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African Culture and Globalization: Assessing Regal Excesses and Reverse Rhetoric in Stephen Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*

Abstract

This paper explores the toxic Yoruba regal culture in the context of globalization as the playwright records in the play *Alaafin Aole Arogangan.* This is with a view to aligning the Yoruba regal culture with global cultural best practices. Global best practices on culture have spread across the world and societies across the world bear the duty of domesticating such cultural recommendations. The study is qualitative in nature through which ideas or findings in the paper are arrived at through rationalism anchored on available textual data and evidence. The paper is also guided by Oswald Spengler's Cyclical Theory, whose essence is to modernize the social system for development. In the play, Solanke portrays the regal vices of Alaafin Aole Arogangan of Oyo Kingdom. These include suppression of women's rights through commodification of women, tendency for killing, regal superiority, as well as institutionalization of dominions. These are vices that are inconsistent with global framework for social system such as gender equality specifically as enshrined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 5 – Gender Equality. Solanke revisits the Yoruba regal history in the play through the reigns of Alaafin Aole so as to repudiates regal excesses. Aole commandeers GIRL, requests the head of the Baale of Apomu, is in contention with Ooni, and wages a violent war against Apomu outside his regal jurisdiction, among other atrocities. These are perpetrated under the cloak of reverence and awe of the Yoruba regal figures. Solanke, by these circumstances, suggests that these vices can only be eliminated if Yoruba cultural system is re-instituted in alignment with global best practices.

Key words: Yoruba culture, Oyo Kingdom, SDG 5, Gender Equality, Globalization

Received: 15/09/2026 Accepted: 23/09/2026 **GSM**: +234…
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Article Citation: Adebayo, A. O.; Amure, V.; Amure, S. E. and Ogunleye, O. O. (2026). African Culture and Globalization: Assessing Regal Excesses and Reverse Rhetoric in Stephen Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*. *Jalingo Journal of Languages and Literary Studies (JAJ0LLS). 10 (3) pp. 342-351*
https://doi.org/10.66490/jajolls.2026.v10.i3.039
Publishers: Department of Languages and Linguistics, Taraba State University, Jalingo. **ISSN**: 2488-9067

Introduction

The regal circuit is an integral part of Yoruba culture. It is at the peak of the leadership echelon. In the traditional Yoruba societal and cultural system, the regal enclave comprises the king and his chiefs. They perform critical cultural roles especially in the traditional setting of the Yoruba people. The king and the chiefs were usually guided by aboriginal spirituality such as the Ifa Oracle. This system in which the king ruled, according to Oladumiye and Adiji (2014) was very strong among the Yoruba. However, the kings in the Yoruba traditional system perpetrated some excesses such as high-handedness, patriarchal supremacy, war mongering, and autocracy. However, times do change and this gives rise to the concept of the dynamism of culture. The temporal transition has heralded globalization which is in the words of Boncius (2017) is a coagulation of the participation of all international stakeholders in designing new universal order. The new world order can be in the context of culture, politics, diplomacy, and economy, to mention a few. To this end, there is a sense of commonality in the social spheres in societies across the world.

To this end, the attention of African playwrights has been drawn to the idea of global reconstruction of cultural order. The African playwrights whose attention has been drawn to this social topic have, therefore, been featuring the cultural practices in their respective domains considered to be toxic. This is especially so if such cultural nuances are unrelatable in the comity of nations. The context of comity of nations and globalism is relevant in the interpretation of culture-oriented literary text in the contemporary time because of the universalizing characteristics of the contemporary temporal space. One of such African playwrights whose attention has been drawn to culture vagaries in the aboriginal Yoruba era in relation to the modern time as defined and conditioned by globalization is Stephen Solanke in his *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*. This play is a regal historical play which exudes a number of vices inconsistent with the global best practices in ensuring social harmony, human dignity, and culture mercantilism. These are exemplified forth in this discourse.

Literature Review

Literature has played significant roles in society. These roles are targeted to improve the human social conditions in many societies across the world. Indeed Ogundokun (2021) looks at the prose context of literature and avers that:

> The findings reveal that the selected novels are focused on the poor conditions socio-politically, economically, culturally and psychologically that exist both during and after the colonial era. The paper concludes that literature helps readers to cope with the socio-cultural, political, economic, religious and other challenges of their immediate as well as remote environments through the process of self-discovery. As such, positive social change is possible through literature. (1)

In this excerpt, the social spheres which literature has addressed are cultural, economic, religious and so on. These are explored in order to address the shortcomings in their obeisance in society. In the same vein, Zala (2013) asserts that literature is capable of enriching the human mind and reading, literature, makes a man indeed perfect in his existence. Today there are texts on a variety of social topics: texts meant for to educate, those meant to entertain and the texts which are meant for self- development. Zala goes further to opine that there is a literary text for

each person's choices. To him, literature can be indeed pivotal to society as long as it is studied and applied in a positive context.

