamu and Kudaro, in the resolution of the centuries old conflict between Koloro and Ndura, in the personality of Bambulu and in the discovery of the anti-snake-bite vaccine by him. While it is true that Bambulu's vaccine is made from herbs, which Bambulu had sourced

from the village, it is also true Bambulu's background as a scientist is not in doubt and we find that he is the voice of Henshaw as physician. Henshaw also uses this character to stress the curative potency of African traditional medicine.

In a discussion with Damba and Ansa, King and Queen of Koloro respectively, Bambulu speaks competently about vitamins and we see the intrusion of Henshaw's medical background into the facilitation of the ideas presented through the play. A very good illustration is the scene where Damba and Anse maintain unequivocally, in a discussion with Bambulu, that the King's mother, Grandmother, "died of vitamins". Bambulu refutes this erroneous claim and explains:

...if the old lady fell into a pit and broke her neck, death in that case would not be due to Vitamins. It would be due to asphyxia and respiratory paralysis consequent upon the fracture-dislocation of one or more of her cervical vertebrae (16).

The herbs represent African culture and Henshaw's position at the time this play was written was that the integration of African culture and western civilization will make the African continent a better place for all and sundry. In his view, there are certain cultural elements embedded within the ambits of African culture, which should not be discarded. For instance, we discover that he makes the role of the aged of fortune-teller, who features in this play, a very significant one. Through the old man's prophecy, Henshaw emphasizes the efficacy of the metaphysical aspect of African culture. This character functions as a soothsayer and soothsaying in the pre-colonial African past was an integral part of African culture, which Henshaw believes is still relevant even with the advent of modernity. At a point in the play, the fortune-teller tells Kudaro, Bambulu and Ayi:

A mighty wind shall a great rain shall fall, much harm shall be done. But blow, out of destruction there shall be calm,

and all shall not be the same again. A mighty wind shall blow and all shall not be the same again (14).

The prophecy in the context of this play can be interpreted in at least two ways. At the first level of interpretation, the “mighty wind” and “great rain” which shall cause a great destruction in the land is the scrapping of the age-long traditional values which occurs as a result of the advent of the whiteman and the subsequent introduction of western civilization, which represents modernity, into Africa. Subsequently, things have fallen apart, never to be the same again. The fortune-teller also prophesizes that there would be calm after the storm and Henshaw believes that calm can only be restored through the successful integration of the positive aspects of western civilization and African culture respectively into a single union.

Damba, tall, elderly, agile and an embodiment of dignity represents African culture and civilization, the bastion of support which Africans had relied upon for centuries before the coming of the whiteman. However, he is illiterate. That he is uneducated is a great personality flaw and a stain on his escutcheon because it beclouds his sense of judgement. Ansa, his wife, who is said to be about his age, despite her good nature, is a symbol of docility, which is a trait that Henshaw disapproves of in African women. Ansa cuts the figure of the traditionally oriented African woman, forever subservient and eternally condemned to a life of servitude operating in a very denigrating manner under the wings of her lord and master, her husband.

One of Damba’s supporters in his relentless and very bitter campaign against the interests of the people of Udura – in his bid to ensure that the traditional values of Koloro inviolate-is Ajugo, the Prime Minister. Ajugo has a domineering and very aggressive personality and we see this vividly depicted when he drags Enusi, who is also a Chief of

Koloro, before Damba's court for the adjudication of a matter. Ajugo accuses Enusi of betraying the trust of the people by supporting the marriage of a young male indigene of Koloro to a lady from Udura. He tells Damba:

Your Grace, a young man from this village has actually been married to a girl from Udura... Tradition has received a blow in the face... Enusi actually supported the idea. He went as far as to question the custom of marrying only to our own people (18-19).

What Ajugo advocates for in the excerpts above is enculturation, which in Henshaw's perspective is retrogressive. According to Marvin Harris:

Enculturation is a partly conscious and partly unconscious learning experience whereby the older generation invites, induces and compels the younger generation to adopt traditional ways of thinking and behaving (88).

