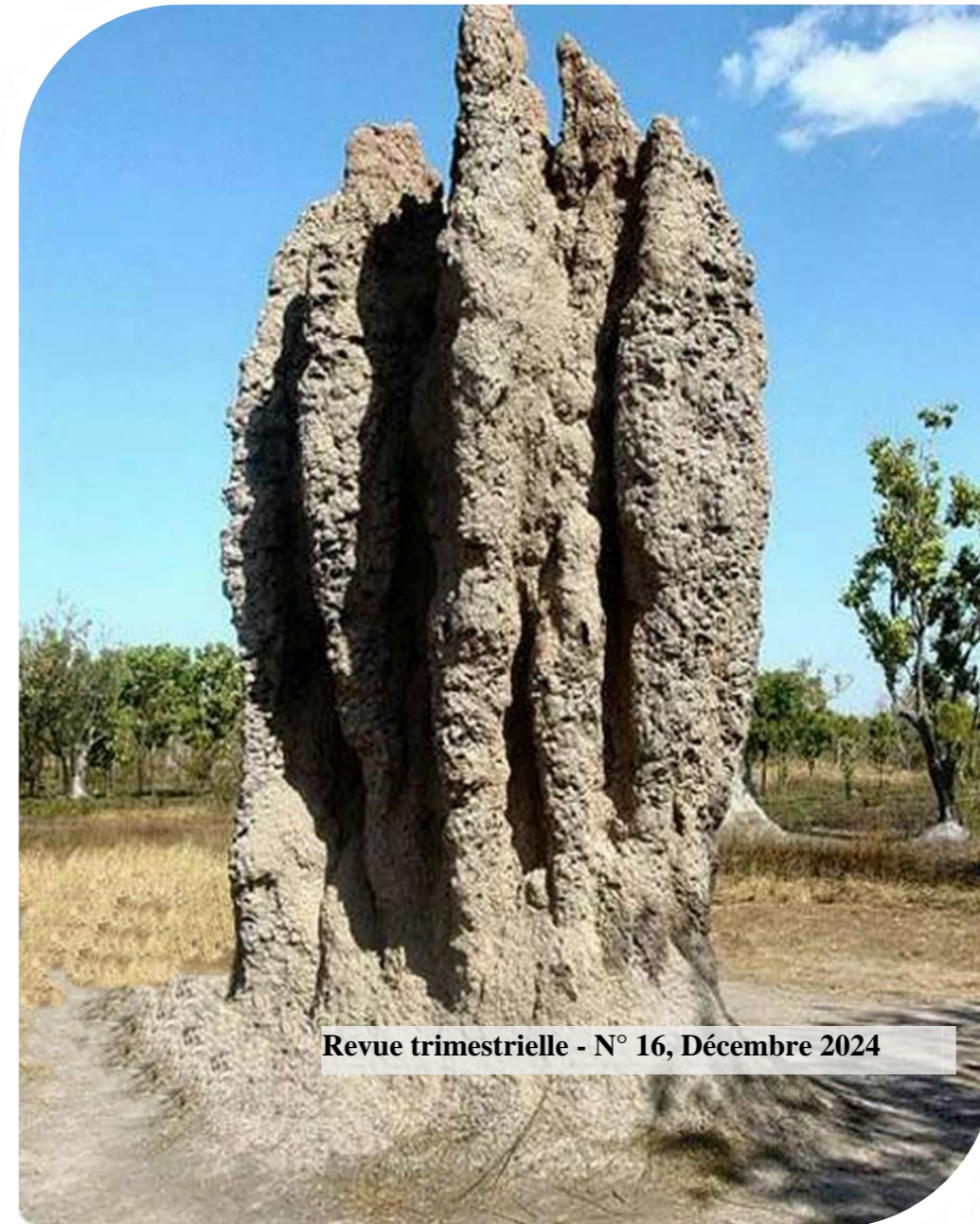


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LETTRES, ARTS ET SCIENCES HUMAINES



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La Revue Dama Ninao nous renvoie à la Civilisation de l'Universel du poète sénégalais Léopold Sédar Senghor, qui prône la porosité des âmes avec l'acceptation de l'autre, de ce qu'il dispose d'utile pour mon avancement : sa civilisation, sa culture, sa langue ... Elle se fonde notamment sur la philosophie de Paul Ricœur qui préconise la perception de Soi-même comme un autre. Considérer soi-même comme un autre aux yeux de l'autre, nous amènerait à faire taire nos distensions et ressentiments afin de redimensionner notre espace, reconstruire notre histoire et notre société.

