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## **EDITORIAL**

Every academic environment is sustained by learning through rigorous methods. Research is one and the focal point for assessment. A serious member of the academic community is measured by the quality and number of academic articles.

In spite of the desire to acquire many research reports, this edition has insisted on standards and quality. It is important to note that many articles have been rejected for not meeting our requirements.

The first and most obvious task of our journal is to provide a level playing field for researchers all over the globe in language-related disciplines, which is the vehicle for conveying knowledge. In this edition, seventeen (17) articles have undergone academic scrutiny from our blind reviewers.

To our esteemed contributors and readers, thought-provoking articles are expected and we are ready to publish them in the next volume.

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Three hard copies of the article with text, charts, tables, figures, plates or any other original illustration should be sent to the editor-in-chief JAJOLLS, Taraba State University, Jalingo, Taraba State Nigeria. Submission should either be in English, French, Hausa, or Arabic languages. Articles should be typed in double line spacing with a wide margin on each side only on A4 sized paper not exceeding 15 pages including abstract with not more than 6-7 keywords. Articles are to be submitted with Five Thousand Naira (N5,000) assessment and handling charges. By submitting an article to JAJOLLS, the author(s) agree that the exclusive rights to produce and distribute the articles to the publisher.

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## **African Traditional Practices as a Counterbalance to Western Democracy: A Post-Colonial Appraisal of Terhemba Shija's *The Siege, The Saga***

### **Abstract**

*This paper examines African Traditional Practices as a Counterbalance to Western Democracy using Terhemba Shija's The Siege, The Saga. The colonial era had a significant cultural influence on the colonized. Though it seems a thing of the past, its remnants still linger till date. As such certain critics are of the opinion that it is "progressive" and yet to be completely erased. One of the objectives of the paper is to examine the traditional African beliefs using Tiv culture. The theoretical framework used for this paper is postcolonialism. The method used for the paper is analytical method. The paper finds out that African culture is a treasure to behold. The paper also finds out that, the treasure of African which is worth beholding has been tempered by the Western culture. Post colonialism therefore, is an attempt to create a balance between past cultures and "progressive" cultures. Thus, this research work intends to appraise Terhemba Shija's novel, The Siege, The Saga using the post-colonial theory of criticism. The paper shall bring to bear the aspects of traditional African practices in the novel and the effect of Western civilization on the African worldview, using the Tiv example.*

**Keywords:** African, Counterbalance, Democracy, Practices, Traditional Western

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### **1.1 Introduction**

Post colonialism cannot be discussed without reference to colonialism. This is due to the fact that the colonial era deposited a lot of influences in the architecture of Africa, which led to acculturation. Taking Nigeria as a microcosm of the Universe therefore these same influences that permeated Africa, sipped into Nigeria and have affected virtually all aspects of life till date. As such literary works especially those coming out of Africa are usually tinged with characters who struggle with identities in the wake of colonization. A notion E.C Nweze emphasizes in his description of the



colonial novel when he opines that (the colonial novel) “was nothing more than a reflection of the European prejudices against the black race in general, and Africa in particular...based on false theories and myths and in some cases intentional lies meant to deaden the critical consciousness of his metropolitan reader” (*The Colonial Writer and His Age*, 2-3).

In many cases, the works of literature stemming from these places are heavy with socio-political, economic and emotional undertones. What post-colonial literary criticism seeks therefore is an analysis of literature written by both the colonizer and the colonized. The aim being the need to expose, the influences of Western infiltration on Africa in terms of politics, religion, culture, family to mention a few. In his *Things Fall Apart*, (1958) Chinua Achebe aptly portrays this when he showcases the Igbo culture and how their contact and eventual interaction with the White man led to the loss of cultural practices and values. It is common knowledge that Achebe's novel was written in response to the negative portrayal of the African as savages by Joseph Conrad in his *Heart of Darkness* (1899) Achebe however writes his novel pointing out who the real savages are. In his opinion, forcing Western culture on Africa is the height of savagery. This is where post colonialism comes to play. What then is post colonialism?