Damba's anger about this transgression of the traditions of the land, which forbid the people of Koloro from having any relationship with the villagers from Udura, culminates in the detention of Bambulu who is responsible for the intrusion of modernist ideas into Koloro. Thus, we find that the struggle for supremacy in Koloro is between Damba, assisted by Ajugo, who are the custodians of the traditional values of Koloro and Bambulu, the western educated African who recognizes the virtues inherent in western civilization.

While it is true that there is a paucity of critical materials on Henshaw's works, the few available ones usually emphasize the point that in *This is Our Chance*, Henshaw simply advocates for inter-tribal marriages in Africa. A good example is Nwamuo's statement that:

In *This is Our Chance*, he deals with inter-tribal enmity and prejudice which influence inter-tribal marriages (113).

To an extent, this is a valid assertion. In fact, Henshaw put this into practice by marrying outside his tribe. His wife is Igbo, while he is Efik. However, as we have tried to point out above, the overriding thematic preoccupation of Henshaw in this play is not 'inter-tribal enmity' or the 'prejudice which influence inter-tribal marriages' but his desire to enlighten his audience about the virtues of integrating African culture and western civilization. Like, Nwamuo rightly points out, Henshaw, through *This Is Our Chance*, diagnosed the cultural sickness paralyzing most African countries before independence (113). The 1940s and the 1950s were periods of great cultural revivals in Africa. A lot of African nationalists, fighting for the independence of their countries from European colonial powers were affirming their blackness by dropping their Western/Christian names, becoming adherents of traditional African religion and advocating for the reorientation of Africans who had become lackeys of the whiteman and his culture. For Henshaw, this was an idealist position, which was unachievable and unrealizable. The whiteman's culture has come to stay in Africa and the adoption of its most positive elements would assist the African to come to terms with the complex nature of the 20th century which has beginning to manifest even in 1945 when this play was first staged. Hence, a very pragmatic Henshaw, through *Bambuolu*, calls for the synthesization of both cultures for the overall benefit of the diverse peoples of the African continent.

In the play, Bambulu's detention on the orders of Damba coincides with Kudaro's attempt at eloping with Ndamu to the big city to start a new life. Unfortunately, the couple's plans are nipped in the bud and in the process Kudaro falls into the hands of the warriors of Udura while Ndamu is captured by the soldiers of Koloro. The resultant

effect of this development is a political stalemate. When an ambassador from the court of Mboli, Chief of Udura, comes to Koloro to request for Ndamu's freedom, Damba retorts:

Go tell Mboli, the country Chief of Udura, that I Damaba, the Great King of Koloro, hold captive his son who was actually caught trying to run away with my daughter. This fellow knows too well that your village and ours are on terms of unspeakable enmity... Ajugo, send this creature back to the prison! The men to arms: all the women to the farms! Gather the harvest immediately; prepare to get the children into hiding places: mind the cattle; call the rain-makers and tell them to send down a mighty downpour on Mboli's village (24-25).

Damba calls for war to resolve the crisis. For Henshaw, as conscience of society, this is a negative attitude to the problems caused by the incursion of western civilisation – which Udura to a certain extent represents – into Africa. He posits through Ansa, Queen of Koloro, that dialogue and compromise are better and more desirable than confrontation. Ansa, as leader of the womenfolk in Koloro, asks to be given a chance to mediate in the crisis. She tells Damba:

I have asked you to forget about war with Udura or any other village. Send a message to the wife of Chief Mboli. Tell her that since you men have failed to solve this problem, we, the women of both villages, will solve it (25).

This is the only time that Ansa asserts her rights to freedom of speech in the play. In some of the scenes where she features, she always aligns herself to Damba's position. However, in Scene I of Act II, she speaks (out) her mind but her "freedom" is short-lived. Her speech makes Damba (to) laugh her to scorn as he spurns her advice and offer of assistance in settling the imbroglio amicably:

Sit down. You are not yourself, or else you would not talk like that Ha-ha-ha-ha!... The women will solve tradition. I know you are not well... You are too soft Ansa... And yet this is one of these riddles of nature that a weak creature

such as you are, should be together with me; a lamb and lion under one roof (25-26).