La Revue Dama Ninao s'est inspirée de la nature. Des insectes en miniature nous produisent de bels chefs-d'œuvre architecturaux, conjuguent leur génie créateur et leur force dans la patience et dans la tolérance. Ils créent des œuvres monumentales qui dépassent l'entendement humain, les termitières. A cet effet, la nature semble nous parler, nous guider, nous instruire dans le silence. Seules ces créations nous interpellent sans autant faire de nous des disciples. Comme la termitière qui, pour la plupart du temps, est une composante de maillons surgissant de la même matière, la Revue Dama Ninao se veut une termitière scientifique dont les enseignants-chercheurs en sont les maillons.

Au confluent de diverses sciences, la Revue Dama Ninao se propose de promouvoir la recherche scientifique et universitaire en impulsant le dialogue interdisciplinaire, le dialogue entre divers champs disciplinaires et divers contributeurs du monde universitaire.

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### La taille des articles

Volume : 10 à 15 pages ; interligne 1.5, police 12 pour le corps du texte et les courtes citations ; police 11 pour les longues citations, Times New Roman, les références des citations doivent être incorporées dans le texte. Exemple : Guy Rocher (1968, p. 29), pas de référence en foot-notes à l'exception de quelques commentaires.

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- Un **TITRE** en caractère d'imprimerie et en gras. Le titre ne doit pas être trop long ;
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- Un **Résumé (Abstract)** de 8 lignes en français et anglais, en interligne simple, suivi de 6 **Mots clés (Key words)**
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    - 2-1-Pour le **Titre** de la première sous-section
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La revue Dama Ninao, de par son nom qui signifie « entente », a pour objectifs :

- de matérialiser le monde universitaire qui est un creuset où « le fer aiguise le fer », les échanges se croisent, puis s'entremêlent pour aboutir à une reconstruction des connaissances scientifiques individuelles dans la collectivité ;
- de promouvoir la recherche scientifique et universitaire en impulsant le dialogue interdisciplinaire, le dialogue entre divers champs disciplinaires et divers contributeurs du monde universitaire.

La revue Dama Ninao a une portée scientifique et sociale. A cet effet, elle publie tous les articles relevant des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines et s'intéresse aux études et théories littéraires, linguistiques, sociologiques, philosophiques, anthropologiques et historico-géographiques sur appel à contribution thématique (colloque) ou varia. Elle est un espace de rencontre, de construction et de reconstruction des réseaux relationnels et scientifiques.

**Professeur Koutchoukalo TCHASSIM**

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**BELONG AS A SATIRE OF AFRICA'S LONG WAY TO DEMOCRACY  
AND DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract:** The African Diaspora has always sought to reconnect with Africa, find a way home, and build the type of society they dreamt of while leaving the motherland. In *Belong*, Bola Agbaje, dramatizes the yearning for home and the hideous realities of socio-political life. The protagonist's struggle to bridge two worlds as a native of Nigeria and an aspiring politician helps set bare the discrepancies between Africa and the Western world. The play also enacts the hindrances of African democracy and development. Through the psychoanalytical perspective, this study analyses how Bola Agbaje dramatizes the call for home and the pitfalls of democratic and developmental advancement. Subdivided into three sections, the study will first look at the dramatization of return to the homeland. Second, it will highlight the encounter with home and the dismaying contrasts and third it will discuss how corruption constitutes a drawback to democracy and development.

**Keywords:** African diaspora, democracy, hindrances, corruption, development.

**Résumé :** La diaspora africaine a toujours cherché à renouer avec l'Afrique, à trouver un moyen de rentrer chez elle et à construire le type de société dont elle rêvait lorsqu'elle a quitté la mère patrie. Dans *Belong*, Bola Agbaje met en scène le désir de rentrer chez soi et les réalités hideuses de la vie sociopolitique. La lutte du protagoniste pour jeter un pont entre deux mondes, en tant que natif du Nigeria et aspirant politicien, contribue à mettre en lumière les divergences entre l'Afrique et le monde occidental. La pièce met également en scène les obstacles à la démocratie et au développement de l'Afrique. À travers une perspective psychanalytique, cette étude analyse la manière dont Bola Agbaje met en scène l'appel à la patrie et les entraves au progrès démocratique et du développement. Subdivisée en trois sections, l'étude se penchera tout d'abord sur la mise en scène du retour à la patrie. Deuxièmement, elle mettra en lumière la rencontre avec la patrie et les contrastes et, troisièmement, elle analysera comment la corruption constitue un inconvénient pour la démocratie et le développement.

