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## Knowledge Policing

Re-conceptualizing Ogun in Peter Omoko's  
*Battles of Pleasure* and Roy-Omoni's *Morontonu*

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# Knowledge Policing: Re-conceptualizing Ogun in Peter Omoko's *Battles of Pleasure* and Roy-Omoni's *Morontonu*

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*Abstract: Western education, civilization, modernity, science, and technology as Eurocentric factors have negatively influenced the worship of African gods. The understanding that indigenous worship is barbaric, uncivilized, and outdated has clouded most African minds to conspire with Euro-North academy to undermine what is African. Speaking on the influence of modernity and the emergence of Western civilization and urbanization, this article delves into the relevance and timeous subject of the decolonization of knowledge and the recovery and restoration to dignity of marginalized African histories and sensibilities. The critical analysis focuses on significant themes that are associated with Ogun, the Yoruba god of war, which has been subject to misinterpretation by scholars, most likely due to the influence of modernity. Using the case of Ogun, the article critically demonstrates how Peter Omoko's "Battles of Pleasure" and Alex Roy Omoni's "Morontonnu" have confronted colonial myths and stereotypes that seek to consign African histories and knowledges to oblivion. This article delinks its discussion from views that Ogun causes chaos and violence; a narrative is created to analyze the reason behind such associations. The article relies heavily on decolonial epistemic perspective to examine Ogun's representation and archetype in Peter Omoko's "Battles of Pleasure" and Alex Roy Omoni's "Morontonnu," as the god of peace, harvest and obstacle remover, by exploring themes that relate to his characteristics in both plays. The article concludes that Ogun's fury only manifests when a community's code is broken.*

*Keywords: Coloniality, Decolonial Epistemic Perspective, Knowledge Policing, Ogun, Yoruba*

## Introduction

Ogun is the Yoruba god of iron and war, and the peoples' myth associates all iron implements with him. The Yoruba god has been represented by scholars such as Soyinka ([1976] 1990), Barnes (1997), Poynor (2012), and Afolayan (2013), some of whom researched his positive aspect and some who extensively condemned the aggressive characteristics of the god. This article argues that the scholars who have represented Ogun to be a ferocious god have been influenced by modernity. The themes from Alex Roy-Omoni and Peter Omoko's play will assist in delinking from the school of thought that Ogun only causes crises and that the god offers no good to any community that worships him. The definition of modernity, in this regard, is linked to Walter Mignolo's (2007) view of coloniality as a concept, which sees colonialism as still existing despite its supposed ending after the colonizers had departed. This article will delink its discussion from views that Ogun causes chaos and violence; a narrative will be created to analyze the reason behind such associations. For instance, the songs rendered in Battle of Pleasure are extremely abusive ones, with themes which focus on social experiences and problems, from infertility and virility, to laziness. Also, the strategy deployed by King Isorowolu in Morontonnu to discipline the tyrant in the play proves to be a stringent one that entails human sacrifice. As such, one is tempted to assert that the god who is honored in the festival being performed in Battles of Pleasure is a chaotic god. Likewise, the god to whom the sacrifice is to be appeased in Morontonnu is a bloodsucking deity. However, it is convenient to delink from such opinions and adopt a decolonial

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perspective as a critical theoretical approach that initiates an epistemic break from Eurocentric knowledge, one which focuses on determining what is correct or not for the ex-colonized. Colonial imaginations of Ogun and racist constructions of the deity have represented him as bloodthirsty, vengeful, and an article of superstitions; therefore, it is pertinent to give a brief background on Ogun and the god's significance in Yorubaland.

The South-Western part of Nigeria, also called Yorubaland, has a culturally rich history that has been extensively explored in plays, novels, poems, books, and articles (Eades 1980; Leroy 2002; Adeuyan 2011; Adesina 2009; Waite 2016). Ogun belongs to the Yoruba pantheon of gods sent to the earth by Olodumare. Although there are different versions to the Yoruba creation stories, this article will focus on the one that Ogun is linked to the presence of the iron that was used to clear the path for the other gods in the Yoruba pantheon during the creating of the earth (Soyinka 1990, 140). In this mythology, Olodumare (the Yoruba version of Supreme God) is the "Almighty" with sixteen ministers serving as intermediaries between him and mortals as he is too great and remote to access. The ministers include Orunmila, the god of wisdom; Obatala, the god of creativity; Ogun, the god of war and iron; Osun, the river goddess and Sango, the god of lightning and thunder (Jegade 2006; Ribeiro 1997). As indicated, Ogun is the Yoruba god of war, while iron (metal) is symbolic of his worship. Likewise, Yoruba people relate the metal chain used during Oduduwa's descending from the sky to found Yorubaland, to Ogun's presence in Oduduwa's journey to planet earth (Blackmun 2012). In commemoration of this occurrence, one of the praise names of Ogun is Osin Imole (the first of the primordial Yoruba gods who came to Earth); he is celebrated in such places as the Ekiti, Oyo and Ondo States. All these attributes are present in the oriki (panegyric) of Ogun which is often recited at the sacred grove of the god during the Ogun festivals.

It is important to note that Ogun's oriki comprises more utterances than the ones reproduced below. According to Adeeko, "oriki is referred to as Yoruba praise poetry" (Adeeko 2001, 182). Oriki is a cultural phenomenon among the Yoruba-speaking people of West Africa. Karin Barber defines it as "a genre of Yoruba oral poetry that could be described as attributions or appellations: collections of epithets, pithy or elaborated, which are addressed to a subject" (1993, 1). Okewande defines oriki as "a literary form by which one can identify an individual within the history of his [her] family, clan and tribe" (2016, 487). Oriki of Ogun assists in identifying the characteristics of Ogun and its archetypes in individuals and religious worship. The relevance of oriki, as Okewande puts it, is that it "links an individual to the root and the society at large" (2016, 487). Thus, Ogun's contributions to Yorubaland can be easily realized in his oriki. Only the part that reinforces Ogun's significance to the earlier mentioned creation myth is provided below:

Ogun lakaiye, Ọsin imọlẹ	Ogun the owner of the earth, the first of the primordial gods
Ogun alada méjì, Ofi okan sanko, Ofi okan yena	Ogun owns two cutlasses, he uses one to till the ground, and the other to protect (Direct translation by researcher).

