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**Decolonizing Africans of Western Hegemony and  
Imperialism: A Reflection on Ahmed Yerima's Historical  
Drama Attahiru and The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen**

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**Joseph Agofure IDOGHO, (PhD)**

*Department of Theatre and Media Arts*

*Federal University Oye Ekiti*

*Ekiti State, Nigeria*

*(08060596423*

*joseph.idogho@fuoye.edu.ng / agofurei@gmail.com*

*Orcid ID - 0000-0001-9832-1184*

**Hannah Modupe AKPODIETE (PhD)**

*Department of Theatre arts*

*Delta State University Abraka*

*Delta State, Nigeria*

*08023176907*

*dupedudu2018@gmail.com*

**Toyin Abigail FERANMI-OJO**

*Department of English and Literary Study*

*Federal University Oye Ekiti*

*Ekiti State*

*08034935668*

*toyin.feranmi-ojo@fuoye.edu.ng,*  
*<https://orcid.org/009-0001-0110-8254>*

**Isaac Terkimbi GONDO**

*Department of Theatre and Media Arts*  
*Federal University Oye Ekiti*  
*Ekiti State, Nigeria*  
*(07039220000*

*Isaac.gondo@fuoye.edu.ng & gondoisaac@yahoo.com*

**Timi Hadiza KAYODE**

*Department of Theatre and Media Arts*  
*Federal University Oye Ekiti*  
*Ekiti State, Nigeria*  
*08023031440*

*timi.kayode@fuoye.edu.ng*

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**Abstract**

Historical drama has proven to be a critical tool to educate, guide and conscientize society. It has also demonstrated the potential to direct social decisions especially relative to the correction of societal ills stemming from prejudices and stereotyping. The study thus sets out to examine the role of historical drama as a tool for human liberation, using Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and *The Trial of Oba Ovoranwen* as case studies. The study adopts the new historicism theory which holds that the work of art can be understood through its historical context vis-a-viz its cultural and intellectual history through literature. The study adopts a qualitative research methodology, using the thematic analyses of the plays under study and conceptual research approaches. The findings reveal that historical drama, and theatre are critical tools for promoting, preserving and propagating history from generation to generation. This invariably indicates the necessity for reliance on historical antecedents with regards to decision making at the national level. The study further highlights five ways through which Africans can liberate themselves from subtle Western hegemony. Arising from the findings of this study therefore, it is recommended that: historical drama should be appreciated as a viable tool for re-telling history. Policymakers should also resort or consult historical dramas to learn from history as a guide in addressing and resolving prevailing socio-economic-political-religious realities of contemporary situations. The society at large should give adequate attention to historical drama as this can apply to the correction of contemporary societal ills.

**Keywords:** *Colonialism, Decolonization, Historical Drama, Western Hegemony, Globalization*

## **Introduction**

In spite of the undeniable fact that a minority of African countries are supposedly independent and sovereign nations supposedly; most of these countries still survive by the whims and caprices of the West. A pathetic socio-political and economic situation of many African nations is the elitist dominance of western powers in domestic affairs. This dominance instead of ushering in much desired development, has given rise to plutocracy and mismanagement of public common wealth by stooges of the west. The dominance has also constituted a hindrance to indigenous democracy in the African political space. This practices of plutocracy has led to internal-colonialization whereby the rich stooges of the west recolonize the masses, to their selfish advantage with their western benefactors subtly manipulating the system behind the scene. This in essence is what constitutes neocolonialism.

Thus long after the African countries have gained independence, most Africans continue to suffer the effects and ramifications of colonialism, particularly in terms of economic organization and leadership. Despite having attained independence with the African leaders now at the helm of affairs: the colonial authorities - the West and America continue to maintain insidious administrative dominance. Neocolonialism has also developed because of the governing elites who took on the characteristics of colonial rulers to oppress their people. It is obvious that history repeats itself given the social, economic, and religious realities that exist now in Africa and Nigeria (Aketema,2022:243): which now begs for the question of whether people ever learn from history or not.

History is the study of human ideas and historical events, both recent and distant, including individuals and their social, cultural, and physical environments. Humanity sees these past occurrences as experiences which should inform present and future aspirations. These also help to counsel and advise people on what to do in their present circumstances. Modern times place great emphasis on having a thorough understanding of nature and sequence of events, their cause-and-effect relationships, a critical analysis of the significance of these events to people's current

lives, and future planning in order to avoid past mistakes and face the future with confidence.

As a result, in their never-ending attempt to portray the human condition, modern dramatists use historical events and conflicts to narrate, recreate, and perform. Every group, institution, and civilization as impacted by war and conflict have deservedly received the attention of many scholars who have written extensively on the causes, scope, nature, and motivations of human warfare. Some scholars opines that the desire for control or power over others is the root cause of conflict in human civilizations Brown (1984: cited in Mubarak 2015:44), postulated that:

Who should govern is often a fighting issue, for those in control of the government have a lot to say about who gets what, when and how. And since control of the government tends to give political legitimacy with the right to use force to some groups but to deprive others of this power, it is hardly surprising that human history has been marked by so many civil wars and violent changes of government (44).

In addition, as sociologists endeavour to unravel the causes of war, historians and creative writers are documenting and examining it. Ogunpitan observed:

The link between literature and war is ancient, as ancient as human settlement. Myths, legends, epics and other forms of imaginative literature are replete with stories of wars, or heroism, and of courage. There certainly are more volumes of literary work on war than there are historical accounts (cited in Azeez, 2012:133).

Moreover, both the artist and historian are writing to correct certain impressions and misconceptions about war and as well use it to teach against its recurrence or serve as a model guide to subsequent decisions. The artists retell the exploits, adventures, stoicisms, resistance and bravery of certain historical characters in an imaginative and more visionary style. Accordingly, Azeez (2012), argued that:

Both the historical and the imaginative writer are men and women with keen research interest, seekers after truth. Thus, they, after the war, may want to portray an “objective” view of the war and by so doing inject, their “subjective” opinion on the issue (135).