One critical element in a society which interconnects literature and society is culture. Culture has been examined in divergent perspectives to give all-round opinions on culture which are representatives of the different social situation especially in Africa. For example, Raeff et al (2020) look at the conceptualization of culture and opine that conceptualizing culture is not an easy task. As with so many complex phenomena in human conditions, culture can be defined and understood in many ways. They note that culture goes back to biblical era. They cite Homer, Hippocrates, and Herodotus, as well as the Chinese scholars, Han dynasty. They have identified over many definitions of culture which were in use in the early 20th century across divergent academic endeavors, and this include history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and psychology. Furthermore, Spencer-Qatey (2012) posits thus:

> To really understand a culture and to ascertain more completely the group's values and over behaviour, it is imperative to delve into the underlying assumptions, which are typically unconscious but which actually determine how group members perceive, think and feel. Such assumptions are themselves learned responses that originated as espoused values. But, as a value leads to a behavior, and as that behaviour begins to solve the problem which prompted it in the first place, the value gradually is transformed into an underlying assumption about how things really are. As the assumption is increasingly taken for granted, it drops out of awareness. (3)

In the same vein, Naik et al (2023) explain that culture encompasses critical aspects of a given society, and these include language, religion, education, government, as well as identity and personality of people that are an integral part of a culture. They further note that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's explains culture as "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs". In summation, the definition of culture also underscores the fact that culture is reflected in physical elements in a society including cuisines, fashion, music, dance, literature, or architecture. Such also in non-physical elements including traditions, customs, value, and beliefs. All these perspectives on culture are corroborated by Jegede's (2002) contextualization of culture in the Yoruba traditional healing apothecary. Jegede is of the opinion that cultural makeup and aboriginal practices are major factors in the efficacy healing and health administration among the Yoruba. Jegede avers that culture determines and shapes society. This position manifests in Ogunmola's (2026) assertion that culture reshapes the music of the modern Yoruba stating that Yoruba culture indeed holds an important place in traditional and modern situations. Ogunmola avers further that the influence of culture on the development of the modern music is palpable which is seen in the incorporation of Yoruba rhythm, percussion, as well as religious themes, including dance styles in the various genres emanating from the region. Conversely, the media has played a significant role on reconstitution of Yoruba culture in contemporary time (Kolawole and Kenechukwu, 2025). This signifies the modernization of Yoruba culture because the media is phenomenon of the West.

In addition to literature and culture, also critical to this discourse is the concept of globalization which is global social phenomenon that redirects all cultures of the world in

contemporary time. Cornali and Tirocchi, (2012) have explained globalization with emphasis on its impact on social phenomena. To Cornali and Tirocchi, there is a relationship which can be found between globalization and many changes which have swept through the education systems in the society. They aspire to establish how people can examine the consequences associated with a phenomenon which are heterogeneous. They consider globalization as a force that determine specific social changes, and assert that multidimensional processes may be pivotal in the causal direction and this makes the situation quite hard to determine. Alkharafi and Alsabah (2025), in addition, view globalization as the integration of the world's nations as well as social and political systems. Globalization, they say, links far locations such that events in one place do affect and become affected by the events elsewhere around the world. They further maintain that globalization involves widening, deepening as well as speeding up of global connectivity. Therefore, they posit that "global village" and "compression of the world" are used to indicate interconnection of modern life. To them, this is where digital media or the internet allows the people to interact or share information, as members of a small community do. Alkharafi and Alsabah, indeed, see globalization as a process which can be controlled averring that deglobalization represents the opposite of what globalization represents as deglobalization is conceived as the weakening of interdependence in the comity of nations.