Taking a cue from Bill Aschroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*, (1989), post-coloniality as a scope includes “those peoples formally colonized by Britain but with interest and relevance to countries colonized by other European powers such as France, Portugal and Spain” (1), because they have been impacted in all facets of life by the activities of these colonial powers. Terhembra Shija in his *Post-coloniality and the Poetry of Tanure Ojaide*, further states that the “definition of the “post-colonial” arises more with the prefix “post” which literarily means beyond colonialism” (2) therefore “the concept of post-coloniality suggests either a “reaction” to the experience of colonialism or the “aftermath” of colonialism (2). He however quotes Bill Aschroft et al as having used the term “post-colonialism” to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonialism to present day. He buttresses his point in the following words:

This is because there is continuity of pre-occupation throughout the historical process initiated by the European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted”. (3)

Again, another looks at Hisham, M. Nazer's “*Key Concepts of Post-colonial Criticism*” asserts that post colonialism “attempts to understand political, social, cultural and psychological operations and the colonialist and the anti-colonialist ideology (1).

This work therefore intends to carry out an appraisal of Terhembra Shija's *The Siege, The Saga*, along the lines of post colonialism and its effects on the traditional practices of the African people using the Tiv of Benue state as yard stick. For the purposes of this work, Western Democracy is not limited to the political arena alone. Everything non-African is considered colonialist and as such Western in all ramifications, The novel revolves around Targema, the protagonist who hails from a poor background in Turan village. He struggles through school and manages to graduate, the financial difficulties notwithstanding. While in school, he meets Torkwase a girl of high social standing who dates him and eventually jilts him for a wealthier man. He feels badly hurt and attempts made by Torkwase to mend their broken relationship all prove abortive. He soon begins a legal practice and with time finds his feet in

society, which eventually boosts his ego and erases the complex that had been a burden all his life. With his new stand in the society, he mixes with the crème de la crème and hangs out at the “happening” spots in Gboko, where he again meets his first love. Fate has brought them again together and he decides to marry Torkwase, first because of her beauty, and secondly because he still loves her. Torkwase in turn promises to be faithful to him after a wealth of apologies for her past behavior. They get married, start a family and try to live the ideal life. Things however get to a head when Targema who is vying for the Governorship seat gets into a political battle with Chief Shaagee, an influential figure in the Gboko society, considered to be Torkwase's foster father, vying for the same position. In the long run both men lock horns in a political tussle and end up in hate propaganda meant to run each other down before the people of Gboko. This exposes Torkwase's infidelity and rubs Targema's personality the wrong way, and he becomes estranged from his wife. To win him back, Torkwase embarks on a journey to visit a spiritualist/prophet believed by her friends to have the solution to her problems and on their return are caught in a military crossfire where all three of them lose their lives. But her demise brings unity between the opposing forces at the end of the novel.

## **2.1 Conceptual Framework of Tradition**

The term “tradition” could be defined as knowledge, concepts, superstitions and mode of life, which can be transferred from one generation to another generation. It is said to be the body of customs, thought, practices, among others, belonging to a particular country, people, family, or institution over a relatively long period of time. Rashida and Massarat defines tradition as a society's approach and opinions, which remains legitimate for generations, on vital subjects such as sacred or political issues. It is derived from the Latin verb “traditio”, which means “to handover or to hand down” and “tradere”, meaning to transmit. Judging from its etymological sense therefore, “a tradition is a statement, belief or practice transmitted especially orally by practice from one generation to another generation” (2). It basically refers to that which is indigenous, that which is aboriginal or foundational, handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practiced by a people.

## **3.1 About the Author**

Terhemba Shija is a Scholar, a novelist and a poet from Benue State. He teaches African Literature and Media Literary Theory at the Department of English, Nasarawa State University, Keffi. His collection of works includes *Whispers of Distant Drums*, a collection of short stories, *Serenades of Zaki-Biam* and a volume of poetry, *Cantos for the Bernie*.