Nineteenth-century colonial resistance narratives include Nigerian dramatists who depict the heroes against white colonial encroachments. The extent to which dramatists scrutinise or critique the questionable historical narratives of some prominent figures is contentious. By contesting the prevailing colonial authorities via both structure and

substance, playwrights ultimately reconstruct historical narratives and amplify the voices of the colonised.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Today's African societies are characterized by subtle Western- European and American entrenching their hegemonies and dominance; with African leaders been complacent with it. The modern African leaders are satisfied with this development for their personal and self-aggrandizement. This situation has given rise to neo-colonialism and hardship among the masses in contemporary African societies. To alleviate this situation, scholars and dramatists alike has resulted to writing historical drama to remind the elites and the masses of past event and how it was resolved in relations to the present societal realities. Thus when humans see or encounter a re-enactment of historical events in contemporary times, the expression "history repeats itself" is often expressed by the audience members should that play resonate with happenings in the social world where it is re-enacted. This affirms the timeliness nature of most works of art including plays. Such historical drama tends to pontificate societies to response to its prevailing realities; using history and historical fact as springboard.

It is against this backdrop therefore that this research examines societal responses to and interpretations of its current circumstances, which seem to mirror historical events. Historical dramatists are essential to society as they motivate citizens to take necessary actions for success by using historical and archival resources to enlighten them about significant concerns pertaining to their history (Mubarak 2015:65)

This study assessed the efficacy of historical drama, namely the case studies of *Attahiru* and *The Trials of Ovonramwen* by Ahmed Yerima, in motivating individuals to engage in collective action over issues pertinent to their realities that directly affect them; using their history.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Conceptual Clarification***

Colonialism is the deliberate enforcement of a "superior" nation's laws and customs onto another nation deemed inferior. Colonialism is the process by which a state creates and administers colonies in another country. Ejeh (2021: 17) defines colonialism as a "form of domination"

whereby some individuals or organisations exert control over the land and/or conduct of other individuals or groups. To exploit the colonised country and augment the economic prosperity of the colonialist home state, the objective is to impose superiority of one nation over another. Ejeh 2021:17 cites Horvath (1972). Consequently, colonisation serves as a mechanism for both exploitation and advancement on several levels. British colonists had no interest in understanding the many traditions of the indigenous populations during their first arrival in Nigeria. They arrived in Nigeria only for political and economic motives. To acquire foreign resources for economic progress and imperial expansion, the British subjugated Nigeria and other African nations. Their two principal objectives were to create rapid and cost-effective revenue and to devise methods for optimising colonial governance. Colonisation undoubtedly had both beneficial and detrimental effects on Nigerian society.

Regrettably, the adverse effects of colonialism surpassed its beneficial aspects. This study examines the adverse effects of colonialism in Nigeria, since these challenges continue to impact the country's political, social, religious, and economic institutions today (Idogho, 2018:22). The many issues facing Nigeria today arises from the colonialists' failure to implement an appropriate administrative structure for the nation. The colonial authorities bequeathed the nascent Nigerian leadership a frail economy with limited prospects for development and advancement (Ejeh 2021: 18). They intentionally executed this to ensure that Nigeria would continue to seek their assistance in governance post-departure. This suggests that Nigeria is not entirely autonomous. The entrenchment of colonial traditions inside Nigeria's governmental framework and the cultural tapestry of its varied populace impeded the nation's development.

"Imperialism" and "Colonialism" are almost synonymous due to their analogous definitions. Nonetheless, a nuanced difference exists between the two. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1998) define imperialism as the extension of control by one country over one or more surrounding states (p. 122). Said (1993) expressly defined imperialism as "the practice, theory, and attitudes of a dominant metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; whereas 'colonialism,' which is invariably a consequence of imperialism, is the establishment of settlements on distant territory" (8). Consequently, 'post-colonialism is intrinsically linked to the concept of imperialism.'

**Decolonisation:** The act of liberating a nation's populace from the impacts and repercussions of colonialism is termed decolonisation. The decolonisation argument remains pertinent primarily because to the past and on-going colonial oppression faced by nations, whether overtly or covertly. Despite Nigeria's nominal independence from colonial status, Britain, its former coloniser, continues to exert indirect authority over the nation.

The concept "decolonisation" may be interpreted in several ways. Decolonisation refers to the termination of colonialism and the establishment of a nation's sovereignty over its territory. A situation in which a formerly dominating nation resurfaces and functions autonomously, without of direct external meddling. The analytical dissection of the colonisers' perspectives, which saw colonised individuals as inferior, may be characterised as decolonisation (Mignolo, 2011). Decolonisation may be seen as a cognitive emancipation from "acute colonialism, marked by a disconnection from or unconscious rejection of one's own reality in favour of the realities of others" (Soyinka, 1998: cited in Ejeh 2021: 17). This entails emancipating oneself from the colonial affliction of consciously dismissing one's own language and distorting one's spelling and pronunciation, as well as attempting to emulate the communication and behaviour of those deemed superior. Decolonisation is a process of self-discovery, reawakening, and value reorientation that involves the deliberate identification, dismantling, and elimination of detrimental remnants of slavery and colonial ideologies that hinder development and progress at all levels. It promotes the acceptance of our identities and views within a global community, with self-realization, self-determination, and self-esteem.

**Hegemony:** Ashcroft et al. (1998) define hegemony as "the capacity of the ruling class to persuade other classes that their interests align with the collective interests" (116). "Consequently, Postcolonial literature reveals Western dominance and the formation of the colonial subject" (Idogho 2018). The objectives of the ruling class are shown as the collective interest and are therefore assumed, rendering hegemony a kind of power over the economy, education, and media that is implemented quietly and inclusively rather than by coercion. The leaders of post-colonial Nigeria persist in exercising elite dominance. The contemporary ruling elite in Nigeria have emulated its colonial predecessors by using religion and ethnic divisions to subjugate the masses.

## ***Drama and History: A Marriage of Convenience***

To begin with, *Attahiru*, is a historical drama that recreates a long-gone past event through theatre to protest and resist historical misrepresentation and as well as guide against contemporary prevailing reality. Historical drama is defined by Etherton (1979) as:

A shift from the re-creation of oral traditions in dramatic terms to the re-creation of a past contained in written histories. It is concerned with the colonial; and also, with the immediate pre-colonial period and with those once powerful and extensive African empires like Benin which have an indigenous chronology of rulers giving some access to a more remote past (65).