Methodological Approach

This study has been anchored on a number of methodological strategies. The strategies were considered on the basis that the study is within the gamut of humanistic studies. The data used were culled from the text selected for the study on the basis of how recent as it was published in 2024. Such recency excludes the study from being repetitive. The first of the strategies is the adoption of the qualitative mode of analysis. This is because the study is within the realm of the humanities. By this, the system of advancing an opinion from the available data is rationalism, that is thinking deeply on an issue and reaching a conclusion based on intuitive and local knowledge about the issue. Furthermore, on the recency of the text used for the research, this was ascertained because recency and globalization which manifests in the liberalization of culture as preached in *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*, interlink. The recency aligns with the contemporariness of the concept of globalization as this is central to the study. Furthermore, textualization strategy has also been employed. Textualization is the extraction of specific excerpts from the play. The textualization consists further in the rationalization of cultural concepts in order to align with the central goal of the paper. This is targeted at making the analysis in the study to be evidence-based or empirical in order to allow logic and acceptability.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the Oswald Spengler's Cyclical Theory. In the theory, Spengler maintains that cultures progress from the creative level to the stage of urbanization, and mechanical civilization peak. Spengler sees history as being a series of rising and peaking. This is similar to the life of organisms. Spengler suggests that cultures alongside civilizations in the long run fall and is disdained. Cyclical Theory is applicable to the conduct of this research because civilization is a common factor to both the theory and the context of consideration of *Alaafin Aole Arogangan* by Stephen Sholanke as the play for this study.

Stephen Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan* in Context

The play, *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*, is a modern and very recent play on Yoruba culture, specifically on the regal aspect of Yoruba culture. It is on the *Alaafin* royal system. The *Alaafin* is the title of the Oyo King in Southwest Nigeria. The Alaafin is a prominent king in Oyo town. He heads the Oyo Kingdom. *Alaafin* is the title of kings that occupy the throne. Many people have mounted the throne. Aole was one of the Alaafins that have ever mounted the throne. This play is about his reins. The foreword to the play written by Bode Sowande thus reads:

> Aole, a king, is central to the tragedy pathos of his people in the powerplay of absolute rulership. Who is the good and who is wielding power with cruel absolutism? The play has given us a drama that animates the story so we see clearly a Yoruba epic drama of a momentous past, whose lessons avail us with wisdom even today. (p. v)

This foreword paints the perspective of chaos that characterizes the rule of Aole, as A king of Oyo. It is the elements of the chaos in relation to global best practices on culture that this study seeks to affirm.

Globalization and the Liberalization of African Culture

Globalization and liberalization are two critical concepts at the center of the study at this juncture. The former requires and enables the latter, however, the latter manifests in the former. That is globalization is a decentralization and the universalization of clan cultural products. Liberalization connects to being subtle and accommodating. In today's world, globalization is indispensable as it enables the oneness of the different peoples and societies across the world. Any society in disdain of globalization stays in isolation. However, the construction of the Yoruba cultural philosophy and manifestation of same can only be seen as outlandish and toxic. Such a society cannot be presented to the rest of the world. The Yoruba royal culture therefore needs to be detoxified and aligned with the global best practices on culture and societal values. Solanke suggests this in the play *Alaafin Aole Arogangan.*

Findings from the Research Text

This section of the discourse is dedicated to analyzing the research text on the basis of relating the vices of the king, Alaafin Aole, as the playwright documents, to the global best cultural practices. The analysis of the text on the basis of the relative link between the regal vices of Alaafin Aole and the global social philosophies encapsulated in globalization shall be on some systemic frames. All these constitute the motif of chaos in the play. This globalization-orientation analysis is as below.

Gender Oppression in the Play

One of the critical elements of chaos in the play is gender oppression perpetrated by the reigning Alaafin Aole. This vista of commodification of women ca be deduced from the excerpt below:

> **LAGUNNA:** My young girl, do stop crying. You are in front of the all-powerful Alaafin, the god among mortals. **BASORUN ASAMU:** You should count yourself and your family lucky that Kabiyesi has seen fit to demean himself by wanting to align with you and your family. … **GIRL:** But I do not love Kabiyesi. He has had my intended sent to Igboho as a slave and my family scattered… **ALAPINNI:** Do you have any shame at all? Are you aware of what you are saying? You dare question the actions of the Kabiyesi, who has the power of life and death over us all?... **AOLE:** The Alaafin boils like a mortal. But like a god, we shall, in our

> actions, be sober. Take her away. For seven days, keep her half-fed. When she agrees with us, return her. And if not, we shall utilize the totality of power invested in us…