Before the resolution of the crisis engendered by Ndamu and Kudaro's love affair, Ansa dies. Her death is symbolic because it represents Henshaw's desire for the emergence of a new crop of modern women who will be independent and who will not be easily intimidated by the menfolk. In this play, Henshaw exhibits a feminist streak, as the new African woman emerges from the ashes of Ansa's funeral pyre. The ideas that Henshaw raises in this 1959 play, that the African woman is an indispensable backbone of society and should therefore not be relegated to an inferior status, has continued to be a very important theme in the works of different African playwrights. A good example is *Tell it to Women* (1995) written by one of Nigeria's foremost female playwrights, Tess Onwueme. In one of the scenes in the play, two male characters, Koko and Okeke, indigenes of Idu, affirm the pre-eminent position of women – represented by the Omu or market women leader and the Umuada, the market women association – in the society. according to Koko:

Look who is more powerful than the Omu of Idu? Can any man dare stand his ground in the market place... I wonder if these women ever remember the role of the Umuada of Idu when they talk about power? Who wields more power than the Umuada of Idu? (261-262)

Ayi and Kudaro symbolize the new African woman that Henshaw envisages in the play. Ayi is bold and speaks with forthrightness as evident in her speech when she announces Ansa's death to Damba and members of his court. For someone who is supposed to be a servant, - which in fact is the unenviable status women are traditionally relegated to in Africa – Ayi speaks confidently, courageously and forcefully. In response to a statement by Damba, she barks back:

I trifle not, but I must speak my mind. For long I have seen her serve and love you as never a woman has, I have seen her organize the women of this village in their farms and in their homes. I have seen her trying to do everything to make you, and this village, worthy of her. And yet as she lies dying, tortured by all that your stubbornness has brought to her, you sit here and talk of principles, of customs and traditions, and listen to the advice of a man who has not feelings at all (30).

After Ansa's death and Ayi's defiant outburst, a perplexed Damba finds himself in a quandary, wavering between standing resolutely on the part of tradition or rooting for [a] change. An adamant Ajugo warns Damba that the consequence of changing tradition is death. Damba decides to die by taking poison and Bambulu and Ndamu are brought to the court to witness Damba's death before their own deaths. The point which Henshaw is making is that anyone or any society inextricably bound to tradition and unreceptive to positive change is destined for destruction. When a boisterous Bambulu and Ndamu are brought before Damba, the reader notices a change in Bambulu's character. Despite his western education, with its modernist ideas, he has come to realize that the soothsayer who symbolizes some of the positivist aspects of African culture is not a fraud:

When the prophet talked of rain and storm, my Lord, I did not believe him, but I see now that there was veracity in his prophecy. How is it that a great chief as you should be a prisoner in your kingdom? (35).

When Ajugo tells Bambulu that he also has to take poison and die, Henshaw's medical background again comes to the fore when Bambulu, in a very comical way retorts:

What, Sir, is the composition of this poison which you want us to drink? Is it a miotic, a pyretic, a caustic, a mydriatic, a hypnotic, an anaesthetic or a narcotic (35).

Damba, Bambulu and Ndamu are saved from the jaws of death with the sudden, unexpected arrival of Kudaro from Udura. She is accompanied by an ambassador who explains to Damba that Kudaro, using the anti-snake-bite vaccine given to her by Bambulu had saved Mboli, King of Udura from death after he was bitten by a snake. At this stage, Damba's daughter's name becomes symbolic. We have established in this study that in giving names to the characters that people this play, Henshaw had been influenced by ideas drawn from different African cultures. Among the Yorubas, Kudaro means "Death stands apart or alone". Death, here, also means political backwardness, economic stagnation and social degeneration which the people of Koloro are enjoined to renounce. Ajugo is the harbinger of death and with his rigid, uncompromising stance on the issue of tradition, he represents all these negative things mentioned above and which would only destroy the society if they are allowed to flourish. Thus, at this stage, Henshaw simply calls for a separation from the body politic of society those vices and attitudes which are capable of hindering the movement of the African continent into the new phase of enlightenment which western civilization and ultimately modernity entail. With the safe arrival of his daughter, an elated Damba condemns Ajugo to death:

(Then with the poison in his hand he approaches Ajugo menacingly, and handing it to him says). Take your reward. You shall die for your wickedness. Stand aside (Ajugo moves to a corner of the stage slowly but not cowardly...) (34)