This reveals that the plays at the centre of this study, being about pre-colonial encounter between colonial rulers and indigenous Africans, can undoubtedly be classified as historical plays. In this context, Okoh (2007: cited in Adeoti 2007) stated that:

Over time, history has remained a dynamic source material for play creating and playwriting. From the first to the present generations of playwrights in Nigeria, the trend remains the same. Whether the focus is on distinguished figures or events, the historical material is adapted, recreated or subverted to serve a purpose, depending on the social vision or ideological persuasion of the individual writer (Adeoti, 2007:110)

This allegation may be applicable to the works of Ahmed Yerima, including *Attahiru*, *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen*, and *Ameb Oboni the Great*. These three historical dramas possess a nationalistic tone owing to their common focus on colonialism. As a result, Yerima discovers significant facts on Nigeria's colonial past. His plays do not seek to represent the past accurately, unlike historical writing. His comprehension of historical events underpins these creative reconstructions of the past.

Consequently, while history and theatre may seem similar, they are fundamentally distinct. These are two distinct but interconnected disciplines, since one enhances the other. According to Scrubber (2001), if history and drama were to conflict, the people would choose drama over history. He said, "For the play to succeed and retain the audience's interest, the importance of drama must prevail" (133-137). Moreover, an author may modify, exclude, or even invent historical events to fulfill his objectives or to meet the aesthetic criteria of his genre, albeit adhering closely to the facts. His artistic autonomy enables him to articulate his thoughts, ideas, and aspirations via writing. Consequently, he can authentically reconstruct history. This, however, does not mean that the



creative license permits the dramatist to extend his input to fabricating facts. Rotimi (1978: cited in Mubarak 2015:62) suggested that "the dramatist's input does not forget historical truth" (10). Similarly, Yerima (2003) explained that:

The use of historical materials in a work of art is the attempt by man to further explain the significance of the historical event in a less serious story-telling version or style even while using the facts of the historical event... "Less serious" means the addition of the entertainment element, and aesthetic embellishment values to the facts of history.... In this case by giving life to the historical acts, and using his power of imagination, he (the dramatist) endows history with characters, dialogue, new argument, culture of music; dance, religion, to create an environment, so that history moves from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first in visual form, without losing its original essence (189-190).

Therefore, a dramatist is free to select that aspect of history which he feels will enhance his creativity and give it a new interpretation for the enjoyment of his audience. According to

Soyinka (1988), "the artist or the ideologue is quite free to reconstruct history on the current ideological premises and, thereby prescribe for the future through lessons thus provoked" (126).

Incidentally, for African writers, whose history was disputed, damaged and misrepresented, dramatizing historical materials can be a process of imaginative recovery and an affirmation of existence, culture and tradition. Accordingly, Muhammad Inuwa Umar-Buratai (2007) reasoned that:

This is because colonialism undermined and misrepresented African people and their cultural practices. There is the crucial need to project aspects of the people's pre-colonial and colonial history in imaginative form, to correct colonial misrepresentations. Thus, the historical play presents and re-asserts what it adjudges as the authentic history of the people to achieve a kind of self-appreciation (cited in Adeoti, 2007:144).

The notion is that the visual and aural advantages of theatre may be used to more extensively and insightfully research, replicate, and correct misunderstandings about Africa in historical plays. African playwrights, such as Ahmed Yerima, include historical themes into their works.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this investigation is based on Stephen Greenblatt's 1982 New Historicism Theory, which tries to evaluate

literary and cultural history and appreciate creative works considering their historical circumstances. Observations indicate that history has been reinterpreted as theatrical plays. As a result, creators of historical theatre attempt to create drama from historical events, blurring the line between fact and fiction. The study indicates that the playwright's interpretation of historical events, while imbued with his thematic concerns, defines the link between history and theatre; thereby making this theory relevant to this study.

## **Research Methodology**

This study used a qualitative approach, using thematic analysis to properly assess and evaluate the chosen textual sources as primary materials. Secondary data sources use a conceptual research technique to acquire and assess material related to the study's topic.

## **Data Presentations and Analysis**

### ***Plot Summary of Ahmed Yerima's Attahiru***

Attahiru 1, the twelfth and last Caliph of the Sokoto Caliphate in pre-colonial northern Nigeria, is the focus of the drama *Attahiru*. The play depicts the clash between the Caliphate's fervent Islamic nationalism and Lugard's imperialist, colonialist ideology, culminating in the Caliph's heroic death at the Battle of Burmi, where hundreds of his subjects and loyalists were slaughtered. At the peak of the African rush, France is swiftly advancing into Niger, but Great Britain is keen to assert dominance over the Caliphate before it can.

To expedite and broaden his endeavours in Sokoto, Lugard initially composes a letter of purported camaraderie to the Caliph, soliciting the establishment of a rapport with the European "infidel," irrespective of his inclinations.

Caliph Attahiru, a committed Muslim and patriot, rejected the invites of friendship, asserting that "the only permissible relationship between a believer and an infidel is...war!" Consequently, Lugard's methods were unsuccessful (Yerima, 1999: 33). British colonial forces experienced defeats due to the intense opposition provoked by this proclamation across the caliphate. The Caliph's refusal was a definitive act of resistance against economic exploitation, leadership sabotage, and the cultural desecration of the people's indigenous culture.

On March 15, 1903, the British initiated an offensive attack against the Sokoto Caliphate, successfully deposing the Caliph. He embarked on the Hijrah to the East due to apprehensions for the safety of women and children. The second Battle of Burmi began on July 27, 1903. The catastrophic incident resulted in the deaths of over 600 individuals, including Caliph Attahiru, whose demise marked the end of the Sokoto Caliphate. The British triumphed in the conflict due to their possession of more advanced weaponry compared to the Burmese, who were limited to swords, cutlasses, arrows, and spears. The resistance fighters were mentally prepared to confront the British assault.