These lines help to explain who Ogun is, but not in totality. He is universally acknowledged in Yoruba mythology as an indispensable divinity, in as much as all iron and steel belongs to him. Hence, exploring Ogun's features as presented in the plays will assist in determining the construction of the god in contemporary texts. Biodun Jeyifo claims, "there can hardly be, in Africa itself and in the African diaspora in the Caribbean and South America, a pre-colonial deity or avatar with a more powerful institutional consolidation as a religious and expressive frame of reference than Ogun" (2011, 53). As previously mentioned, Ogun as a religious figure inspires the people to worship him annually in several festivals across Yorubaland. Sandra Barnes comments that in the

Minds of followers, Ogun conventionally presents two images. The one is a terrifying spectre: a violent warrior, fully armed and laden with frightening charms and medicine to kill his foes. The other is society's leader known for his sexual prowess, who nurtures, protects, and relentlessly pursues truth, equity, and justice. (Barnes 1997, 2)

Those who do not revere Ogun are referred to as enemies by his adherents. The primary text examines the reason behind Ogun's association with the modernized notion of his fierceness and wicked nature. For instance, the Yoruba believe that accidents occur when Ogun is not offered libations. Hunters also believe that there will not be a successful hunt unless they revere Ogun in the proper way.

Rituals performed during the Ogun festivals are also examples of Yoruba communities' knowledge about the gods. Most of these rites are still performed in some parts of Yorubaland as a reference to Ogun, although some believe that the rites are barbaric, primitive, outdated, and not meant for modern and civilized people. This is not only limited to the colonizers; some people who were born and raised in Yorubaland, for example, find it difficult to participate or contribute toward the existence of indigenous worship. Such people equate traditional festivals to celebration of evil. Ogunleye contends that "the Yoruba people, for example, are dangling between the traditional and the so-called sophisticated western mores and value system and had not even got to the other end before the traditional one collapsed, so we are in a total vacuum" (2015, 65). "The other end" refers to the colonialist knowledge that the people now possess, which has resulted in what Boaventura de Sousa Santos defines as "epistemicide" (Santos 2014, 92). Santos defines epistemicide as the extermination of knowledge and ways of knowing. This approach no doubt has affected the value system of the Yoruba people. It has also caused a major setback in the celebrations in honor of the god of iron, in particular. For instance, the relevance of Ogun to technology and security is being overlooked by modernity. During an Ogun festival, for example, Ogun is offered Aja (a dog) as a sacrifice because a dog symbolizes security, and to the Yoruba people Ogun is a god of security. This is also because all iron implements used for security and transportation represent Ogun in Yorubaland.

Coloniality has caused crisis, thereby instilling the belief that Ogun is a chaotic god or that the god's worship is barbaric and outmoded. Therefore, decolonial theory deals with foundational questions that are relevant to conditions which dictate the representation of Ogun as an African subject, for example, and the manner in which such an existing crisis can be resolved. The Yoruba understanding of Ogun as a god of peace is fleshed out in *Battles of Pleasure* and *Morontonu*, as the archetype of the god being worship is Ogun. These plays are critically examined to tease out Yoruba understanding and representation of Ogun as a god of good harvests and peace. The article, against colonial myths and fictions, erects a critical defense of Ogun, as not a monstrous figure capable of causing chaos in the community, but actually a god of peace and bountiful harvest.

Peter Omoko's plays are becoming a basis for scholarly efforts in the recent Nigerian literary critical scene. He has published a number of plays that deal with current issues in the country. With plays such as *Battles of Pleasure* (2009), *Three Plays* (2010), *Uloho* (2012), *Crude Nightmen* (2015), and *Majestic Revolt* (2016), Omoko has significantly emphasized his presence in the Nigerian literary scene as a voice from the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. This might be due to his numerous dramatic themes that include the cultural rejuvenation, ecological tempers and social justice, leadership crisis, military misadventure, national unity, and political and ethnic rivalry. Most of his plays are set in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria with major themes on environmental problems, and other socioeconomic issues encountered by the Nigerian society.

Similarly, Alex Roy-Omoni's ability to use drama and literary expressions to explore cultural, social, and political issues of Nigeria makes him a voice to be reckoned with in the country's dramatic scene. In addition to collections of poems and unpublished plays, Roy-

Omoni has two published plays, *The Ugly Ones* (2011), and *Morontonu* (2012). He has emerged as one of the foremost third generation dramatists from the Southern part of Nigeria. Some of the prominent themes in his two plays are folklore, myths, religion, oral poetry, incantation, and rituals. He also emphasized the difference between good and evil, blackmail, oppression, office brutality and bullying, deceit, victimization, abuse, unjust work ethics, murder, maiming, set-up, terrorism, human rights abuse, and god-fatherism. In the play under review, one encounters full exploration of the themes of corruption, exploitation, insecurity, electoral malpractice, and bad leadership perpetuated by inept rulers.

## Archetype of Ogun Worship in Both Plays

On the one hand, Peter Omoko's play relies on song and dance traditions during the Ogba-Urhie festival to bring about a new worship dimension as regards the god the play represents, which is similar to how Ogun is worshipped in some parts of Yorubaland. This Ogba-Urhie festival is a mimetic representation of the Ogun festival in Yorubaland, adapted by the playwright. *Battles of Pleasure* is a modest, recreated song of rivalry between Igede and Ubigen, performed during the Ogba-Urhie festival.<sup>2</sup> The major characters, Saniyo and Logbo, two leaders of each community's singing troupes, trade insults in the songs' texts. This type of song is also performed during Ogun festivals across Yorubaland, often by age groups representing a section of the town. These groups compose songs that exaggerate each other's private parts: for example, during the Ogunoye festival of Ikere Ekiti where different age groups in the community sing songs about each gender's genitalia (see Osundare 2008, 10).