**Mots clés :** diaspora, démocratie, obstacles, corruption, développement.

## Introduction

This paper scrutinizes the place of the British Nigerian diaspora in the homeland. It equally analyzes the pitfalls of African development and democracy. Diasporic communities and their input to development and political issues in the motherland have also been issues of interest in this study. While most of the diaspora make it a personal matter to go home on holidays or renew their ties with it; the core of the issue is that the host land has always presented challenges ranging from identity issues to sociopolitical integration of the migrants. Sociological views on migration have shown that “these migrants run away from the tyranny of dictatorial governments and the shivering poverty of their homelands in the third world seeking a better life.” Guluma Endelkachew, (2019, p. 72) Such is the case of the Nigerian diaspora among which many could be found having fled from civil wars and the excesses of political regimes since early post-independence. They constitute a host of people seeking asylum because they “are victims of circumstances and events quite beyond their control that have in many instances caused untold and unimaginable misery pain and trauma.” Guluma Endelkachew, (2019, p. 72)

Once in the land of hospitality, the achievement and success that ensues causes most of the migrants to pull together into communities and not hesitate to enforce their ties with the homeland where they participate in various aspects of life in the communities. In this line of thought, the elite and those who have made it always return home, moved by genealogical, social, economic, or political reasons. “Such groups are seen to mobilize and remit financial, material, intellectual, and political resources to their ‘home’ communities with considerable effect.” Ben Lampert (2013, p. 830)

The same issues are dramatized by the British Nigerian playwright Bola Ogbadje in *Belong*, a play about a British Nigerian migrant who faces challenges due to his hybrid and transnational personality. The play dramatizes the ambitions of a returnee coupled with a patriotic desire to bring change and development in Nigerian politics. However, the reality on the ground is a hideous tableau of obstacles and

snare due to corruption and political malpractices that hold up democracy and development in the motherland. From a Freudian psycho-analytical perspective, the study will shed light on the dramatization of the pitfalls of democracy and growth through the life course of the protagonist. The issues are analyzed on Marie Bonaparte's view that "Literary characters are the projection of the writer's unconscious wishes and conflicts." Bonaparte Marie (1933, p. 3) Therefore, the focus will be on how the author fetches from her own experience and frustrations as a native of Nigeria navigating a British sociopolitical but still carrying ambitions for the homeland. The play centers on the protagonist's yearning to return home even though he can claim to have been fully integrated into Britain. The study is subdivided into three sections, the first looks at the issues and challenges that motivate the return to the motherland. The second section deals with the encounter with home and the dismaying social and political realities. In the third section, attention will be put to how Bola Agbaje points at political corruption and nepotism as the pitfalls of African and Nigerian moves towards democracy and development.

### **1- Diasporic Challenges and the Journey Back to Homeland as Expressed in *Belong***

Diasporic challenges range from race and identity issues in the land of hospitality. There is also a yearning to return home after one has made it in life. Such challenges stem from immigrants' binational or transnational status that sets them between cultures, and geographical areas. Many are the colored people in the Western world who have to cope with discrimination based on their skin color and their origins. Another challenge immigrants face is the difficulty of social integration and adapting to societies and institutions that have, at some point, tolerated their settlement. Such realities justify why African international immigrants dramatized in *Belong*, yearn to reconnect to their homeland. In many ways, they represent the playwright's unfulfilled expectation to return to a homeland that she left at a very early age.

In addition, most people in the African diaspora make it a moral duty to assist relatives at home. They also commit to contributing to decision-making and the

economic life of their countries of origin. Contributions “such as installing street lights, tarring roads, undertaking health awareness campaigns and building youth centres ...” Ben Lampert, (2013, p. 832) materialize how the diaspora partake in the economic and infrastructural growth of the countries of origin. In addition to these organizational moves, many in the diaspora return home for ideological or social concerns. British Nigerians or Nigerians abroad are deeply rooted in their origins and would seek to return home to enforce family links with relatives however long they stay abroad.

In *Belong*, the playwright dramatizes analogous situations through the experiences of the protagonist, Kayode, a fully integrated British citizen, who mirrors figures like Sadi Khan, Rishi Sunak, and other immigrants or their descendants who have achieved success in England. Kayode stands for many immigrants who have ascended to political positions in the U.K. and even claim key positions in the decision-making arena, but still have to face the challenge of their ethnic origins and skin color. The action of the play portrays Kayode, a British Nigerian, as a candidate in the general elections. From the opening scenes of the play, spectators and readers get a hint of the unnatural atmosphere in which Kayode and his wife Rita live as citizens of England. In a conversation between the couple, we can read:

Rita This place is not going to clean itself, Kayode.