## **4.1 Post-Colonial Analysis of *The Siege, The Saga***

As part of its cultural heritage, Africa has rich literary traditions even though literariness existed in oral more than written forms till the spread of literacy, but not the novel. Most writers of African origin have found the novel a fit and useful medium to portray their worldview, life and culture to bring out their oral traditions. The forerunner, being Chinua Achebe who stepped into this literary scene of Africa, when the African society was on the vertex of a crucial phase of history” (Maleki and Navidi, 11).

Shija in his *The Siege, The Saga* is one novelist who as a native of Africa penetrates the root cause of the problems of his fellow native beings. The major themes in his novel revolve around community life, marriage and family, morality, traditional

beliefs of the Tiv people. The first part of the novel is set in Turan, a Tiv village in Benue State, Nigeria. This part which constitutes the prologue portrays traditional village life and customs. The Tiv ancient rites are presented in the novel as parts of a well-ordered culture before British colonization. For instance, we see Tsavnum Gbaka portrayed as a great hunter who, when called by his ancestral name of *Angera Ingyoroko Dagbera* “would slap his bulky chest with pride and bellow: “the fierce lion that descends from Swem Karagbe” (9). As part of tradition, only those who are his age mates are allowed to address him by that name, “those he had grown up with and rivaled in material accomplishment” (8). The above description gives a vivid insight into the world view of the Turan people. From the above it seems obvious that respect for tradition is the bane of the Society as depicted by the writer.

Tsavnum is also seen to boast of organizing a “lavish dance ceremony for his first wife, a feast which only wealthy elders were known for” (12). Traditionally also, he is shown to have “set up a vast settlement of seven huts for himself and his five wives, at a distance that did not sever him from his ancestral roots” (8), Community life is perceived from the above description. The ideal society where everyone lives in a closely-knit structure is definitely an African traditional practice. Again, for protection against wild beasts, and stray bullets the gber-kpugh concoction was applied by every brave hunter (12). What Shija portrays by the above scenarios is a detailed picture of Tiv traditional society and culture. He takes the task of revealing the various dimensions of the Tiv and showing that the Nigerian culture is diverse and rich.

Things begin to change 30 years later when the influences left behind by the - colonizers start taking their toll on the community. The novel records a sensitive phase in the history of the Tiv people because Shija picks up the situations that transcend history. For instance, the accidental killing of Agashua, by his father is seen as sacrifice for political security for his younger brother, 30 years later, Shija reminds the readers of their past and the traditional, social and cultural identities that are invaded by the Western culture later.

*The Siege, The Saga* depicts the conflict between individual and society in the sense that man's relations to his or her surroundings change his reactions to certain actions, for instance, Chief Shaagee who on one level protests against traditional rituals, tends to tilt towards colonial influences when he feebly opposes his father's instruction on performance of the *ibiamagh* ritual which required parading naked before his people. He refers to the act as primitive and barbaric and considers it unimaginable (72). Hear him speak:

This is primitive. It's unimaginable. To walk naked before the elders and subjects who are making me king, a man with three wives and nine children and you expect me to believe that it was a legitimate process of acquiring political power? You expect me to feel happy that spectators are jeering at my wives' nudity? Impossible. This is not my idea of seeking election into the parliament. (72)

The question that readily comes to mind is, what exactly was the dress code of Africans before the colonialists arrived? Could it be that Shaagee's reaction is a result of the years spent in studying in England? Well, Chief Gesa has the answer to this when in response to Shaagee's protests he replies in the following words:

You talk of democracy in the whiteman's and. What is more democratic than having a leader sufficiently exposed before his

kingmakers and subjects? They should know him. He and his wives should have no secret before their concept in the first place? (72)

Yes, Chief Gesa believes in democracy. However, his perception on the matter is quite different from that of his son. He is portrayed as one who has “aged greatly, is one of the oldest traditional rulers in Tiviand and spends nights in the ate for the purpose of warming himself... and also communing with the spirits” (68). This portrayal therefore shows the generation gap between him and his son, and his worldview and probably that of those in the same age grade as he who believe that parading naked before one's subjects signifies purity of heart and intentions and by extension, is democratic.