Omoko consequently borrowed from the abusive songs' poetic repertoire, rendered in the Udje festival of Egbo-Ide, from where he hails. Uhanghwa's worship in *Battles of Pleasure* is quintessential of Ogun's, since the priest referred to as Curator in the play offers libations to him and the songs resembles those rendered in Ogun festivals (Omoko 2009). The materials used during the libation rite also suggest the type of sacrifice given to the god of iron during worship. It is essential to mention that despite the abuses thrown at each other in the Ogba-Urhie festival, there is evidence of friendship and marriage between both communities. Another purpose of the festival is its ability to provide an avenue for bachelors and spinsters to meet their potential lovers from either Ubigen or Igede. Examples of such marital associations include Saniyo and Odjiko's wives who are from Ubigen (Omoko 2009). Ogun is therefore constructed in the play as the only god who can give abundantly in the areas of harvest and protection, and maintain peace in the community.

On the other hand, Roy-Omoni's *Morontonu* is a play which derives its sustenance from Yoruba folklore on Ogun, the obstacle remover. Roy-Omoni significantly integrates myths, religion, oral poetry, incantation, and rituals of the Yoruba people of the Southwestern Nigeria to examine the subject matter of jealousy, with references to good and evil, blackmail, and other sundry issues that make the play a morality one. The reason for choosing *Morontonu* is the manner in which the play experiments with Orisa-nla as Olodumare. Ogun, being one of the sixteen elders of Olodumare, may be inferred from associated worship in the text. Yoruba people appeal to Ogun to remove any obstacle on their way to freedom, which may include both spiritual and physical hindrances. The play commences with dancing and drumming in honor of a mighty warlord, King Isorowolu of the Yoruba community of Ala town (Roy-Omoni 2012). It is evident from the opening scene that the king has just returned from a war and the townspeople are singing his praises. The opening act presents the praise singer who portrays how strong and powerful Isorowolu is. Suddenly, the monarch's mood alters as he retires into his inner chamber. Here, he considers how powerful he is; yet he has no male son to ascend the throne after his demise. During his pensive mood, Balogun, Ala community's chief warlord,

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<sup>2</sup> Ubigen and Igede are the names of the two fictional communities adopted by Peter Omoko in *Battles of Pleasure*.

enters the king's inner chamber and asks about the reason for this change in mood. Isorowolu voices his dilemma and informs Balogun of the birth of his twenty-third princess. The monarch mentions how every woman who becomes pregnant by him gives birth to female children only.

Balogun and Isorowolu decide to call a meeting with other chiefs to deliberate on how the obstacle might be removed. During the meeting, Balogun opines that the king should take another bride "with a strong blood" (Roy-Omoni 2012, 28). The search commences; Morontonnu becomes the chosen one. With the assistance of the village Ifa priest, Morontonnu is confirmed as a suitable bride for the king. As might be expected, jealousy arises in the palace since Awelewa, the king's first wife, requests other three wives to collaborate with her to harm Morontonnu. They reject Awelewa's request, in order to show their support for the king. Morontonnu succeeds in giving birth to a male child which causes Awelewa to dislike her even more. Awelewa distracts everyone in the palace while she abducts the newborn prince and takes him to an evil forest where Esu resides. Note at this stage that Esu is not presented as the Yoruba trickster god in this play but is given the name of a mystical character. This might be due to the knowledge that Esu is misunderstood as the devil in Yorubaland. Awelewa requests Esu to kill the baby. Upon her arrival to the palace, Awelewa accuses Morontonnu of kidnapping her own infant in order to punish the king. Believing Awelewa's account of the ordeal, Isorowolu orders Morontonnu to be beheaded in the Ogun shrine and her blood to be used to decorate the throne.

## Coloniality: Ogun Festival

In recognition of the three pillars of coloniality: power, knowledge and being, this article focuses on using coloniality of knowledge to analyze the constructions of Ogun as a god of peace in both *Morontonnu* and *Battles of Pleasure*. The analysis is based on the knowledge that the worship of the god is barbaric, and all the rites associated with the festival are outdated and a total waste of time. *Battles of Pleasure* is a mimesis of the Ogun festival and as such efforts will be made to briefly mention the association between the play and the traditional festival. The imitations of actions of song warfare during Ogun festivals are the basis of what constitutes the people's cultural dramaturgy. Aristotle's reference to drama as a "mimetic process," that is, an imitation of an action, becomes relevant in this discussion. Mimetic action, in the context of the Ogun festival, is the organized presentation of festival procession, mock heroic dance, abusive songs, and display of an effigy, which are very significant to the people and are explored in *Battles of Pleasure*.

*Morontonnu* is also a representation of how sacrifices are done to placate Ogun. The manner in which the sacrifice in the play is offered is symbolic of how the god's request can be harsh when evil is continuously perpetrated in the community. In simple terms, activities that reveal evidence of imitation, enlightenment and/or entertainment in their style of presentation, in their purpose, and value, could be said to be dramatic. Sacrificing and beheading dogs during Ogun festival is decorated with performance.<sup>3</sup> This is possibly identical to Goffman's opinion on performance as quoted by Philip Page: that "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers has some influence on the observers" (2011, 24). A traditional Yoruba performer in Ogun festival, for example, intends to convey a message in performing his or her role, thereby engaging in role plays that entertain or educate the audience.

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<sup>3</sup> Ehikhamenor describes the process of dog sacrifice in Yorubaland thus: "the neck of the dog would be slit in one fell swoop with a sharp sword, and the severed oesophagus would be directed towards the shrine, with all of the blood drained onto all of the irons, as if they were taking a cool shower. The head of the dog and its perplexed eyes would be left on the shrine overnight. By morning it would have disappeared, Ogun had come overnight to claim its sacrifice" (2006, 59).