Kayode *gets up from the sofa and heads out of the room.*

*He exits.*

Rita you think you're the only one who finds it hard to dealing with this this? (*She shouts back to Kayode*) You're still a trending topic on Twitter! (*She puts on a different voice*) Mrs Adetundji, did he really mean those things? (*She puts on another voice*) Oh you poor thing, you must be ... blah blah blah blah blah. Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 5)

The excerpt highlights the social unease that marks the British society in which people's transnational or binational identities undermine cohabitation with others. Rita reveals a gloomy outlook of Britain as a place stained by racial and ethnic

disparities that people do not hesitate to use against citizens and deprive them of what they deserve. Rita should be seen as a medium through which Bola speaks her mind against the shortcomings of the British social and political institutions that cannot curb racialization. Despite his popularity as it is averred on social media, Kayode is still a stranger and does not deserve the support of the white electorate. It is a dismayed Kayode who tells Fola, why England will not change but maintain the stereotypes against immigrants regardless of how long they have lived in Britain or the contributions they make as citizens to the country's uplift. It could be inferred looking at the author's background that the characters are loaded with the author's frustrations that transpire in the standpoints through which characters illustrate themselves throughout the play. In the excerpt below, there transpired anger and frustration, as one can read it:

Kayode I worked my fingers to the bones. My campaign was watertight ... 'Can you trust an African?' Was the headline! All of a sudden there is this doubt. Why? Cos I'm frigging African... FUCKING BULLSHIT!

Fola (to Kayode) I hope you see now what I have been telling you for years. Your Hinglish is better than the Queen's and they still call you...

Kayode Fola! This is my home.

Fola You fool yourself when you say that you are British. Bola Agbaje (2012, pp. 10-1)

The lines above reveal that Kayode has an idealized perception of his identity within English society while the situation is otherwise. While Kayode views himself as a British citizen, others do not consider him that way. Fola's attempts to raise the awareness of Kayode prove in vain. Kayode's situation is that of many diasporas who drop their identity to end up belonging nowhere because they are stereotyped and kept on the brink of the preconceived attributes of colored people.

Such racist treatments result in immigrants being denied some privileges. This situation forces many to endure a life of frustration which makes them lose self-esteem and live a life of depression. In one fit of anger, he says:



“Kayode I DID NOTHING WRONG WHY CAN’T YOU GET THAT THROUGH YOUR THICK HEAD! (High case in original) My crime was being a Nigerian. I am being chastised for being an African.” Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 12), It is obvious that the protagonist feels victimized and needs to find a way out of such a predicament. To such a reality reactions vary from one community to the other. While some will stick to the diaspora identity and enforce values to survive many seek solace in redirecting their frustrated love, skills, and wealth home. Fola is made to put such thoughts forward to redeem the good-willed persons when she tells Kayode who has become desperate as a loser in the elections. Home offers a chance to achieve things one could not do or cannot do in England. It offers chances to people who have tried hard but lost in a land of many opportunities which does not segregate against poor performance but stereotypes. Kayode is fed up and wants to withdraw from a society that has given him all but still refuses to accept him as he is.

Kayode ... (to Fola) I need a break from this place.

Fola Yes a break – great idea. Come and work in Nigeria. I will be a new start.

Nigeria is flourishing and crying out for people like you....

Kayode No, just a break.

Fola That place needs Nigerians from the diaspora with skills to help rebuild the country. Forget England, it’s crumbling on the ground. Nigeria is on its way up.

Jump on board now. Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 12)

As part of the community of Nigerians who live outside their country, Bola explores the character of Fola as a mediator for the development of Nigeria viewed from the Diaspora. In this sense, Fola constitutes a think tank that foresees the actions that are necessary for the redemption of the Nigerian development issues. Fola is part of the characters that carry, the playwright's aesthetic and socio-political manifesto for a better Nigeria and Africa at large. In the excerpt above, Fola’s urge to go home and engage in the development of Nigeria is the epitome of the type of contribution the African diaspora is expected to make or is making for the sake of countries that could not provide them with the best opportunities for their success. It is therefore on Patriotic grounds that the playwright instills her strong feeling of the need to return

and give a helping hand to Nigeria on its way to development. The play illustrates the characters' effort to find skilled and well-off people who would return home and participate in national development. Studies have proved that organizations in the diaspora work to transfer technologies by building companies, transferring money for relatives' subsistence, creating jobs, and installing industrial and production units. The call to the motherland and the return to it is also about the return of the skilled elite embodied by Kayode and Fola to participate in political life and help undertake development projects.

Besides the political, economic, and developmental reasons that drive the diaspora home, it is worth noting that many of them come home to reconnect with the family they left behind when they emigrated. As a Nigerian British playwright, one can infer that Bola Agbaje is homesick and intends to urge her compatriots to remember the motherland. When Kayode finally resolves to go home, he says: "I want to go to Nigeria. I would like to see my mother she is not getting younger..." Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 14) His statement explains why many in the Nigerian diaspora come home almost yearly. "Whether it is the emotional connection to ancestry, a consciousness of identity, or a willingness to return to Africa, the African Diaspora tends not to display every characteristic it is associated with." Wapnuk Shakdam, (2014, p. 296) They have always made up their minds for family reunions. In Kayode's case, there is a sly mixture of unspoken political ambitions coupled with the fact that he has broken links with the family many years before. One remains doubtful of the sudden decision to go home when we know he has been beaten in the elections and his ambitions to make it at the top political responsibilities have crumbled.