In this except, actions, beliefs, and cultural philosophies which demonstrate regal and patriarchal excesses are manifest. The excerpt exemplifies the absolutist tendencies which Alaafin Aole, the King, exhibits in the play which is a representation of what the king did when he was on the throne in actual life. Central in this totalitarian exhibition is the commodification of women seen in Aole's resolve to commandeer GIRL into marriage without her consent. Such a practice by Yoruba king was/is known as *gbe'sele* (that is to commandeer a woman into marriage perpetrated by Yoruba kings). This is in spite of GIRL's declaration that he does not love the king. It is particularly worrisome that Aole goes extra destructive miles to achieve his self-centered end. For example, Aole, sends GIRL's lover on exile in Igboho, and Aole scattered GIRL's family. Worse still, he has requested maximum torture including starvation and incarceration to be meted to GIRL for refusing the lustful advances of Aole. All these are an exemplification of the awe that Yoruba culture accords kings and this is why BASORUN ASAMU states that GIRL should be happy for obtaining the attention of the king. This is seen in the declaration "You should count yourself and your family lucky that Kabiyesi has seen fit to demean himself by wanting to align with you and your family." However, the playwright coming up with a play of this gender-blind signification at this moment (2024), the age of Western civilization and globalization as indicating that these are inconsistent with the global best practices on gender and the rights of women. This is especially so as contained in the United Nations' SDG Goal 5 – Gender Equality. According to Ernst et al (2024; Leal Filho et al, 2022), SDG Goal 5 is intended to ensure the rights of women to, opportunities in different spheres of society, including political, economic, as well as social ramifications, across the world. The playwright seems to be suggesting that these regal practices allowed by culture should be jettisoned.

Inclination of War in *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*

In addition to gender oppression as an element of chaos and patriarchal excesses in the reign of Aole, is inclination towards war. I the particular instance in the play, quest for provincial and municipal dominion and domination was the pivot. In the play, Solanke records that the cause of war as a means of municipal domination was a toxic cultural means of social chao in the Yoruba milieu of the Aole regal worldview. This is noted in the excerpt below:

> **AOLE:** Every year during the dry season, the Alaafin sends out the army. This year, Apomu our target will be. Afonja, our general, bring to us the head of the baale…**ASIPA**: But Kabiyesi, Apomu is under the jurisdiction of the Ooni who is in charge of our spiritual land, Ile Ife… **AOLE**: Apomu we have chosen, Apomu it will be … Or is our Aare-Ona Kakanfo afraid?

This crux of this excerpt is that Alaafin Aole is waging a war against Ooni of Ife to establish regal supremacy between the two royal figures in Yoruba royal kingdom. The strategy being adopted seems to be intense, daring and suffocating. This is seen in taking control through the violent act of beheading the Baale in Apomu, a town under Ooni. The act of war is anti-human. The act of beheading is crude and barbaric, and if the Ooni responds with the same level of audacity and pugnacity, there certainly will be chaos in the land and this would bring no development. This is because the wherewithal that should have been invested in developmental

projects would have been expended on procuring the gears, tools, and modalities of warfare. This chaotic situation is antidevelopment and opposed to global goals, especially the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals initiative. The link between the aboriginal barbarity and global framework is important because the practice has not resulted in social development in the Yoruba society as an African society.

Fatality as Consequent Evidence of Regal Tension and Autarchy

The destruction projected as the consequence of the regal tension and ruthlessness manifests in suicide mission in the play. The suicide is that of the Baale of Apomu. As the playwright recounts:

> **SOLDIER:** (*to Afonja*) The Balogun said I should tell you that the Baale of Apomu has killed himself… The town will be disorganized … He sent me to ask if we should attack now. … **LAFIANU:** My Lord, when the sound of the drum of death and destruction are heard … The Baale of Apomu is dead, the Ooni is not offended and the Alaafin can be placated with the head of the Baale… (26/27)

This conversation contains statements and incidents that portray the Yoruba society as uncivilized and callous. The suicide that the Baale of Apomu commits as a result of the tension between the Alaafin and Ooni of Ife. This is worsened by the fact that the soldiers in the Alaafin camp did not feen any human compassion as a result of the suicide that the Baale has committed. This is because they battalion are actually planning to attach Apomu despite the gruesome suicide of the Baale. This is insensitivity towards the sanctity of the human life, decency, and dignity.