### ***Plot Summary of Ahmed Yerima's The Trial of Oba Ovonramwen***

The Federal Government of Nigeria commissioned Yerima to compose *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen* in 1897 to commemorate the centenary of the British imperialist incursion into the Benin Kingdom. The 1997 Independence Day commemoration included a theatrical performance, (Yerima 1997: 6).

*The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen* depicts the historical events that led to the British invasion of the Old Benin Kingdom at the close of the 19th century. The novel chronicles the downfall of the Oba of Benin, emphasising how her economic ambitions and expansionist fervour are consuming the vast Kingdom, necessitating the subjugation of both the Kingdom and its esteemed populace to facilitate a lucrative commercial enterprise. The Benin administration has rejected British attempts to get the Benin Monarch's endorsement of a protection treaty, denying the British government a legal foundation for meddling in Benin affairs.

The Oba's supporters claim that his participation in the annual Ague festival festivities precludes him from greeting guests, since custom forbids the Oba or the Kingdom from interacting with outsiders during this period. Vice-Consul Philip requests permission to visit the Benin Kingdom to address the trade issue.

Vice-Consul Philips resolves to violate both national law and the Royal Court's admonition, since he suspects the Oba is executing innocent individuals with whom he must engage in commerce or trade and thinks that these rituals include human sacrifices. Oba Ovonramwen's chiefs mutiny against him when he sends Vice-Consul Philips and his troops to assault the Kingdom because of the conflict between him and his brother over Ovonramwen's execution of numerous internal rebels. Vice-Consul Philips resolves to go despite the

Oba's messengers advising them to withdraw upon their encounter in the woods. The Benin warriors, however, attack him and his contingent, resulting in his death along with six of his associates. This move resulted in an imperial war against the Benin Kingdom. Following his withdrawal into the forest with his leaders, Oba Ovonramwem ultimately capitulates to the British. After a brief pause, the Oba removes his crown, presents it to Chief Obasaki, and bows before the likeness of Queen Victoria. Moor subsequently apprehends him and demands that he show reverence for the Queen's portrait. After his conviction, Oba Ovonramwem and five of his chiefs are condemned to death and exiled to Calabar. To resist the Oba and the Benin Kingdom, Chief Obasaki collaborates with British forces as Benin's "Native Political Agent."

## **Discussion of Findings**

The analysis in the previous section reveals that the two plays have two similar qualities. The affected natives resisted economic trade hegemony and governmental authority, while European colonial powers sought to subjugate them. Sir Frederick Lugard, the principal British colonial administrator in Nigeria, deemed it prudent to annex the northern area at an opportune moment.

On January 1, 1900, Sir Frederick Lugard announced in Lokoja that the British government, of which he was a representative, had assumed governance of the territories previously administered by the Royal Niger Company, in accordance with specific commercial treaties from 1885, allegedly acquired from the Sultan of Sokoto and the Emir of Gwandu by the National African Company, which later evolved into the Royal Niger Company. Tibenderana (1988: cited in Mubarak 2015:58), observed that:

Because of conflicting interpretations of the treaty, relation between Sokoto and Gwandu on the one hand and the Royal Niger Company on the other became strained with the result that by the close of the nineteenth century, Europeans had come to be hated and mistrusted throughout Sokoto because of their apparent political designs within the area (58).

In pre-colonial Nigeria, the Royal Niger Company's main business was commerce. To support its growth, the company acts as a conduit for Europe to import raw materials from Nigeria. Prior to colonisation, Europeans dominated treaty negotiations with African rulers. The British colonists saw that political opposition from African kings like

Obas like Ovonramwem and emirs like Attahiru would seriously hinder their ability to carry out free commerce and accomplish their economic objectives. The British plan to replace the pre-colonial rulers of Benin (Oba Ovonramwem) and Sokoto (Attahiru) with more manageable local administrations was the source of the indirect British influence. Yerima's assertion that: "Attahiru did not desire British rule over Sokoto, led to his resistance and eventually the war" (2003:187) supports his argument. Attahiru tried to avoid becoming a mere puppet with no real authority as a temporal and spiritual leader, a Sultan who was just a title.

There are recurring themes throughout Oba Ovonramwem's struggles. Since 1862, British attempts to get the ruler of Benin to sign a protection pact had failed. Henry Galway, the British Vice-Consul, persuaded Oba Ovonramwem to sign a covenant of protection in 1892. The Benin Kingdom was required under the standard requirements of the treaty to allow unrestricted trade inside its boundaries.

From 1888 to 1897, Ovonranwen Nogbaisi was the Oba of the Benin Kingdom. According to Ofonagoro (2001:40), Oba Ovonramwem, known as 'Nogbaisi' or 'the Enlightened,' was knowledgeable about international affairs during that time. He acknowledged how the British government had contributed to the conquering and enslavement of important peoples and kingdoms, including Warri, Lagos, and Itsekiri. As a result, he was against conflict with Britain. He was convinced that the Benin Kingdom could secure an arrangement that would allow him to protect the autonomy and sovereignty of his kingdom through smart diplomacy and negotiation. Chief Obaseki, the commerce ambassador for the Benin Royal Court, continued the antiquated mercantilist practice of confining foreign trade within his Kingdom to legally licensed Benin court agents.

The Benin Royal Court imposed trade restrictions that the British found intolerable. During his leave of absence in December 1896, Consul Galway's too ambitious replacement, Vice-Consul Philips, attempted to provoke conflict with the Benin Monarchy. In December 1896, he requested permission to go to the Kingdom of Benin for business.

As a result, before colonisation, economic and commercial interests motivated all European forays into African nations. Africa supplies vital raw materials for the development of Europe. The Berlin Conference in 1884–1885 was the culmination of this and marked the beginning of the effort to economically exploit Africa.