Ogun festival dramaturgy can thus be described as a combination of traditional and performing arts in a cultural milieu which contains mimetic impersonation either of human actions or of spiritual essence. In other words, it comprises traditional dramatic content such as dance displays and music, as well as secular performances. This stems from the fact that the festival integrates all the features which constitute typical African religion and secular theatre. The most important point to make is that African theatre has developed without major restrictions placed upon it by physical limitations, or time barriers, such as traditionally proscribe the form and length of much European and American theatre. Thus, the representation of Ogun characteristics by employing a mimesis of the presentation of an associated festival rites in *Morontonu* and *Battles of Pleasure* is an attempt to define, in style, that each performance during the festival is unique, possessing its own aesthetics, colors, music, dance, costumes, spectacles and audience. For example, *Battles of Pleasure* is written from the perspective of songs rendered to appease Ogun during the Ogba-Urhie festival of the Iggede and Ubigen community. Similarly, Ikere Ekiti, from where one of the researchers originates, also celebrates Ogunoye festival to appease Ogun, the god of harvest and peace.

*Morontonu* and *Battles of Pleasure* highlights the representation of Ogun as a god of peace as represented in songs and practices that are rendered to the deity during Ogun festivals. In this article, attention is drawn to the elements that depict the characteristics of Ogun in both plays. Examples of such elements include songs, dance and costumes, various combinations of which have resulted in assisting audiences to realize how Ogun is represented in the plays. These elements have been subjugated by coloniality. It is pertinent to note at this stage that each “act” in *Morontonu* is called “happening” in *Battles of Pleasure*. Omoko might have used this term instead of replicating the traditional pattern of Acts which is borrowed from Greek drama and Euro-American playwriting. The playwright’s adoption of “happenings” is itself a decolonial perspective of moving away from the so-called established Euro-American models of stage performances.

Thus, we have in mind the definition of a scholar such as Ruth Finnegan, (cited in Echeruo [1973] 2013), who might have been influenced in this way, as evident in what she refers to as African drama in its entirety. She comments on the absence of “linguistic content, plot, represented interaction of several characters, specialised scenery” (Echeruo 2013, 30). To Finnegan, African ritual performance lacks the development that could be compared to that of Greek dramas. In contrast to Finnegan’s view, Peter Omoko and Roy-Omoni present plays that explore the rich cultural performance of a festival associated with the god of harvest, productivity, fertility, and peace. Consequently, Tanure Ojaide applauds Omoko’s effort in adapting the “rich performance genre of his people to create suspense, action, music, and poetic flamboyance” (Ojaide 2009, 7). The elements examined by Ojaide differ from the view of Finnegan that African ritual festivals are not fully developed.

Giving an example of Egungun (masquerade) performance as an African ritual performance, Echeruo contends that the music, dance, rhythmic gestures, drumming and verbal commentaries are elements that make masquerade performances satisfying to their audiences (Echeruo 2013). It is pertinent to note that elements such as music, dance, gestures, and drums are also important parts of the alleged Greek drama (Campbell 2010). Thus, to my knowledge, ritual performances in their very manifestation as dramas are a communal activity of adherents coming together to define their notion of god. These require and involve groups of audiences at all stages of their enactment. This participation might be through dance, songs, gestures, and verbal commentaries, which are elements that enable such performances to convey meaning to their audience. Concurring with Echeruo, I consider that drama flourishes best in a community which has satisfactorily transformed ritual into celebration and converted the mythic structure of action from the religious and priestly to the secular plane (Echeruo 2013). Echeruo’s view falters, however, by relying excessively on having African ritual performance trace its origin to

Greek drama, rather than arguing that African ritual drama had developed as fully as the latter, though in different ways.

However, I shall make an epistemic decolonial turn away from what scholars such as Finnegan and Echeruo regard as drama. Definitions of terms originating from Africa should be given African consideration, rather than Eurocentric definitions that regard Afrocentric knowledge as inferior to that of the former. Thus, the Euro-North American “empire” perceives knowledge that is being produced in the zone of non-being as inferior and not capable of producing what is termed knowledge in Euro-Northern eyes. In correlation with this concept of an interpretive turn, Grosfoguel (2007) suggests an epistemic decolonial turn, which concerns transcending and decolonizing those aspects that are regarded as the Western canon and epistemology. Such a turn discusses the process of undertaking the production of a radical and alternative knowledge that is different from what modernity influenced scholars refer to as “normal or right” knowledge.

Similarly, according to Grosfoguel, Santos views the colonized as having been categorized in the zone of non-being at the bottom of the social structures and as being targets of misrepresentation (Grosfoguel 2016). Ogun, being a Yoruba god, of iron, and having an African origin which is an alleged zone of non-being in terms of colonialism, is on the receiving end of such definitions and associations. It was previously argued that the god has been misrepresented to the African and to those outside Africa as being a cruel deity. The ensuing discussion in this article will form a basis for exploring songs and practices that symbolize the god as being important to his people in a positive manner, rather than merely a trouble-making divinity.

This article also concerns itself with how coloniality, a surviving condition of the colonial experience, continues to pollute and infest our imagination, knowledge and political communication as Africans today (Maldonado-Torres 2007). It is relevant to note that what seems to be right or wrong is determined by the people on the upper part of the abyssal line. As an African, I note that the African experience in the supposed zone of non-being is presented in books, academic performance, cultural patterns, self-images of Africans and so many other aspects as part of what the colonizers view us to be and not what we view ourselves to be.

Commenting on the effect of Eurocentric “knowledge” on the knowledge and being of the colonized, Anibal Quijano observes that “the Eurocentric perspective of knowledge operates as a mirror that distorts what it reflects, as we can see in Latin American historical experience...Consequently, when we look in our Eurocentric mirror, the image that we see is not just composite, but also necessarily partial and distorted” (2000, 556). While the locus of enunciation and Latin American colonial experience influence the thoughts of Quijano, it is evident that his views correctly reflect the African colonial experience, where African knowledge(s) were distorted, disfigured, and displaced as European colonists sought to replace the existing knowledge system with a Eurocentric sense and sensibility, in what would be understood as epistemicide. This implies the intentional manner of allowing Euro-North American knowledge to dominate other forms of knowledge that emanate from the colonized part of the world. In line with the foregoing, Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that the teaching of history from a Eurocentric perspective is an epistemicide meant to eliminate Africa’s glorious past (2012). The existing and trusted indigenous African knowledge was marginalized if not eradicated and replaced by colonial Western-oriented knowledge.