Need for the Liberalization of Yoruba Cultural (Regal) System

It is critical to aver that Yoruba cultural system needs to liberalize and be permissible to global cultural best practices. This is because the incidents that the playwright recounts and records in the play are too toxic, and no toxic culture can be relatable in international culture system. There is none of the incidents, commandeering a woman without her consent, warring, as well as suicide and invasion of territories is justifiable and defensible. The fact that the economy, politics, science and technology as well as the standard of living of the people are still at low ebb is a testament to the fact that the tension and regal rascality at the time did not yield any development in Yoruba society. This can be attributed to the fact that during wars, too many resources and too much energy are devoted to fighting the war. In the same vein, the commodification of women as perpetrated by Aole in this play is a suppression of the potential of women. If a country wants to move forward in contemporary time, such as inclusivity peace, there in need for such a country or a society to give women opportunities (Lwamba et al, 2022). The global society today does not condone suppression of the rights and potential of women. This is especially so, because the United Nations does not accommodate violation of women's human rights. So, a country that will be relevant in the comity of nations needs to observe the rights of women and respect women's human dignity. However, the call for liberalism in Yoruba culture will face stern resistance. This is because, the culture of violence, chaos, and commodification of women is age-long and it is endemic in the people of the Southwest Nigeria, and to change or redirect the consciousness of the people towards cultural liberalism is a herculean task.

Discussion of Findings

It has been asserted so far in this study that there are some indices of patriarchal excesses in the play Stephen Solanke's *Alaafin Aole Arogangan*. Such indices of regal excesses include regal gender oppression, inclination to war, as well as regal tension and autarchy. These circumstances can be described as and, indeed, are vices in the context of today's world. This is because they result in tendencies that mar development as they are inconsistent with today's universal cultural and social realities. It is important to posit that the context of globalization as signified in the idea of universal cultural and social realities is important to this discourse because it is the goal of Oswald Spengler's Cyclical Theory. This is especially because the ultimate goal of the playwright is to lampoon the vices perpetrated in the royal circle in the play as representing the Yoruba actual-life experience. This is with a view to calling for and emphasizing the urgent need for culture stake holders in Yoruba land to make Yoruba culture relatable by non-Yoruba peoples across continental Africa and globally. The implication of this is that these cultural menace in Yoruba regal circle will have to be jettisoned so as to make the culture endearing, practice-able, and progressive. This is a laudable goal.

However, achieving the playwright's ultimate aspiration about Yoruba regal culture, is a herculean task. This is because the cultural practices and philosophical system that often lead to these vices are age-long and so deeply rooted and indelibly ingrained in the people. The causal factors are dialectal cultural phenomena that benefit the people in various ways, means and degrees. For example, gender oppression through the objectification of women benefits the patriarchal hierarchy in that such serve as a veritable means of power, influence, and dominion of influence. Therefore, letting women be free will amount to disarming the Yoruba patriarchal class, rendering Yoruba men powerless and irrelevant in the social structure and system. This development is hard for Yoruba patriarchy to bear. In addition to this, war is of substantial benefit to the regal oligarchy in Yoruba socio-cultural system. This is because many benefit from warring and its persistence financially or by profiting through spoils of war and conquest. The quest for dominion through acquisition and expansion of frontiers is central in the heart of the promoters of war, and to convince them to the contrary appears inconceivable and achievable. However, these have to be done because of the need for aligning with global best practices in order to achieve social growth, modernity, and progress which is the crux of Oswald Spengler's Cyclical Theory.

Conclusion

The play, *Alaafin Aole Arogangan* is Stephen Solanke's call for the liberalization of the culture of the Yoruba especially in royal context. The fact that the play was written in the era of globalization speaks volumes for the detoxification of Yoruba regal culture of violence, chaos and gender imbalance. Revisiting history in the era of hypermodernity is to aver that the playwrights is calling attention to the need to eliminate the vices in the cultural practices of the people. For example, gender equality or respecting the rights of women is nonnegotiable in today's world (Khan, 2026; Nigam, 2025). There is also the need for peace in the societies of contemporary time in Yoruba social system and sub-social system. Aole's vices are a metaphor for the Yoruba cultural toxins which need to be eliminated in order to open the Yoruba society as an African society to the rest of the world. This has the potential of bringing the Yoruba ways of life to other peoples around the world and bringing other peoples across the world to Africa. This is globalization of Yoruba culture, and it has the potential of bringing development to the region. The meaning of this is that cultural traits (vices) such as inhumanity, gender

discrimination, ethereality, pugnacity, superiority complex and so on should be jettisoned in alignment with global best practices.

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