## **Globalization's Effect on Western Hegemony**

Under the guise of globalisation, Europe, America, and other nations attempted to spread different agents to maintain Western hegemony. According to Odour (2002), the United States is the main force behind the creator of globalisation. He found that the West uses more than a dozen institutions as agents and catalysts for the globalisation movement to covertly retain its control. These include:

- The Western European Governments (WEG)
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- The World Bank (WB)
- The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
- The World Trade Organization (WTO)
- The United Nations Organization and its Organs (UNOO)
- The World Business Community for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)
- USA Foundations and Businessmen (USAFB)
- Capitalist Political Parties (CPP)
- USA Communication Industry and Agents (USACIA)
- Americans Dominated International Companies (Multinational) (ADIC)
- Non-Governmental organization (NGO)

Alongside these companies and agencies, media outlets like the BBC, CNN, VOA, and Radio France International, as well as information media organizations, television, films, and the Internet, play major roles in the process of global cultural integration. Due to the influence these agents, nearly every teenager all over the globe essentially watch the same films, listen to the same music, and dress in similar ways. At the same time, viewers of television in almost every nation see the same important events, get the same financial predictions, and catch a peek of natural calamities. Most of the material that these media channels distribute comes from the US and Europe. As a result, people's economic well-being is increasingly impacted by global perspectives, which, when embraced and cited by others, erodes local customs and values. Alongside the main players previously mentioned, other well-known proponents of globalization, including the G-7 leaders, have quietly strengthened Western power. According to former President Clinton,

globalization is not a choice in policy but rather an inevitable reality. According to Tony Blair, it is relentless and inevitable. Oni 2025:12 references Seabrook (2004). Based on an examination of its proponents and architects, one may get the conclusion that globalization seems to be a battle between local cultures and global civilization, or a declaration of war against all other cultures. In this case, African influence is not very noticeable, which is subtle western hegemony.

### ***Strategies towards Decolonizing Africans of Western Hegemony***

1. ***Resisting Western financial aids in whatever guise it is offered:*** through these financial assistances, the west dictates which and what policies African leaders should formulate and implement.
2. ***African cum Nigeria should encourage home grown products:*** it's a shame that Nigeria still import Agricultural products among other things from Europe and America. This is a kind of economic reliance.
3. ***Leadership and health care resistance:*** If African cum Nigeria can free themselves from the western financial aids; the west would not have access to intrude into African leadership and policies making procedures. If Africa develops their health sectors, they will not rely on the Western world for health care as our leader always relies on them for quality health care.
4. ***Self-Reliance in the Oil sector:*** Nigeria is responsible for the negligent collapse of the oil refineries in Nigeria to the extent that Nigeria exports crude oil and imports refined petroleum at a greater expense whilst allegedly subsidizing the price of petrol for the Nigerian consumers (Idogho 2018;24).
5. ***Promoting Indigenous Culture over Foreign Culture:*** Many Nigeria today cannot speak their languages, prepare their indigenous cuisine; let alone aligning with their traditional mode of worship.

### **Summary of Findings**

According to the research, the best way to promote and spread knowledge about African civilizations' pre-colonial experiences viz-a-viz

decolonizing African is via historical plays. The play explored the political, theological, and economic realities of pre-colonial Nigeria by drawing on historical facts about Emir Attahiru of Sokoto and Oba Ovoramwen of the Benin kingdom. This study demonstrates how the playwright used certain themes to make the play applicable to modern society. Playwrights are now required to reconstruct history in a way that is relevant to contemporary realities based on the previously outlined idea. This suggests that the play addresses historical personalities and occasions while preserving historical authenticity in both scope and setting. History is an imaginative reworking of real-life occurrences. Instead of just correcting the apparent biases of colonial history and restoring people's faith in the pre-colonial era, it argues that the role of history in theatre is the most effective way to spread and promote African history and collective experiences to subsequent generation and to further guide the masses on how to take decisions on their present realities..

### **Conclusion, Summary and Recommendations**

The methods to free Africans from Western hegemony were the main preoccupations of this research. To demonstrate the connection between history, theatre, and Nigeria pre and post- colonial reality, the study used Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru* and *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen*, a historical drama, as a case study. Highlighting similarities between the pre-colonial Nigerian circumstances portrayed in the drama viz-a-viz the current political, religious, and economic circumstances of the postcolonial reality. Nigerians must thus take a moment to reflect on their past and fight against the pernicious effects of neocolonialism as it is presently entrenched by the so-called democratic leaders: while the African leaders on the other hand should consciously resist Western influences on Nigerian economic and political reality as epitomized by Caliph Attahiru and Oba Ovonramwen in the plays under study. .

This study thus makes a strong case for African leaders to oppose the privately imposed Western hegemony inherited from colonial rulers. It does this by exemplifying Oba Ovonramwen of the ancient Benin Kingdom and Emir Attahiru of the ancient Sokoto dynasty. How, 65 years after gaining independence, can Nigeria continue to mismanage its resources and remain economically dependent? Nigeria profited from colonialism's advances in technology and infrastructure, but it also endured widespread abuse. The colonial ideology placed a strong focus



on economic reliance. The populace had to rely on the country's resources, like as land and minerals, to survive when the British forced them to leave. Because the imperialists tried to prevent the indigenous people from running their own municipal corporations, they became reliant on their colonial rulers. Economic aid given to African countries under the pretence of "developing countries" is a subtle way for the West to exert its hegemony; keep in mind the saying "he who pays the piper dictates the tune." The West affects the policy of African nations via financial aid from the IMF, UN, and other agencies, which frequently undermines African progress. The main conclusions of the research show that history has an influence on theatre that goes beyond redressing the obvious injustices of colonial history and re-establishing trust in the pre-colonial past. Additionally, it is the most effective way to tell future generations about Africa's pre-imperial past and prepare them to make or take critical decisions on issues affecting them in present time using history as a basis..

Accordingly, playwrights are encouraged to continue to use history to tell stories about the past, suggesting that history and theatre may coexist together. To understand the past and address current political, religious, and economic issues, African and Nigerian politicians should study historical materials like historical plays. Because historical theatre may be utilised to address current social challenges, it is recommended that playwrights, theatre students, and the public carefully examine it.