In this section, we have discussed how Bola Agbaje dramatizes racial discrimination, and the need to refresh the family bond and participate in the development of the home country as the motives behind the protagonist's decision to return home. To achieve this, Bola explores the character, named Kayode, with a transnational profile in the British multicultural context moved by race and ethnic considerations. Indeed,

*Belong's* hero, Kayode, is an Anglicised Nigerian and aspiring Westminster MP who has apparently caused a ruckus in an election by his condescension towards the black community and vilification of his black opponent. Leaving his boutique-owning wife behind, he escapes the row by going home to his wealthy Nigerian mother...

Michael Billington (2012, para.2).

The author appears to explore from her own experience as a Nigerian born in Britain to address the issues faced by many naturalized compatriots in the diaspora. The characters are well built and Kayode fits the description of Nigeria diaspora members who are driven home by the need to reconnect with their ancestry. He is the stereotype of people in the Nigerian Diaspora who come after they have suffered racialization and difficulties of social insertion issues that they face abroad. The playwright even has a character put the following while talking about Nigeria: "Fola: That place needs Nigerians from the diaspora with skills to help rebuild the country. Forget England, it's crumbling on the ground. Nigeria is on its way up. Jump on board now." Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 12).

Fola hereby mentions the need for the Nigerian elite to lend a hand to the development of their country. The implied meaning is that the people in the diaspora have the resources and know-how necessary to push their home countries in the way of progress. Such a statement illustrates why people in the diaspora are expected to come. Kayode symbolizes many African elite Africans in the diaspora who have become skilled and financially well off to buy assets and set up industrial units capable of producing added value to the economy of their countries. In the very case of the protagonist Kayode, he is a skilled politician who can participate in nation-building after his political career in England.

In *Belong*, Kayode could be counted among the most controversial characters who go through a series of metamorphoses because quickly readapts to situations and opportunities. Such a piece of evidence in the play part of the dramatic strategies in which the author seeks to address burning issues that undermine the nation's

development as seen by the author who is a Nigerian expatriate looking at development and political issues as a native outsider.

## **2- Confronting the Hostile Realities of Motherland and Home**

*Belong* presents members of the African or Nigerian diaspora as aliens both in their homeland and abroad. For a nation that needs the contribution of its sons and daughters at home and abroad, the displays a reality of members of the diaspora who henceforth belong nowhere. Kayode does not belong to England and is not completely accepted as a Nigerian. As a British immigrant, Bola Agbaje has a deep insight into the plight of the transnational individuals moving in between the African and Western societies, institutions, and the hideous realities that lay dormant. Bola's satirical overtone has penetrated diasporic identities and stature and can be a source of hostility and drawbacks to the contribution of the diaspora to development. Indeed, Isibo Rama, (2015, para.6), says regarding the experience of many in the African diaspora that "Returning to Africa is hard, you encounter what we call the "Prodigal son/daughter complex" which makes you bend down to a variety of expectations both interesting and frustrating in most cases. "The truth is that your family loves you for who you are, not the money you make..." Isibo Rama (2015, para.6). Arguably, many at home would expect you to remain theirs and keep the values that bind or identify you to them instead of the possessions you bring home. The situation in *Belong* appears different. The protagonist's encounter with home results in a delusion of hopes and ambitions. He is confronted with socio-political realities that counterpoise what moved him to come home. He is welcomed by issues and attitudes that will throw cold waters on his enthusiasm as a returnee and his potential "to contribute to development at 'home'." Ben Lampert, (2013, p. 833). The debate over the diaspora's contribution is still heated due to its scope. Many agree that the contribution is minimal and cannot be counted as a significant part of the national GDP. However, it is also worth noting that the financial assistance provided to families and the business units set up by the diaspora could not be neglected in the economic input and the creation of jobs for the nationals.