Furthermore, upon examining several constructions of Ogun by scholars influenced by modernity, it is obvious that the colonizer not only aims to distort the history of the colonized; he or she also destroys the existing African knowledge systems. The colonizer intends to empty the heads of the colonized and convince them to understand that their belief is a taboo. She or he tends to undermine the colonized people’s self-confidence and manipulate them to believe that they cannot live without colonial domination. Labels such as laziness, drunkenness, backwardness, violence, dirtiness, stupidity, ignorance, bad luck and spiritual damnation constitute manufactured accusations against the colonized. For example, after persuading the

colonized people to believe that they are nothing without the colonizers, the latter pretend to intervene and save the colonized from the many deficits that plague them. Dominating the knowledge of the colonized polishes the ego of the colonizer, which reduces the subaltern to a being of shortages and inabilities while the colonizer is elevated to the status of munificent saviour and benefactor whose intentions 'must' not be questioned. The colonized is left in an unfamiliar vacuum and expected to be grateful for colonialism, which is oftentimes packaged as civilization, modernization, and development. One might pose the question here: is Ogun antithetical to civilization? In answer one should consider the belief of the Yoruba people that Ogun embodies the metals used in wiring the streets and homes, the cars and buses we drive and the trains and planes we ride in. This exemplifies the view that all iron implements belong to Ogun and they represent him in their society.

### **Constructions of Ogun as a God of Peace in *Battles of Pleasure* and *Morontonu***

In this article Ogun is regarded as a god of peace by exploring themes that relate to his characteristics in Peter Omoko's *Battles of Pleasure* and Alex Roy-Omoni's *Morontonu*. His fury will only become manifest when a code, which might affect the peace of a community is broken, as explored in both plays. For instance, the manner in which Omoko constructs Ogun shows that as much as the god is generous, his generosity is directly related to the people's generosity towards him in terms of giving him yearly sacrifices and in the form of praising him with songs during the festival. The participants will not use this avenue to cause chaos in the community but, instead, make peace afterwards. After the victory dance that marks the end of the annual festival, it is not permitted in the community that anyone should sing abusive songs. Participants are expected to be at peace with one another, which will make Ogun the god of peace to bless the people. At this point, the understanding of Ogun that is derived from this aspect of the play actually contradicts established understandings of Ogun as a god that destroys rather than gives. Omoko from a decolonial perspective counters the distortion of Ogun as a destroyer by portraying Ogun as a god of peace and not of conflict.

In the text, the attributes of Ogun as a god of peace are mentioned in the conversations between the characters preparing for the Ogba-Urhie festival. It might not have been the playwright's main intention to analyze Ogun and how the god is represented in the community, but the use of words that symbolize his characteristics as a god of peace is paramount in the play. *Battles of Pleasure* redirects one's understanding of Ogun as a destroyer, as depicted by modernist theories, and helps one to appreciate the local indigenous knowledge system as providing a more conflict-resolving society in spite of the seeming disagreement in terms of abuses during the festival. Both troupes resolve their differences because they both believe that with Ogun as the god of peace, the society has to be free of rancor and chaos. Ogun is not a wicked god that intends one person's downfall to bless another one. Omoko has constructed the people of Igede in a decolonial manner to examine the weakness of Ubigen as antagonists for the upcoming festival due to Logbo's direct attack on Saniyo in the previous year's contest. Saniyo refers to how Logbo boasted of his victory rather than celebrating with the Igede troupe after the contest. The following conversation is informative in several respects:

ODJIKO: (*Swallows hard.*) Are you now accusing me of selling out?

AMUDU: I did not accuse anybody of selling out. But it was obvious from all circumstances that we were sold out.

OLOBA: I think we should all be careful. The designs of a man's heart are different from those of the face. Or is it not the teeth that one uses in laughing that he also uses in biting?

SANIYO: (*Impressed.*) Just imagine ... how they boasted of their prowess after they noticed the audience's overwhelming reception of their song ...

AMUDU: Look, Saniyo, they have capitalized on our weakness, fine! Should we then sit down and allow them to drink water peacefully? If the snake loses its venom, my brother, children will use it as a mere rope to play. (*Grin.*) They cannot have their cake and eat it. We are not known to be cowards. (*Pause, then sternly.*) I must tell you this, if we fail to avenge this affront, then our honour as a people is besmeared. Besides, it could be interpreted to mean an admission of cowardice. I don't think we are prepared to bear this stigma. Are we? (Omoko 2009, 15–16)

The impression one gains from the conversation between Odjiko, Saniyo, Amudu, and Oloba is that Ogun is a god of conflict. At this stage, it is evident that Saniyo and his band members are complaining about how Logbo and the people of Ubigen had celebrated after the previous festival without making peace with the people of Igede. Ogun is a god that discourages disobeying the community's codes of conduct. The significance of the Ogba-Urhie festival is the rendering of abusive songs in honour of Ogun but making peace afterwards. The above extract voices the disparity on the part of Logbo and the Ubigen troupe; they exchanged abuse in their songs but subsequently failed to reconcile with each other. In *Morontonu*, Awelewa through un-forgiveness, jealousy, and betrayal becomes an obstacle to peaceful co-existence in Ala kingdom. Ogun's action as a god of peace His actions commence when Awelewa decides to take the new born baby to the evil forest. Ogun does indeed remove the obstacle hindering the progress of the Ala community. This is an act of wickedness to which Ogun detests. Awelewa confirms her role as the said obstacle when she claims to be behind the Ala community's predicament. Let us examine her words in the evil forest that clarify her role in attracting Ogun's wrath to this community:

AWELEWA: A child sees herbs and calls them vegetables. These people don't know what they are playing with. Fire! Yes, they are playing with fire. (*She paces up and down for a few moment and continues.*) This is me, Awelewa, who laboured day and night with the help of the ancestors to establish the king on the throne. With my bare hands I took the firebrand sacrificial pot to the evil forest. Tossed and battered by the wind of hatred from the evil ones, yet full of vigour and determination to save my fatherland in the face of defeat. Oh, who can tell if my fate has not been locked up in that singular act? Where do I go from here? (*She becomes more vigorous.*) This is not the end; it is rather the very beginning of the king's troubles, troubles, troubles. Yes! Yes! The lion's boldness is in its heart, the spider's web is within it and the snake's power lies in its venom; it lies sleeping within its vertebrae, awaiting a simultaneous response when triggered. I paid the first price and the last must be paid. *She carries the child now and raises him up, still shaking the gourd.*) No, nobody can take the king's attention from me. Nobody. How can I, Awelewa, after failing to get the king a male child, be relegated to the background by a little thing, who calls herself Morontonu? Well, this child shall die! He shall die! (*Calling.*) Esu! Esu o!! Esu oooo!!! (Roy-Omoni 2012, 63–64)

From this extract, it is clear that Awelewa becomes Ogun's opponent and a hindrance to the progress of the community she claimed to have assisted in the past. She recounts how she "singlehandedly established the king on the throne" with the assistance of the community's ancestors (Roy-Omoni 2012, 63). Awelewa's promise to the gods before the request was granted remains unknown. She mentions "paying the first price" and that the second needs to be paid. Although Roy-Omoni did not allude to any promise made by Awelewa, one may deduce from the above extract the reason for her inability to produce a male child due to her recourse to the word "fate." She should have asked the ancestors the price she would pay for her request and not assume that her "fate has been locked up by the gods" (2012, 63). Awelewa becomes

violent, which is contrary to the principles of Ogun, and makes the decision to kill Moronton's son, which causes her to stand in the way of the progress of Ala community. For peace to reign in Ala Kingdom, the cause of Ogun's wrath had to be removed. The king ordered Awelewa to be executed and sacrificed to Ogun in order for the god to continue supporting the people. He says, "and for you Awelewa, my judgement on you is that you should be killed for your evil doings..." (*Turning to the CHIEF GUARD.*) Take her away and send her to the land of no return" (2012, 85). Eliminating Awelewa is not an act of wickedness but a means of cleansing the village from evil activities. Ogun is thus reimagined as an obstacle remover and a god of peace, who would not allow anyone to oppose the progress of his followers.

Similarly, the rivalry between Iggede and Ubigen community during each year's festival as portrayed by Omoko aims to assist the reader in understanding qualities of Ogun that are often misinterpreted. Through the emergent attribute of Ogun as a god of peace he is portrayed as a deity who aims to mediate conflict between two communities that are participating in the annual festival. The previous year's festival affects both communities because they refuse to reconcile after the contest. The aftermath of the previous season's festival launches the action in *Happening I*. Oloba, Amudu, and Odjiko visit Saniyo and immediately notice the effect of the previous season's abuse on Saniyo, the target of the Ubigen troupe. Saniyo was angered and his eyes became red because of how he had been represented in the song by this troupe. Hence, an implied significance of Omoko's portrayal of Saniyo is the depiction of a misinterpreted quality of Ogun by the modernist commentators. The following excerpt explores the significance of Ogun's association with the color red that is often misinterpreted:

A thatched square-like conference hall, supported from falling by forked posts. About four chairs are placed side by side at the right hand corner of the hall. SANIYO, a stoutly built man sits on a three-legged chair at the left corner of the hall, thinking. The atmosphere in the play shows that a contest has just taken place. Enter ODJIKO, OLOBA and AMUDU. SANIYO concentrates on his thoughts, pretending not to notice the men's presence ... as each walks to the other corner of the hall to collect chairs for themselves.

OLOBA: (*Light-heartedly.*) Hope nobody has died in this compound? (*Surveys his face, notices no change of countenance.*) Saniyo, hope you are not sick? Your eyes are red like the buluku of the Odede of Ade cult.

SANIYO: Sick! Sick, did you say? Sickness is better? A sickness may be cured with time but the effect of an insult remains forever.

OLOBA: (*Surprised.*) Don't tell me you are still reminiscing about the event at the last performance. You are sad as if the heavens have refused us a favour. But you can't remain like this all day.

SANIYO: (*Hysterical.*) Why won't I? Why won't I be sad? Just look at the image and metaphors with which I was represented in their songs. (Omoko 2009, 13)

It is evident from this conversation that Saniyo is still angry as a result of the previous season's performance. The characteristic of Ogun that is being misinterpreted in this conversation is the redness of Saniyo's eyes. Ogun is not directly referred to in this conversation, but a physical feature that is often linked to his being a cruel god, after being provoked, is implied in this dialogue. Oloba explicitly comments on the redness of Saniyo's eyes and compares it to the color of the buluku often worn by an Ogun priest. Oloba says, "your eyes are red like the buluku of the Odede of Ade cult" (Omoko 2009, 13). A buluku is the red cloth always tied to the waist of an Ogun priest during the festival or whenever he wants to carry out a rite in honour of the god. Omoko might not have intended to demonstrate this physical quality of Ogun precisely, but in a decolonial perspective, he attempts to explain the association between Ogun and the color red.

This physical quality of Ogun's red eyes is often associated with fury and aggression by scholars who are influenced by modernity. It is thus necessary to disagree with John Pemberton who associates Ogun's favorite color, red, with fury and aggression without exploring the cause of the redness (1997). Omoko's construction of Saniyo's red eyes offers a contrasting view to Pemberton's association by emphasising dissatisfaction with evil as the reason for the red eyes. Note Oloba's reference to Saniyo's look in comparison to the color associated with the Ogun figure in their community. The redness of Saniyo's eyes does not signify violence but, rather, the effect of the abuse in the festival song on him. It is therefore implied that Ogun may become angry if there is no peace after the festival rites. However, if Ogun's principle in the community intends to act against the tenets that Ogun stands for, the god has a way of disallowing the imminent wrath that could emerge.