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**Coloniality, Aspiration and Family Language Policy:  
Understanding Parents and Caregivers' Complex  
Dispositions towards Children's Translanguaging**

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**Busani Maseko**

*School of Languages  
North-West University  
Vanderbijlpark, South Africa  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9550-7968>  
Email: [komaseko@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:komaseko@yahoo.co.uk)*

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**Abstract**

In Africa, the use of ex-colonial languages at the expense of indigenous languages is a lasting consequence of colonialism. In Zimbabwe, this linguistic inheritance is punctuated by the legitimisation of English, despite the constitutional recognition of multilingualism. Colonial ideologies that ameliorate English account for families' complex dispositions towards children's translanguaging practices, despite being framed as a transformative, inclusive, and empowering practice for indigenous languages. Drawing on insights from decoloniality, translanguaging and the family language policy approach, this study interrogates how selected parents' and caregivers' orientations towards children's translanguaging practices shape their family language policy. Findings reveal how the aspiration for children's acquisition of English for social and economic advantage influences parents' and caregivers' ambivalent attitudes towards translanguaging practices at home, inadvertently perpetuating

coloniality within the family domain. Therefore, there is a need to emphasise the decolonial potential of translanguaging in family language policy.

**Keywords:** *Decoloniality; Family language policy; Translanguaging; Parents and caregivers; Language practices; Language ideologies*

## Introduction

One visible remnant of colonisation in Africa is the continued preference for, and esteem accorded to ex-colonial languages in government, education, the media and commerce at the expense of indigenous African languages (Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2022; Kamwangamalu, 2016; Siziba & Maseko, 2024). In Zimbabwe, this linguistic inheritance situation (Bamgbose, 2003) is also characterised by ‘elite closure’ – a strategy employed by those in power to limit access to powerful institutions and economic privilege by maintaining language policies and practices that exclude non-elites (Myers-Scotton, 1993, p. 149) through legitimising English as the transacting currency. Macro-level language ideologies that devalue indigenous African languages are often reproduced at a micro-societal level. This, in turn, influences parents' language choices, practices, and preferences for their children's socialisation and schooling (Maseko & Mlilo, 2022). In the context of family bilingualism and multilingualism, how languages are learned, managed and negotiated is often a function of parents' ideologies, that is, their beliefs about the value, utility and importance of languages within the family repertoires (Léglise, 2024; Spolsky, 2012). Within the family domain, these value positions can validate or challenge language ideologies that circulate in extra-familial spaces and macro-community levels. While extensive literature exists on challenging the legitimacy of English at the macro-level of language policy, there is a lack of research on its impact within micro-institutions of society (Maseko, 2021). The Family Language Policy (FLP) approach has emerged as an important frontier in language policy studies to explain how families negotiate and balance intergenerational transmission of their heritage languages and the acquisition of majority or official languages for education and general upward social mobility (Léglise, 2024). In education, translanguaging has emerged as a rewarding pedagogical strategy that can be used to mainstream and revitalise historically marginalised heritage languages in teaching and learning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Maseko, 2022b). The benefits of translanguaging, a common practice for multilinguals, have

been largely overlooked in academic research on family settings (Hirsch & Kayam, 2020; Karpava et al., 2019). Despite the framing of translanguaging as a transformative, inclusive, decolonial, and therefore empowering practice for marginalised heritage languages in education (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Kleyn & García, 2019), we are yet to fully understand its intersection with family language policy, given the observation that the home/school binary is increasingly being blurred (Maseko, 2024; Purkarthofer et al., 2022).

To address this gap, this study draws on the family language policy approach and the concept of translanguaging to understand parents' orientations towards children's language practices that embrace 'languages' as fluid systems that can flexibly overlap as contrasted to being bounded and independent entities that should be used in separation (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; García & Lin, 2016; McCracken, 2017). I show how parents' attitudes and orientations towards the 'mixing' of what they perceive as elements of 'separate' languages in their children's linguistic practices reflect lingering colonial ideologies that shape their family language policy by emphasising what they perceive as 'legitimate' practices. By drawing on data from parents within selected indigenous language-speaking families in Zimbabwe, this study reveals that parents' views and attitudes towards translanguaging are largely aspirational, stemming from the dilemma to preserve their heritage languages, vis-à-vis the desire for their children's acquisition of English, perceived as the key to social, economic, and political advantage.

The following research questions guided the study:

- What are the language ideologies of parents and caregivers regarding children's translanguaging at home?
- How do these ideologies challenge or reproduce coloniality in family language policy?

### **Decoloniality, Translanguaging and Family Language Policy: A Conceptual Apparatus**

Study draws on a framework informed by arguments from decoloniality, translanguaging and family language policy. By bringing these three concepts into a theoretical conversation, I attempt to show how the reproduction of the 'coloniality of language' (Veronelli, 2015) in the family domain shapes parents' dispositions towards children's languaging

practices. Coloniality refers to the lasting power structures that originated from colonialism (McKinney, 2020; Veronelli, 2015). Proceeding from this logic, ‘coloniality of language’ would refer to the historical impacts of colonialism on language, particularly the reduction of indigenous and heritage languages to subservient roles in different levels of society, and their framing as inherently devoid of the ability to express complex ideas and therefore communicatively inferior to colonial languages (Veronelli, 2015). Since coloniality can be understood as “that which survives colonialism” (McKinney, 2020, p. 2), decoloniality, therefore, seeks to dismantle structures and cultures responsible for the perpetuation of colonial ideologies and practices in various social spheres (Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2022). In Southern Africa, decolonial approaches have been applied to understand how colonial relics can be eradicated from formal spaces such as higher education institutions (Fataar, 2018; Hlatshwayo, 2023). Attention has often been paid to efforts aimed at decolonising the curriculum (Nyoni, 2023) as well as language practices.

This study uses decolonial arguments to examine family language practices and ideologies (Lin & Martin, 2005). Particularly, I attempt to show how parents’ attitudes towards translanguaging, touted as a potentially decolonial and transformative practice, are shaped within a colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2007), which perceives children’s languaging as a barrier to attaining English proficiency. These ideologies and orientations towards children’s multilingual practices can be discussed within the framework of family language policy.