In *Belong*, Bola demonstrates a good mastery of the worries of the diaspora who intend to come home. The situations that Kayode faces, are the expression of the author's worries about how she will be welcomed as a returnee to Nigeria. From a social and genealogical perspective, returning home brings about a feeling of relief for many in the diaspora despite some adverse realities they have to face. A look at Bola's dramatization of issues shows that home is not always home and does not stretch a welcoming hand to returnees. In *Belong*, it is against the consent of his wife that Kayode returns to Nigeria to reunite with the family he left behind. The encounter looks affectionately warm when we discover that Kayode's mother has "gone to get the full works, manicure, pedicure – and hair..." Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 15). She took on herself to give a special welcome to her son. The aesthetic interest in these details lies in the affective gap created while the son was away for years. The mood was even set by Kunle's iconic "We are happy to see you ... and Mama will be pleased you have arrived safely. Since the news of your visit, she has not stopped talking about you. The way Mama has been acting you would think the King of England himself was arriving in Ijebu-Ode." Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 15) Indeed, as we can read:

*Mama enters dressed in an all-white 'iro at buba' (wrapper and top).*

*Kayode jumps out of his seat as soon as he sees his mother. Kunle prostrates for Mama, but she does not notice him. Kunle gets up.*

*Mama I cannot believe it. Alluhamdululia Rabilliah Al-Amin.*

*Kayode nods. [...]*

*Mama I said is that you I am seeing? God you are wonderful.*

*She starts to sing.*

*Mama Subhalliah Wallihandulliah Alllllaaah Alllaaah*

*Akbar [Thank you God. God is great.] Thank you God for*

*bringing my son back to me safely. I didn't think I would see this day. The day my son, my only son will finally return home. Adura mi ti gba. [My prayers have come true.]*

*Kayode I have missed you, Mummy.*

Mama (in Yoruba) Ma puro. [Don't lie.] Bola Agbje (2012, pp. 16-7)

Palpable is the atmosphere laden with emotions. It is blatant that missing one another has caused Kayode and Mama to long for a family reunion. The final words by Mama indicate a contrast between what Kayode says and the long unfulfilled expectations of his mother to see him again. She utterly means that, if Kayode missed her he would have come home long ago. Both expected to meet but Kayode's return is a catalyst action through which the playwright probes into how it feels to meet again.

Incidentally, as soon as these welcome cordialities are over, Kayode is faced with a series of realities against his "I am here to rest, Mummy." Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 22) He will not rest because in the eyes of his mother and other acquaintances. They have to take the best out of him before he returns to Britain where he built his life. A hint of this reserve and hostility is given in the conversation below:

Kayode Why do you hate coming to London so much?

Mama Because the weather over there hates me. It's always trying to attack me.

[...]

*Silence*

Mama I am glad you are divorcing that useless wife of yours o.

Kayode I am not divorcing Rita.

Mama A mother can wish.

Kayode That is not very nice Mummy. She didn't come here cos you hate her.

Mama I do hate her. I still don't understand how that barren witch managed to get you to marry her.

Kayode I married her cos I loved her. We choose not to have children, Mother. Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 21)

What appears initially as a private matter between Kayode and his wife becomes the catalyst for antagonism on their first encounter with their kinsmen after many years. Judgmental views on others stand as the motives behind the apparent disagreement above. The transnational status of Kayode contributes to this because

he stands between two mutually exclusive cultures. One is moved by individualism and the other stands by community values. Mama contends with Kayode as the figure of the Nigerian customs and values that put childbearing at the stake of marriage. Kayode has turned renegade to the point of living an absurd life in England with his wife who has never born him children because they have decided not to have any. To achieve such a picture, Bola coerces Kayode's western broadmindedness to the obstinate, and meddling personality of his mother who chastises Rita as a "barren witch" who cannot bear children to perpetuate her husband's lineage. While it is commonly admitted that marriage is blessed with childbearing, such a belief is the rule between the Kayodes who henceforth claim the British culture and identity. Such cultural contrasts are enough reasons some returnees face challenges on their return home. Besides this meddling in the marriage between Kayode and Rita, Kayode's mother backs Kunle in telling her son that he is a stranger in his own country. He turns out to be white in his black body. As we can read in a heated debate about how Western countries patronize African affairs:

*Kayode is using a fork, while Kunle is using his hands. The two men discuss their thoughts on politics as Mama cuts the meat.*

Kunle Brother Kayode, let me finish now, ah ah. I am not saying that fraud and corruption is not a problem. What I am saying is our biggest problem – What keeps this country oppressed- is our need to look to the outsider to tell us how to act, what type of Nigerians we should be. We are constantly seeking approval from others.

Kayode Who are the others?

Kunle (in Yoruba) Eh ma binu sa – [don't be mad] but it's people like you. You come here with your white views and white way of working and try to embed them into our society.

Kayode I'm not white!