Once again, we see the conflict between the individual and society in Shaagee's conversation with Pastor Puusu, where he is torn between his Christian faith and his traditional beliefs. To defend his decision on the one hand he tells Pastor Puusu that “matters of tradition are a necessary part of society and that the white people also have their rituals of power (72). As much as Pastor Pussu tries to convince him otherwise by stating that power comes from the ballot box and not from the shrine, he in turn convinces himself and the Pastor that the ritual was a “tradition of his people” (77), and

a mark of popularity among his people who needed to prepare their representative in the Federal Government and protect him from evil plans of the enemies of the people. (77)

At the long run Chief Shaagee succumbs to his traditional practices and he and his entire family parade naked through the forest at the dead of night to the *Poor* shrine to secure his political seat by performing the *ibiamagh* ritual and the *imbiorvungu* totem is handed to him. There are primary ideas in the novel, *The Siege, The Saga* which include but not limited to morality, community life, marriage and family among others. Marriage for instance in Tiv is considered as sacred institution, inextricably glued to the Tiv Tradition Practice. The sacredness attached makes it a highly celebrated ceremony among the Tiv people.

To this study therefore, what the writer tries to portray here is the link between the African and his traditional sacrifices and rituals. From all that has been deduced so far, these sacrifices seem to be an integral part of Tiv culture and traditions, in other words no matter the pull by influences of the west, the African is tied to his traditional practices especially when it acts as a means to an end. This we also find in deaths of different members of different families in the society, whom people of Gboko believed to have been sacrificed in the past as such are read as being connected to the present. For instance, Gboko indigenes perceived the death of Shaagee's siblings who died under suspicious circumstances as sacrifices offered by his father Chief Gesa, to secure the political seat. In addition, the author also presents the death of Targema's brother Agashua thirty years earlier, as securing his future seat in Government. Cleansing rites also fall within this category of sacrifices since we are presented with the need for necessary cleansing that would need to be performed on the tribe after the release of Tsavnum. Failure of which could lead to dire consequences.

Over time traditional practices seem to take the back burner when western influences start sipping in. First, we are presented with a drastic shift from the traditional marriage rites as portrayed at the beginning of the novel to the lavish wedding ceremonies like that between Torkwase and Targema. Western democracy also rears its ugly head with the advent of the political tussle between Chief Shaagee and Targema, two men who are tied to the same woman but in different ways. The hate

propaganda and demeaning images painted by both candidates and their supporters portray the total loss of decorum and traditional values as well as respect of self and neighbor as presented in the novel thirty years earlier. From this point morals have no place in the lives and actions of the players. This again is portrayed at the point where the economic boom that comes with the establishment of the cement factory brings with it crime and many more negative vices that were originally not there. Through this, Shija brings to bear, the transformation of traditional society from its original state of innocence peace, tranquility and order to a state of disintegration and disorder, war and hate, all under the pressure of western democracy. To challenge these negative forces so as to bring back sanity therefore, a unifying force must come to play. This culminates in the death of Torkwase whose demise is the force that unites Chief Shaagee and Targema after a worthless battle of words. Again, Shija brings back the African traditional worldview of sacrifice being the price for peace as we read from the epilogue:

Both governorship candidates of the two parties for the election, Chief Shaagee and Barrister Targema, were, for once, united in grief over the brutal murder of the lady. They held each other by the shoulders as they wept and bade Torkwase their final goodbye". (211)

## **5.1 Conclusion**

*The Siege, The Saga* is the story of traditional African beliefs sacrificed at the altar of western democracy. The typical traditions and beliefs of the Tiv people represent their ethics, socio-political set up and traditional society that are in a struggle and a battle with westernization which came to break down the society, culture and history. The primary objective of post colonialist literature is to transcend the destruction of colonialism on various cultures. Shija's novel is a novel that portrays the African Tiv as possessing their own form of leadership and life style. Therefore, by showing the destruction of the society following colonization, Shija suggests that it is the civilizing mission that has led to the destruction and disintegration of the African Society.

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