Conceived within the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the family language policy approach has been deployed to explain how families negotiate and navigate family and community bilingualism or multilingualism. This approach draws on Spolsky’s imagination that all forms of language policy are a function of language practices, language ideologies and language management (Spolsky, 2004, 2009, 2012). Early studies in FLP aimed to explain why some children in monolingual communities become bilingual, while others in multilingual societies remain monolingual (Curdts-Christiansen, 2013), typically within nuclear western-type families. Following King et al. (2008), FLP is often defined as explicit and overt (King et al., 2008), as well as implicit and covert (Curdts-Christiansen, 2013) planning among family members concerning their language use within the home. However, the FLP approach has significantly expanded to include families in migration and transnational contexts (Hua & Wei, 2016; King, 2016) as well as geographically dispersed families connected through digital communication platforms,

also known as digital families (Lexander & Androutsopoulos, 2023; Taipale, 2019). Beyond children's development of bilingual or multilingual competencies, contemporary FLP studies also consider all forms of literacy practices that develop or are managed within the family as important aspects of FLP (Karpava, 2021; Maseko, 2024). While most FLP research emphasises the influence of parental ideologies (De Houwer, 2007; Maseko & Mutasa, 2018), there is increasing interest in investigating children's agency in the articulation and direction of FLP (Gyogi, 2015; Maseko, 2022a). Given the foregoing, parents' attitudes towards children's language and literacy practices may reveal their positioning towards translanguaging as a potential strategy to decolonise language use in the family.

Translanguaging is defined as the “fluid language practices of bilinguals” (García & Lin, 2016, p. 117) which “allows children to draw on all the languages they know to access new languages or communicate a message using more than one language” (McCracken 2017: 25). Because translanguaging challenges the monolingual bias that often favours dominant languages, it has been deployed to understand how it can be a decolonial practice in education contexts. While some studies on FLP show that children often bring language ideologies and practices from school into the home (Karpava et al., 2019; Luykx, 2005; Maseko & Mlilo, 2022; Slavkov, 2017), translanguaging has been given the briefest attention in FLP studies.

Bringing decoloniality, translanguaging, and FLP into this conversation thus constitutes a novel theoretical gesture to understand how the lingering coloniality of language permeates the family. It is also a contribution to the growing calls to decolonise FLP, which has so far been dominated by the American and European traditions, both in terms of data and the conceptualisation of what a family should be (Léglise, 2024). As such, by applying this approach in a post-colonial Global South context, this study heeds the call to “move beyond families from WEIRD (emphasis original) contexts to examine other experiences and other constructions of reality” (Léglise, 2024, p. 292). While translanguaging has been conceived as transformative in children's education, parents' complex attitudes towards the practice at home may reveal their struggles against colonial experiences (Léglise, 2024). Since family language policy is intrinsically linked to the family's sociopolitical and sociocultural context (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; Szilágyi & Szécsi, 2023), we should interpret parental positioning towards translanguaging

within the historical, cultural, and political contexts in which families exist (Szilágyi & Szécsi, 2023).

## **Literature Review**

Recent literature on FLP has mainly concentrated on bilingual families in transnational and migration contexts in America and Europe to examine how they navigate the host country's linguistic and cultural environment and balance between the need to transmit their heritage languages and the aspiration to learn the dominant languages of their hosts for educational and employment purposes (Hua & Wei, 2016; Seals & Beliaeva, 2023). On the other hand, studies on translanguaging have focused on education settings, showing how learners benefit from using their full linguistic repertoire to aid the acquisition of second languages and learning other subjects (Charamba, 2020, 2022; Maseko, 2022b). While there is abundant literature on both FLP and translanguaging as separate fields, fewer studies have sought to understand how translanguaging is perceived within FLP despite being a mundane yet critical practice in multilingual families (Jenks, 2020). However, there is an emerging strand of literature that has sought to understand “trans-constructs, such as trans-language and translanguaging” through the FLP lens (Jenks, 2020, p. 320). This section reviews existing literature to contextualise the study within the ongoing discourse on family multilingualism and multilingual practices.

In several studies conducted in the US, translanguaging has been shown to permeate family language practices as a part of FLP negotiation. Typically, these studies focus on immigrant and transnational families of Asian origins (Choi, 2022; Lee et al., 2021; Song, 2022). They reveal how language practices within Korean heritage language families in the US accommodate and create spaces for translanguaging as part of a flexible bilingual child-rearing practice (Song, 2022). Deploying an autoethnographic approach, Song (2022) reflects on how her bilingual child-rearing and FLP experiences reshaped her identity. Particularly, she shows how her FLP has been dynamic, moving from a preference for the One-Parent-One-Language (OPOL) strategy to embracing the fluidity of language use. FLP is dynamic, not fixed, and is continuously shaped by shifting language ideologies in different contexts. Also drawing on self-recorded data from Korean ‘short stayers’ in the US, Lee et al. (2021) demonstrate how the dynamic nature of FLP was linked to family members’ evolving attitudes towards family



translingual practices. In particular, they show how translanguaging was strategically employed as collaborative and creative language practice among ‘temporary immigrants’ (Lee et al., 2021), underscoring fluid identities that contextually change over time. While most studies in this context foreground parental ideologies and agency, some demonstrate how siblings can influence each other’s languaging practices and assert their agency in FLP.

Through an ethnographic study focusing on the home language literacy practices of two children in a Farsi-Korean-English trilingual household in the US, Choi (2022) reveals how children’s home literacy activities, such as writings and drawings, reflect their agency in influencing each other’s translingual practices. Through an analysis of the siblings’ writings across different scripts, Choi (2022) suggests that siblings’ experiences of each other’s translingual literacy practices in written letters and other written tokens of endearment served to authenticate and legitimise their practices, thus superseding and disregarding parents’ ideologies and attitudes towards their practices. Critically, such findings highlight the inherent tensions, contestations and contradictions between parents’ ideologies and children’s language practices that have been demonstrated by literature from different contexts (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Maseko & Mutasa, 2018). They add to the now-established findings that children may act as agents of their own language socialisation by reproducing practices and ideologies imported from extra-familial spaces such as the school and other literacy domains (Fogle & King, 2013; Gyogi, 2015; Maseko, 2022a). However, some studies show that parent-child translingual FLP encounters can be collaborative (Kiaer & Sheo, 2022). In the context of a Korean family in the UK, analyses of dialogues between the Korean mother and her Korean-English bilingual child during picture book reading sessions showed how they engaged in translanguaging to co-translate complex concepts, onomatopoeic words, as well as colour and historical terms (Kiaer & Sheo, 2022). This shows that parents and children can contribute to the co-creation of FLP through family literacy practices.