Bambulu's transformation from prisoner to hero does not stop him from pleading for Ajugo, whom Damba banishes from his court. Bambulu is not vindictive, a quality which Henshaw recommends to everyone for emulation. If we look closely at Bambulu's name from a Yoruba point of view, it is possible to derive a meaning from it. Bambulu

(pronounced Bami bu luu or Bami bu luu) means “Help me to enlarge his coast” or “help me to add to what he has”. “Coast”, which may stand for “awareness”, or good fortune among many other meanings has a positive connotation. Thus, Bambulu becomes a tool in the hands of Henshaw to make Africans become aware of the immense positive opportunities, which await them if they accept western civilization or modernity as a partner in progress for the development of the African continent. Bambulu’s final statement about Ajugo, at the end of the play, brings this point out very clearly as it is the kernel of Henshaw’s message. To Bambulu, Ajugo (or tradition) is not an embodiment of darkness. He says this of the departing Ajugo.

There goes a light out of this room: steadfast and honest, even to the point of cruelty. A vacuum is created. What shall we put in his place? To our society he is like a foundation-stone. Let no one, therefore cast him off. But let us receive from him those virtues which we so badly need and which we lack. My Lord, I think you for all that you have done, and for the promises you have made. We shall need the schools not only to teach the children how to read and write, but how to plant and reap better, how to play and sing better, and how to live and grow up happily. Our villages shall be friendly to each other. We shall not place the bar of traditional enmity in their path. Neither shall we henceforth allow the tyranny of ignorance and superstition to go under the cloak of custom and tradition. The world outside moves fast, my Lord, and we must move with it. *This is Our Chance* (38) (emphasis mine).

In 1945, Henshaw was the secretary of the Association of Students of African descent in Dublin, Ireland. He wrote *This Is Our Chance* for the end of year party. His advice was for African intellectuals like him as the future leaders of Africa to pick up the gauntlet and reshape Africa’s worldview. It should be stressed that he did not call for the scrapping of African culture. Instead, what he proposes is its modification to make it useful and relevant for the needs of the average African who had to cope with the

challenges of modernity. The point he harps upon is that norms, values, customs, rules, regulations, etc were constituted or made by man for the benefit of man. It is imperative that outdated traditional values should be discarded while the good ones should be retained.

Another important point worthy of mention is that Henshaw, despite being an orthodox medical practitioner, does not see anything wrong in alternative medicine which is also a part of African culture. Thus, we find that the anti-snake-bite vaccine which saves Mboli's life was made from herbs. However, his position is that the practitioners of alternative or herbal medicine in Africa can improve the profession by incorporating some elements of western civilization. The application of ideas derived from western education to the practice of alternative medicine will make alternative medicine better and a worthwhile venture for its practitioners. In *This is Our Chance*, medicine becomes a healer, healing the afflicted physically, spiritually, psychologically, socially and culturally.

Like the play analysed above, *Medicine for Love* is also a comedy. The play is divided into three acts, and the setting is the sitting room of an up-and-coming politician, Ewia Ekunyah. Through this character, Henshaw examines in-depth, the struggle for supremacy between traditional norms and modernity in contemporary Africa a theme which is very common in his different plays. He presents, rather realistically, his fears and concerns for a fledging African continent torn between the cultivation of western oriented cultural tastes and the retention of indigenous traditional values. In fact, Henshaw harps upon this point in his rather lengthy introductory author's note that precedes the play. According to him:

The African is therefore frequently faced with a situation in which he tries to uphold African traditional institutions and regards them as the back-bone of African cultural heritage... At the same time the new cultural mission sponsored by dynamic African youths and intellectuals must move, expand and become identified with a rapidly progressive generation whose eagerness for recognition in a modern world can hardly be tied to all the beliefs and practices of the past (13).

It should be stressed that although the play was first published in 1964, the thematic preoccupations subsumed inside the work of art remain topical.