Ogun's feature as a god of peace in *Morontonu* further becomes evident when Awelewa lies that Morontonu is responsible for kidnapping the newborn. Although he is an individual who represents Ogun in the community, Isorowolu orders Morontonu to be beheaded; however, Ogun as the custodian of truth in the play protects her.<sup>4</sup> Since Ogun detests unjust use of his implements, when this occurs he intervenes in the situation. Ogun protects Morontonu due to the fact that the weapon Werepe is going to use to kill Morontonu is an Ogun instrument (a cutlass or sword); hence Ogun intervenes to make sure Werepe does not use his weapon to cause harm to an innocent woman. There is no way Ogun would not interfere in this case since the weapon of destruction is metal. Ogun punishes the offender and takes vengeance against the erring one.

Due to Ogun's protection, it was impossible for the execution to take place, as Awelewa confesses later in the play. Isorowolu is angered due to the newborn baby being taken to the evil forest as a sacrifice to Esu. Owing to Isorowolu's belief that the baby is a gift from Ogun and anyone who initiates evil towards the baby will be sacrificed to Ogun, he orders Morontonu, who was accused by Awelewa, to be executed. Ogun as the protector delays the process because the king himself instructs Werepe, the palace's chief guard, "to wait for his last command" (2012, 68). The following excerpt illustrates this point:

KING: Not this time at all. All your tricks have been discovered. Balogun, call me the chief guard.

BALOGUN: (*Calling.*) Werepe! Werepe!!

WEREPE: Yes, my lord. (*He enters holding a cutlass and prostrates to the KING.*) Kabiyesi o. May you live long, Kabiyesi.

KING: Take her and prepare her as food for the task ahead.

WEREPE: (*Shocked.*) You mean who, my lord?

KING: (*Pointing to MORONTONU.*) I say take her along. When a thief joins in the search of a missing item, such will never be found. Prepare her for burial, but wait for my last command.

MORONTONU: *Yee pa, mo gbe.* I am finished. My lord, I do not understand what is going on here. Where is my child? (Roy-Omoni 2012, 67–68)

<sup>4</sup> The Oba in Yorubaland is known as the second in command to the gods. Adelowo (1990) reinforces the role of Yoruba Obas as ritual leaders in their community. He further highlights the relevance of Ogun during the coronation of kings and their daily activities. In his words, "In the cultic activities of a town the Oba is usually the head of the ritual leaders. He is the priest-king. In He-Ife, for example, the Ooni of Ife, Alase Ekeji Orisa is usually the Pontifex Maximus, He is the *olori Awon iworo* -the head of all the priests. He assumes this office in consequence of his sceptre (are) which is derived from the divinity to whom he is vicegerent. The office still stands even though the Ooni does not now officiate directly at any particular shrine and only performs certain customary rituals as tradition decrees" (1990, 163). It is compulsory for most Oba in Yorubaland to visit the Ogun shrine before being crowned. As mentioned in the introductory section, most kings in Yorubaland trace their origin to Ile-Ife and adopt Ogun as their patron god.

The above makes clear that it would have been possible for the king to issue an immediate order for Morontonnu's execution but he expresses a condition for it to be stayed. It is thus implied that Ogun might have delayed the process in order not to allow the blood of an innocent to be shed. If Morontonnu was truly guilty of kidnapping the child, the execution would have been a straightforward task for the palace guard to perform as the king would have pronounced his verdict, which would have been acceptable to Ogun. However, it will be recalled that Ogun is not a god that takes pleasure in the death of an innocent; he therefore protects Morontonnu from being sacrificed unjustly. Therefore, a follower of Ogun is expected to know the latter's principles as a misuse of his power could boomerang and bring destructive fire down on such a person. In a situation where a community or individual offends Ogun, such a party is required to placate the god to avert the ensuing wrath. Yoruba people respect all these principles associated with Ogun worship, which explains why his followers strive to avoid committing evil deeds against one another. Likewise, in the course of the play, whenever Isorowolu declares that Morontonnu must be executed something will distract him because Ogun intervenes each time. Examples of occasions when Ogun hinders Morontonnu's execution follow: during the commissioning of Akoni and his fellow hunters to find the missing baby, the parent's arrival after two days of Morontonnu's supposed execution, and Baba Ifa's intervention.

Ogun shields the victims of injustice, some of whom might have been cast out of the community or unjustly thrown into prison. Morontonnu becomes confined there and, according to Isorowolu, Werepe should "keep her in solitary confinement with no food until the time she will be sent to the land of no return" (2012, 69). Isorowolu commands that she is to be imprisoned and banned from having contact with people. For Morontonnu to be acquitted, the offender needs to be exposed. Baba Ifa must interrupt the execution process after every plea to Isorowolu to acquit Morontonnu becomes unsuccessful. The former emphasizes that killing an innocent soul in an Ogun shrine will only attract the wrath of the god. As Morontonnu is being taken to be beheaded, the stage direction draws attention to the nature of sacrifice and to the god in the Yoruba pantheon for which the sacrifice is intended:

(As WEREPE leads MORONTONU in for slaughter, she burst into the dirge again. As the song is going on, BABA IFA enters, to the surprise of everybody.)

BABA IFA: Hold it. Confound it. The wind has blown and we have seen the buttocks of the fowl. (Turning to the CHIEF GUARD.) You must not kill an innocent soul. (Turning to the KING.) Kabiyesi, may you live long. Our elders say that every day for the thief but one day is for the owner. They also say that if a lie has been going for twenty years, one day, truth shall catch up with it. (Roy Omoni 2012, 80)

Morontonnu's intended execution and Baba Ifa's view regarding the act reveal some noteworthy aspects of Ogun's intervention as the god of peace within the play itself. Morontonnu's dirge links her execution to Ogun when she says she will be dying 'a shameful death, death that beheads one' (Roy-Omoni 2012, 78). This symbolizes that she is going to be decapitated and that the sacrifice is going to be offered to Ogun since blood related sacrifices in Yorubaland are made only to him among the Yoruba pantheon.<sup>5</sup> Isorowolu emphasizes that Werepe should "take her out for slaughter" (2012, 69) and that her blood will be used to wet the throne. Ogun thus becomes central in this excerpt with reference to the word "slaughter" which might mislead a modernist thinker to interpret the god as a bloodthirsty one. It has been explained previously that Ogun does not take pleasure in reckless killing unless such an individual is a persistent offender who refuses to change. Ogun delights in peaceful co-existence where there is no evil and injustice.