Kunle All you foreigners think and act like a white 'persin'. What you you fail to realise is that this is not the white man's land. Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 23)

Hypothetically, Kunle should have maintained a sense of hospitality against Kayode until he returned to England. However, Kunle does not abide by such African social precepts. He rather wages antagonism on the premise that Kunle is more of an Englishman than an African. The excerpt embodies clues of hostility about Kayode's return and his presence among his kinsmen. Kunle tells Kayode how the latter no longer belongs to Nigeria. What appears to be a polite discussion on politics turns into an expression of grief against Western culture and those who bear it. Kayode's manners, at the table, and the way he uses the fork, trigger the argument about Kayode's Western identity instead of his Nigerian origins. There is a suggestion that members of the Nigerian diaspora belong to no culture. One can even posit that the author opens a debate about where the diaspora like herself belongs. The West or Africa? It is in such confusion that Kunle suspects; Kayode might be an agent of white supremacy. Though Kayode has not displayed any attitude complicit with the perpetuation of white supremacy, there is an indication that he is alien to his people despite the asset he could have been to his people once back in Nigeria. The return home does not only yield glee, it turns out to be an occasion of stress and social rebuke. While expatriates complain of being discriminated against in England, they belong nowhere. Their people have apprehensions about them and their return and their stay in the motherland. It is a waste of assets and human resources to rebuke the diaspora while they can still bring their contribution to nation-building.

### **3- Pitfalls to African Democracy and Development**

*Belong* is a sarcastic representation of the hindrances that stand in the way of African progress. Bola has wielded ironic dramatization of characters both in the diaspora and at home to enact the perils faced by democratic values and countries' development issues. The play mainly builds on the contrast in the life of the characters to expose why many African countries, like Nigeria, fail to make their way towards democratic progress and institutional efficiency. Situational irony is the sarcastic tool she mainly explores for her aesthetic purposes. Indeed, Bola exposes some of the attitudes and malpractices such as corruption, opportunism, and nepotism that block



Africa's move towards better institutions, a better society, and development. *Belong* proves the author's power to set bare irrelevant attitudes and cast away individual and collective shortcomings. In *Belong*, readers and spectators of the play can perceive how it materializes "the power of satire to undermine authority and influence public opinion. » Megan R. Hill (2013, p. 328). In the framework of the present study, the authority refers to the Nigerian diaspora as the body of people who have made it professionally, ideologically, and financially and who are a potential asset to the country's development. The authority in question is also the family and political authorities in the home countries who, like Fola, Chief Olowayole, etc. expect the diaspora or call upon them to return home and participate in the construction of the country they left, in pursuit of a better life.

However, the series of events in the play shows irrelevant attitudes and choices that help see straying individuals who rather undermine progress than work for it. Nowadays, the African or any other diaspora worldwide stands as institutions collaborating with the society at home to provide for people's needs. The mechanisms set to achieve the purposes of the diaspora and the people at home, do not work properly. Bola is aware of the reality of her homeland. The play indicates the main hindrances lie in cultural contrasts and the weakness of institutions.

Kayode is dramatized as a character who changes in standing according to circumstances. Readers quickly perceive such an attitude when he decides to return to Nigeria without planning it. He only jumps on a suggestion offered by Fola to make it an opportunity. After Kayode has failed as an MP in the British parliamentary elections, he quickly jumps on Fola's suggestion to return to Nigeria on the alibi that he needs to reconnect with his family. The playwright is, hereby, highlighting opportunism in the protagonist who does not hesitate to jump on the next opportunity that comes his way to soothe his pains after the electoral demise.

Such a type of elite is not what Africa needs on its way to development. More evidence transpires in how Kayode justifies his next move to run as a local authority in the election once he reaches Nigeria. He also sought to make a name in Nigerian Politics because as he explains to his wife who was struck by the sudden change,

“The rules are slightly flexible here.” Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 67). The irony in Bola’s dramatization is blatant. It highlights the ridicule in Kayode’s attempt to explain why his holiday turned into electioneering in Nigeria. Through his excuse about the flexible rules in Nigeria, the playwright throws a scathing look at the loose institutions that poorly work to meet people’s expectations. Kayode is in a kind of delusion because as the barman would tell him: “This is a lawless country, no electricity, poor roads, bad hospitals ... Only the rich enjoy life in Nigeria. The poor suffer o.” Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 30)

Through the words of the barman, the play presents a tableau and evidence of why Nigeria, is seen as a country of inequalities. The country is ranked among the most corrupt countries, and such a ranking is materialized in *Belong* through the hostile and unlawful actions of Chief Olowolaye who is ready to subvert the law to deal with a political opponent. Political adversaries are deadly enemies because institutions are deviated from their initial purpose. The chief is an illiterate and corrupt politician who sees himself as a representative of the local political authorities and does not tolerate any challenge to his views and choices. It is in such a corrupt atmosphere that Kayode’s first encounter with the Chief is set. As we can read:

Chief Olowolaye Awon Oyinbo. [These white people]

Kayode I’AM NIGERIAN!

Chief Olowolaye (Begins to laugh loudly) you are only a Nigerian by name. Put 230,000 on the table now.

Kayode What for?

Chief Olowolaye Can you put the money on the table or not?