When the play opens, we see a very frustrated and rather shocked Ekunyah pacing up and down his sitting-room, dictating a letter to his personal secretary, Olu Ita. The letter is directed to Ekunyah's aunt, Dupeh, who had informed her nephew through a telegram that she was sending him a girl, Nene Katsina, from the village, to be his wife. For Ekunyah, this is not an exhilarating development which calls for celebration and he makes this quite clear in the letter:

...for the past week I have had two er – wives here: traditional wives you know! The first was sent by Chief Wajie, our cousin. Her name, if I am not mistaken, is Bekin Wari. The other, Ibiere Sua was sent by my Uncle Chief Yemba. I did not any time ask either Chief to send me a wife... But it would appear from their messages that both of them just happened to think of me, and each decided independently that it was high time I should get married. I knew nothing about it... I would, if you allow me, dear Auntie Dupeh, like to know how to manage two wives before trying to tackle three (18-19)

Through this letter, Henshaw introduces some (constituent) aspects of African culture to the reader. The first is the issue of traditional wives. A traditional wife can be chosen for a man even without his consent by relatives who feel that he is an eligible

bachelor. For example, Samuel Johnson tells us that among the Yorubas of South-Western Nigeria:

It is generally the duty of the female members of the family to look out for a wife for their male relative; girls are generally marked out from childhood as intended for a particular young man, with or without her knowledge... and it is rare for a girl to refuse the choice of her parents (113)

Most of the time, the cogent idea to note here is that marriages of such nature are not often predicated on love. The parties involved in such relationships see it as a marriage of convenience dedicated solely to procreating children. closely associated with traditional marriages in Africa is the issue of polygamy, wherein the man is at liberty to take more than one wife under native law and custom and this is what in fact makes Ekunyah's "marriage" to Ibiere Sua, Bekin Wari and Nene Katsina legal. Of utmost importance to Henshaw are the conflicts and acrimony which ensue as a result of the incompatibility of the husband and his traditional wives or as a result of the bickering among a string of traditional wives in a polygamous relationship.

Ekunyah finds himself psychologically, physically, spiritually and culturally destabilized as a result of the tension generated within his household by Ibiere Sua's and Bekin Wari's rivalry. Both women in their struggle against each other, demand for Ekunyah's support as a matter of right. The first of the two women that we are introduced to is Bekin Wari. Interestingly, for a lady who is supposedly from the village, she is a chronic smoker, a habit tacitly supported by her aged father. At a point when she accuses Ekunyah of bias against her, she refers to Ibiere Sua as "that woman", a term which Ekunyah rejects. Through Bekin Wari's outbursts at the beginning of the play. Henshaw outlines the thematic framework of *Medicine for Love*. One idea which

Henshaw presents before the reader is the workability and durability of polygamy as an aspect of African culture in this modern age. This is made obvious in the dialogue which ensues between Bekin Wari and Ekunyah.

Ekunyah: What woman? Do you mean Ibiere Sua? It is entirely faulty that I have not yet introduced you to each other. That woman as you call her, is called Ibiere, and she says, just as you do, that she is my wife.

Bekin Wari: Call her what you like. She is making a mistake thinking that I'm going to leave this house for her. I mean to stay, do you hear? It's as simple as that... Don't pretend you don't know that her mother has arrived... She's come to make medicine for her daughter against me (18-19).

That Ibiere Sua has the “audacity” to bring her mother into Ekunyah’s house leads Bekin Wari to also invite her father. There are insinuations flying about the home that both Bekin Wari’s father and Ibiere Sua’s mother are adept at preparing traditionally predicated medicinal concoctions aimed at harming their respective daughters’ rival and winning the love of Ekunyah. By vividly depicting the various problems which arise as a result of the polygamous nature of Ekunyah’s household, Henshaw establishes its negative impact on a modern African society which needs to make progress, positively. Although Ibiere Sua, Ekunyah’s second wife seems to respect her husband’s position as head of the family, more than Bekin Wari, the reader discovers that she is not entirely different from her rival. When Ekunyah calls her into the sitting-room to inform her about the presence of Bekin Wari in the house, she retorts:

I am not interested in her name... I have nothing to do with her. The very sight of her gives me fever (20).