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<sup>5</sup> BlackHomeSchoolAcademy opines that "however, in blood offerings it is Ogun, the only one allowed to take a life, who eats first, and it is because of him that the other Orisas can be fed blood" (2014, 5).

Another feature of Ogun as a god of peace emerges in Happening V in *Battles of Pleasure*, during the preparation for the Ogba-Urhie festival performance when both troupes unite to be blessed by the Curator. During their conversation Saniyo and Logbo lead their troupes to partake of the blessings given to participants before the contest. There is no form of abuse or fighting during the encounter with the Curator. Omoko presents a situation where both communities come together under one roof to perform. The Curator prays for both Ubigen and Igede singers under one roof and nowhere in this scene does Omoko record that there was an exchange of abusive songs. It is also evident from the response of the participants that everyone, including performers from Igede and Ubigen, participates in the ritual. The conversation and stage direction below reveal both communities' participation during the rite:

Curtain rises and reveals the Uhanghwa shrine of Igede. The CURATOR in full traditional garment enters carrying a bowl. He settles the bowl at the threshold of the room and in customary displays, paces round the stage, scanning through the faces around. Suddenly he freezes, his eyes focus ostentatiously on the Uhangwa symbol upstage, he utters some chants and moves closer to it. Pours libation, sprinkles some sacred white chalk and resumes another round of dignified dancing amid chanting. The scene also ushers in Ubigen's ritual performance.

CURATOR: ... U ... hanghwa... The god of attractive and flawless performance

It is you we have come to greet

Give us retentive memory on the arena of performance

Make us invisible to hostility of rivals

Who would use diabolic means to stop our voices ...

May we know nothing like stage fright ...

(Returns to the participants, picks up a small bundle of Ugbo-duma and ties it to the hem of each participant's dress.)

ALL: Ise-eee. (Omoko 2009, 56)

Ogun is a god who will not only create peace among individuals but also among communities such as Ubigen and Igede, as evident in the above extract. The Curator prays the same prayers for both troupes to symbolize unity. This is a direct contrast to what happens in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*. *Kurunmi* opposes settling differences between communities but appreciates adopting war as a means of achieving peace, an approach that later led to his death (Rotimi 1971). In reference to the conclusion of the performances by both communities, Omoko records at the end of Happening X that both the victorious and the non-victorious joined the celebration. One should note Omoko's epilogue to the play after the season's song presentation when both communities are reconciled and participate in the final dance of the day:

This is Udje...

The battle of poetic wits

A battle of pleasure

And a display of choreographic splendour

The victorious must sing and dance

The non-victorious also ...

Sleep of course is free for both the rich and the poor.

And so, let the ecstasy grip you to judge.

But the rivalry between the Ubigen and Igede

Continues...(Omoko 2009, 68)

The contest was supposed to create enmity between the two communities, but in order to avoid the incident of the previous year when Saniyo and his troupe refused to present their songs and the resultant factor was famine, both the Ubigen and the Igede community joined in the celebration. This signifies that Ogun must be worshipped in the right way in order for the god to bless the people. Omoko writes that “the rivalry between the Ubigen and Igede continues” (2009, 68) to symbolize that the annual Ogun festival will resurface when the next festival season comes. The rivalry is a prerequisite for the festival to take place since the performance concerns rival communities performing to outshine each other. The very blessing of Ogun depends on this rivalry manifested in the performances during the festival. However, this rivalry does not equal enmity; the principles of the festival demand that reconciliation be achieved after each festival to invite the blessings from Ogun. In a sense, the rivalry itself is only a performance necessitated by the festival. From a modernist perspective, Western education has contributed to the present lack of participation in the festival rites. Most people from the communities have embraced Western culture and perceive the festivals as barbaric and outdated due to their religious practices. Omoko’s representation of Ogun as a god of peace reconstructs the worship of the latter as a means of obtaining peace and security in the society. For example, the victors’ and the losers’ dances after the Ogba-Urhie festival significantly portray two communities that were supposed to be each other’s enemies celebrating together after the festival.

## Conclusion

This article has explored how Nigerian traditional drama is still being interpreted from a colonialist perspective which undermines its religious value. It has also explained why the Ogba-Urhie festival is reminiscent of the Ogun festival in Yorubaland. Also, how the sacrifices offered to Ogun can be misinterpreted as wickedness. It is therefore noteworthy that human sacrifices are no longer offered to Ogun but animals. The article argued that Ogun’s worship has assisted the Yoruba people in the areas of bountiful harvest and peaceful co-existence. It has also bred friendship and communal union among warring communities. Hence, the worship of Ogun appears not to be barbaric or outdated, in terms of its significance to the community. Omoko’s adaptation of his community’s Ogun festival explains that most rites performed during the festival aid the preservation of culture and a bountiful crop. Likewise, Roy-Omoni portrays how sacrifices to Ogun can help ward off evil from the community. Thus, Ogun is not a chaotic or a wicked god but a deity in charge of peaceful co-existence, procreation and harvest. This knowledge about the god is one that is supposed to be encouraged, not to abash those who intend to take the deity as their patron god. This implies that what is just—or not—should be the priority of the so-called ex-colonized, not of the colonizers.

This article accordingly contributes to the existing knowledge of Ogun traditional festivals from a decolonial vantage point. The festival’s drama and song project the Yoruba people’s worldview and identity, portray Ogun’s characteristics as a god who protects, provides for, and guides his adherents through hard times. The case of how Peter Omoko and Alex Roy-Omoni have re-imagined the African god in his play exemplifies how Africans with a decolonial sensibility are presently negating coloniality and restoring the power, knowledge and being of Africans to respectability. The article calls to action many African thinkers and intellectuals of the Global South that are participating in the ‘insurrection of previously subjugated’ histories and knowledges that are returning to importance through various social and political struggles, not to allow the African legacy to be pushed to oblivion. Recovering and restoring African gods to acceptability and respectability in the present academy will be courageous and also a creative scholarly venture which can be executed with research on them.

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