Karpava et al. (2019) investigated FLP among bi/multilingual Russian-speaking children and their parents in Cyprus, Sweden and Estonia to reveal the affordances of translanguaging in family language and literacy practices. Although FLP has been shown to vary from one family to another and from context to context, data gathered through parental questionnaires across families in three countries demonstrates that similarities in parental attitudes towards translingual practices exist

across the three sites (Karpava et al., 2019). Particular language practices were also replicated across all three contexts, suggesting a pervasive disposition towards translanguaging as a dynamic practice that can enhance the status of minority languages in various contexts (Karpava et al., 2019). Although the maintenance of Russian language and culture was generally encouraged through the adoption of the OPOL strategy, it was also shown that not all families employed translanguaging as a conscious language management strategy, further validating the reconceptualisation of FLP as constitutive of both conscious and unconscious strategies of managing family language practices (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; King et al., 2008). Similar attitudes towards translanguaging existed among parents in Hungarian-American families (Szilágyi & Szécsi, 2023). Through semi-structured interviews with parents on their reactions to and perceptions of translanguaging within the family's written and oral communication, Szilágyi & Szécsi (2023) revealed that positive attitudes towards translanguaging led family members to support the practice. However, some parents exhibited monolingual ideologies by rejecting the practice in Hungarian-centred communication (Szilágyi & Szécsi, 2023). By foregrounding parental ideologies, this study sheds important insights into the role of parents as key stakeholders who contribute to FLP by considering the family's social and cultural contexts (De Houwer, 2007; Maseko & Mutasa, 2018; Wilson, 2021). However, positive ideologies about translanguaging do not always translate to flexibility in language practices at home, further highlighting the potential contradictions and tensions between ideology and praxis (Curdt-Christiansen, 2016; Wilson, 2021).

The concept of translanguaging has not been given attention within FLP studies in the Global South. In the African context, literature on language policy has generally focused on dismantling coloniality within macro structures such as education, and rarely on the micro level of the family. However, this appears to be changing. Responding to the call to decolonise family language policy (Léglise, 2024), McKinney and Molate (2022) and Molate & McKinney (2024) begin by deconstructing the very notion of 'family,' which has been conceptualised from a Western perspective in most FLP studies. By showing how 'nuclear' and 'extended' families reproduce colonial constructions of family, and therefore mechanically not extendable to the Southern African context (McKinney & Molate, 2022), they suggest that the concept of 'ikhaya' may be more suitable not only to capture the uniquely South African familial configurations and organisation but also as an explanation of

how languages in these families are managed and negotiated (Molate & McKinney, 2024). Drawing on data from participant observations, semi-structured telephonic interviews, and participant self-recorded naturally occurring interactions (Molate & McKinney, 2024), they reveal how families' embracing and promotion of multilingualism is integral to the family's making of a multilingual *ikhaya*. By showing how languaging is deployed to resist the enduring colonial and apartheid ideologies that legitimise English and Afrikaans within South African society, their study provides important insights for the current study from both contextual and theoretical perspectives. This study builds on McKinney and Molate (2022) and Molate and McKinney (2024), contributing to the limited research on how coloniality is either reproduced or resisted in micro-institutions within a post-colonial Global South context. As the review has demonstrated, this context is underrepresented in global FLP scholarship. In Zimbabwe, the FLP approach is under-researched. However, a few studies have recently emerged. These have sought to understand the influence of parental language ideologies on children's language practices (Maseko & Mutasa, 2018; 2019), the interaction between FLP and school language policy and practices (Maseko & Mlilo, 2022; Maseko, 2024) and the dynamics of FLP in the context of return migration (Maseko & Siziba, 2024). This study adds to the growing literature on how FLP in the Global South is connected to coloniality.

## **Methodology**

This qualitative phenomenological study explored how a select group of parents and caregivers felt about their children's translanguaging practices within their families. Because the study sought to understand participants' lived experiences (Glendinning, 2008; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007) and how they relate to their valuation of translanguaging, a phenomenological approach was deemed valid. It enabled the researcher to explore rich descriptions and interpretations of participants' experiences, rather than relying on quantitative data (Glendinning, 2008). In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven purposively sampled parents and caregivers representing seven families of various linguistic backgrounds to collect data. Potential participants had to satisfy several criteria to be included in the sample. One had to be a parent or caregiver in a family with at least one child attending school in Zimbabwe. Taking a cue from previous scholars (Léglise, 2024; Molate & McKinney, 2024), my imagination of 'family' was not restricted to the

‘Western nuclear type’ consisting of parents and their biological children but was left open to include various family configurations. In each sampled family, only one parent or caregiver was asked to represent the family in the interview. In addition to demographic and sociolinguistic details, the main interview questions explored parental and caregiver language ideologies, family language policies, and the motivations behind those choices. Other questions sought to understand participants’ positioning towards children’s translanguaging practices and their language management strategies. Because ‘translanguaging’ is a theoretical construct that is unfamiliar to ‘laymen’, I sometimes replaced translanguaging with ‘language mixing.’ In some instances, these questions were scenario-based. Following the example of previous studies on translanguaging with lay communities (Burton & Rajendram, 2019; Maseko, 2022b), I would first create scenarios which typify translanguaging and then ask questions based on those scenarios.

Four of the seven participants were interviewed in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe’s second-largest city. Two interviews were conducted in Lupane, while one was conducted in Gwanda. All interviews took place at a time and venue chosen by the participants from December 2024 through January 2025. Interviews were conducted in English and Ndebele as all participants were proficient in one of the two languages. Before the commencement of each interview, participants’ informed consent was sought. The purpose of the study and the participants’ rights, potential risks, and benefits were all thoroughly explained. To this end, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time. Participants were also assured of their right to anonymity and how the researcher would uphold this right. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. Transcripts of interviews conducted in Ndebele were also translated into English. Data analysis is mainly thematic and descriptive, enabling the researcher to foreground participants’ lived experiences of their FLPs and their attitudes towards children’s translanguaging practices at home. To this end, participants’ verbatim responses are used in this article to give them a voice.