However, it is Ekunyah who almost breaks down psychologically as a result of the pressures mounted on him by his two wives. Like so many African elites, he finds

himself straddling two very different cultures – Western and African – with each struggling for his soul. He is a devout Catholic and the Catholic Church frowns at polygamy which in itself is a very important component of African culture. Ekunyah’s emotional degeneration becomes quite obvious when he asks Olu Ita to invite into his home Agatarata, a traditional herbalist, who embodies everything that Ekunyah disdains in African culture:

Olu Ita: Is there anything I can do, sir?
Ekunyah: Go and call me Agarata.
Olu Ita: (surprised) The medicine-man, sir?
Ekunyah: (impatiently) Go and call him, I say.
Olu Ita: But you’ve just spoken to the Chaplain, sir!
Ekunyah: Will you stop arguing, and do what I tell you? (27)

Ekunyah’s spiritual confusion is further accentuated when Agatarata comes into his home and the agitated and very embarrassed politician refuses to acknowledge his presence and even goes to the extent of telling his aunt. Dupeh, that he vehemently detests Agatarata’s vocation. However, Dupeh “convinces” him that he needs Agatarata’s help to survive the physical and spiritual onslaught of his many wives and a bemused Agatarata proceeds to issue instructions which Ekunyah must adhere to if he does not want to die unsung:

This must be worn under your singlet before you go out every day. (He puts a string of cowrie beads around Ekunyah’s neck). When wearing it, you must never allow any woman below fifty years to pass you on the road by your left side. This one (he produces something else) must be placed on your head at twelve midnight every night for about half an hour.... This one (bringing out a string of leaves) should be hung here at the door.... Now take this feather and hold it (...Agatarata takes up the yellow chalk and begins to paint Ekunyah’s face with it. He paints over Ekunyah’s right eye-lid, then over the left; then one masterly stroke from the lower end of the left to the ear to the chin, and the same on the right side...) (36)

At the end of Agatarata's rituals, Ekunyah is told never to eat any meal prepared with palm oil, groundnut oil, linseed oil, olive oil or coconut oil. What this invariably means is that Ekunyah had been issued with a death warrant especially if we consider the different kinds of food that people in Africa eat which contain the various varieties of oil listed above. Ekunyah, as a symbol of the modern African is a caricature and the deceitful nature of his existence becomes apparent when he and his aunt, Dupeh, deny Agatarata when the Chaplain comes into the living room. Dupeh tells the Chaplain that Agatarata is mad:

(To Chaplain) You see another thing that worries our cousin is that he always imagines that we are sick and that his is a medicine man. And before you know where you are, he has tied cowries beads and all sorts of things around you, and painted your face with chalk. We usually honour him. That is why I persuaded Ewia to allow him to put all these things around him. In fact he may grow violent if you try to stop him (39).

However, it is easy for the reader to know those who, out of the east of four characters depicted in the scene above, are really out of their minds.

In Act Two, Henshaw focuses on a very important aspect of the modern African society – politics. He uses Ekunyah to focus on the activities of African politicians and it is obvious that he detests the kind of dirty politics, which has become the vogue in contemporary Africa. Through Ekunyah and members of the committee, we see that many African politicians are a bunch of self-centred, self-opinionated and very corrupt people who engage in politics principally for the purpose of self-aggrandizement. Interestingly, this very important theme revolving around political maladministration in Africa has been de-emphasized by critics in favour of the theme of polygamy in twentieth

century Africa. Even Henshaw, in his lengthy introduction to the play, does not highlight this very important theme at all.

From Henshaw's perspective, African politicians are fraudsters and he presents his ideas very vividly through Ekunyah. When Olu Ita tells his boss that the people of Koloro and Udura want him to build a road connecting the two villages in return for their votes, a very perplexed Ekunyah devises a very ingenious fraudulent scheme aimed at deceiving the inhabitants of Koloro and Udura and securing their votes. He instructs Olu Ita:

...hire about a hundred drums of tar. Line them all along the road from Koloro to Udura. Then hire several loads of sand and heap the sand at suitable intervals along the road. An impression must be given that the roadwork is starting any moment now. Most important of all, bring the road development scheme to the notice of the local newspapers (44).

He also makes a donation of one hundred and twenty pounds for the purchase of a church organ because his opponent, Mr Sonrillo, had donated fifty pounds. Thereafter he asks Olu Ita to:

...Report in the newspapers the contribution I have made to the church organ fund. You can put it in form of an anonymous letter to the Editor stating that it had just come to your notice that Mr. Ekunyah has contributed a hundred and twenty pounds to the church organ fund. But that you understand that owing to Mr. Ekunyah's extreme modesty, he has forbidden the church authorities to announce it publicly. You can then hammer strongly on the sense of civic responsibility involved in this act, and my unprecedented project to build the Koloro-Udura road all by myself. And don't forget that, strange as it may seem, this great man continually refuses public offices, although between you and me, you know that no one has ever offered me any (45).

Ekunyah's hypocrisy becomes very glaring when he refuses to give a shilling to a beggar because beggars were a negligible percentage of the electorate. The beggar becomes a representative symbol of the downtrodden, the masses whose needs Ekunyah is supposed to cater for, but whom he neglects. *Medicine for Love*, as we stated earlier, was published in 1964, two years before Achebe's *A Man of the People* which discusses in greater detail the hypocritical nature of African politicians. It should be stressed therefore that we can classify Henshaw as one of the African writers who pioneered the discussion of neocolonialism in modern African literature.

Every Africa politician who aims at winning elective political offices at all costs will work with a bunch of sycophants who will attempt to do everything within their powers to win the election for their candidate. We also find that in the play, Ekunyah has a committee of friends who support his candidacy but who also use their positions as members of the committee to enrich themselves at Ekunyah's expenses. They hire crowds of people at Ekunyah's political rallies to shout the politician's praises in order to let their mentor feel that the members of the committee were functioning effectively. In an attempt to make Ekunyah win the election unopposed, they pay two hundred pounds to twenty opponents of Ekunyah to withdraw their nomination forms. That the sum of four thousand pounds had been spent bribing his opponents without any guarantee that he would win makes Ekunyah angry and he makes his feelings known to Olu Ita:

Four thousand pounds! I have spent nearly eight thousand pounds in all and without a receipt for a single penny. What do I hope to gain? Eight thousand pounds in two months. It took me twenty years to make it, now all is gone (62).

In Ekunyah's opinion, money spent in securing the elective office becomes an investment, which can be recouped through the collection of bribes or the inflation of contracts after he has been elected. He is persuaded to "invest" more money when Joss, the Chairman of his campaign committee informs him that the committee needs eight hundred pounds to pay off Mr. Sonrillo, Ekunyah's only remaining rival. With these different characters, we find Henshaw outlining some of the reasons why African politicians become very corrupt when they are elected into public offices which they see as avenues of recouping their "investments". For instance, Joss encourages Ekunyah to sell his third house in return for:

Hope... You will have the hope of serving your people, and of receiving their respect: and above all, of wielding untold influence. You will gain instant popularity. If you sneeze, it will be broadcast to the world. Gramophone recordings will be made in your name. And you can always get your local people to name streets after you (64)

A political office will guarantee Ekunyah's transformation into a very Important Personality. Most African politicians predicate their political careers on the concept of service to mankind but Henshaw's *Medicine for Love* shows that the acquisition of political offices by politician becomes a means of servicing or rewarding the politician's acolytes, hangers-on and scophants represented in the play by characters like Olu Ita and the members of Ekunyah's political committee.

Henshaw also highlights the important role occultic magic and practices play in the world of African politics. It is not uncommon to find politicians securing the assistance of juju priests to influence in their favour, the outcome of elections. Part of the money Joss collects from Ekunyah is spent on Agatarata. Joss explains further:

Agatarata will make a special medicine, which we will blow into the air from various places in this constituency. Whoever breathes that medicine into his body will be filled with a special admiration for you... In fact Agatarata has already made a special medicine which your election agents and friends will nib in their hands, and any voter with whom they shake hands will go straight into that booth and vote for you alone... I myself have a great belief in Agatarata and I am sure that he will do something for you. Already he has helped us when we were filling in your nomination forms. Even the ink you used was “treated” by him (66-67).

Agatarata’s “treatment” of the ink in Ekunyah’s pen turns out to be the politician’s greatest undoing. As a result of the substance added by Agatarata, the ink fades on Ekunyah’s nomination forms and it is assumed that he had withdrawn his candidacy for Sonrillo who is declared the winner of the elective post unopposed, even after he had collected eight hundred pounds from Ekunyah. One thing that Henshaw does successfully in this play is to destroy completely the myth of invincibility, awe and mystery that surrounds African traditional medicine-men even in these modern times. Agatarata medicines, charms and fetishes prove not to be efficacious and he becomes a pariah, detested by all and sundry. Henshaw uses this character, Agatarata, to implore African politicians to stop using fetish objects and charms to enhance their prospects in their quest for political power. On a broader level, Henshaw condemns the use of elements of African culture for negative and dubious purposes.

Ekunyah, on the other hand, suffers a nervous breakdown and he only regains his health as a result of the combined efforts of some medical personnel consisting of Dr. Ndawu, Dr. Marsey, who at a point instructs Dr. Marsy and Sister Sera to inject Ekunyah with “injection forte” and “injection magnum”. According to him:

The “injection forte” and the “injection magnum” used together will produce valuable synergism, and each will act as a prophylactic against any unpleasant reactions of hypersensitivity (93).

The successful treatment of Ekunyah by the orthodox medical practitioners sharply contrasts with the ineffectiveness of Agatarata, the practitioner of alternative (traditional) medicine. What Henshaw has done is to subtly indict traditional herbalists as well as question their relevance in today’s modern society.

In Act Three, Scene III, a rejuvenated and reinvigorated Ekunyah reorganizes his life. He relinquishes Ibiere Sua and Bekin Wari, two of his traditional wives, to Dr. Marsey and Olu Ita respectively. He marries Nene Katsina and is rehabilitated by Aunt Deupéh’s fiancé, Mr Bonga who returns Ekunyah’s three houses to him. Henshaw uses *Medicine for Love* to educate his reader about some very important aspects of modern African society and he comes to the conclusion that polygamy has become archaic and should be discarded if Africa is to develop. Relationships between men and women who intend to marry should be predicated on love and nothing else. At the same time, African politicians are enjoined to be more responsible if they intend to take their people to the Promised Land where equality, fraternity, liberty and the rights of the common man in Africa will be guaranteed. This is a message that Ekunyah seems to have imbibed at the end of the play where he is depicted as a very sober, more mature and more responsible individual.

In conclusion, it is pertinent to note that *This is our Chance* was published in 1956 – four years before Nigerian Independence – while *Medicine for Love* was published in 1964, four years after Nigeria had become a sovereign nation. We find that in the pre-independence play, Henshaw, while calling for cultural integration of western civilization

with African culture, subtly hints at the ultimate ascendancy of western civilization as the senior partner in the relationship. In *Medicine for Love*, Henshaw by displaying polygamy (which symbolizes Africa culture) in favour of monogamy (which represents western civilizations) simply asserts in a very forceful manner, the supremacy of a new order which revolves round the West, which dictates the pace of world events and which Africa, as a continent still struggling for relevance in world politics, cannot afford to ignore.

It is apparent that with the advent of the technological age, pioneered largely by the West, African culture has unfortunately become just one of the many minor threads used in weaving the global cultural tapestry that is unashamedly western in orientation and which has become the identity of today's modern man. Invariably, Henshaw's view is that Africa, despite its rich and very diverse cultural heritage, can only ignore western civilization at its own peril. In a very *clinical manner*, Henshaw, has closely examined the modern African society, and has *diagnosed* the fact that the average African, irrespective of status, has a split personality, a unique cultural phenomenon, which is largely predicated on the belief that western civilization epitomizes perfection. The coming of the whiteman into Africa brought about the diffusion of western civilization and Africa culture which prepared the ground for the eventual domination of the latter by the former. The cultural hybridity, which ensued, in Henshaw's *prognosis*, would always be an integral aspect of the worldview of the African. It is interesting to note that although Henshaw's thesis was proffered almost four decades ago, it has become even more relevant with the advent of the twenty-first century which has been many Africans

becoming uncritical and very consummate consumers of western values, beliefs and concepts in spite of the fundamental flaws inherent in some of them.

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