Kunle Chief is trying to –

Chief Olowolaye In view of the fact that your friend cannot produce – how much is it in pounds, roughly £1000 – without questioning or being informed about the purposes, I suggest you take yourself back to your country. Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 35)

Only the audience understands Kayode’s situation vis à vis the Chief. The Chief seeks to test what the author ironically supposes to be the genuine personality of a Nigerian. For, Chief Olowolaye believes that Kayode like most Nigerians,

“always made a bribe payment when requested to do so (24.3 percent), in contrast to the 4.5 percent who refused to pay a bribe at least once (but paid on other occasions) ...” Mohan Jaya (2024, p. 71); The Chief is therefore upset to face the refusal of his counterpart who displays a sense of integrity and could be counted among “the 1.4 percent who always refused to pay a bribe requested.” Mohan Jaya (2024, p. 71). Corruption and bribery are commonplace in Nigeria and Bola as a native of Nigeria is aware of its social and political integration as a practice, however, she deftly makes Kayode rebuke such an act on purpose to let people see the right thing to do regarding perversion. The corrupt in Nigerian politics are being taught how to resist when tested. When the chief refers to Kayode’s incapacity “to produce without questioning or being informed about the purposes” Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 35). He alludes to Kayode’s predisposition to be corrupted and therefore is unfit for Nigerian politics. Therefore, Bola Agbaje probes an insight into what is wrong in the politics of her home country and demonstrates a clear understanding of the manipulations corrupt individuals are capable of. It is my inference that she builds such characters on purpose to enact an indictment on those who adulterate the political atmosphere in the Nigerian context. Bola drives the issues home to why democratic and development values cannot take their roots because those, who are supposed to promote them are those, who defraud the values and endanger people’s individual and collective freedom.

The action in the play reveals that instead of a debate and confrontation of ideas towards better perspectives, brute force, and violence are used. As it reads:

The Chief begins to remove his ‘Agbada’ as Kunle and the Barman try to hold him back.

Chief Olowlaye I am going to beat this boy senseless today.

Kunle Wait, sa. This is all ... Let’s discuss this like men.

Cheif Olowolaye leaps and tries to grab Kayode, who stands still and only backs away slightly. Chief Olowolaye pushes Kunle and the Barman but they continue to beg him.

Chief Olowolaye I am CHIEF OLOWOLAYE and I DEMAND RESPECT. Do I look like your age mate?

Kunle Prostrates himself in front of the chief again. Bola, (2012, p. 37)

The excerpt above is the epitome of the reality behind the political debate in the Nigerian context. The discord exposes the incapacity of the chief and many political actors to bear with contradiction. He also gets angry because he proves unable to convince Kayode. The situation is worsened when he seeks to settle the issues by beating Kayode. The chief is the image of wayward politicians who hold up democratic processes by backing their political manifesto with violence against their political opponents.

Furthermore, *Belong* is a dramatic pretext for the playwright to chastise the weakness of the institutions and cause ethical reform. The playwright highlights the inefficiency of institutions that are supposed to ensure equal rights and collective freedom but cannot do so. The play reveals that Chief Olowolaye leaves the bar furious and the next move he takes is to have the police settle the score on his behalf on allegations of a crime. As it transpires from an impromptu visit to Kayode and his mother:

Police Commissioner I am here on official business.

Kayode It's good you're here. (To Mama) the Chief ...

Police commissioner (to Kayode) Follow me down to the station. NOW! This is a very serious matter. A crime has been committed.

Kayode Right!

Mama Kayode ma soro [Kayode don't talk.] Police commissioner, there has been a misunderstanding. You know me.

Police commissioner It is out of respect for you that I have not sent my officer down to arrest your son.

Kayode (to Mama) Is this a joke?

Mama Ah-ah. I am sure Police Commissioner Mr Samson Ali-Amin wants to get this sorted as quickly as possible.

Kayode (to Police Commissioner) How much did he pay you?

[...]

Police Commissioner (to Mama) Talk to your son. He is “charged for physical serious assault on Chief Olowolaye!” Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 38)

Such a dramatization speaks volumes of how Bola fetches from her experience of the Nigerian realities and how individuals use institutions to perpetrate reprehensible acts on their fellow citizens. As a Nigerian-British seeking Nigeria’s welfare, she does not hesitate to poke her finger at what is wrong, especially, the weakness of institutions before corrupt individuals. The police commissioner is a corrupt individual who has agreed to comply with evil. He does not appear to work for the police but for the Chief and even shows undue deference to Kayode’s mother. The police commissioner has lost orientation and instead of working to enforce the law, he is rather inclined to serve individuals. He is the image of most institutions representing the law and the civil service of most ex-colonized countries making their way to democracy and development. Chief Olowolaye is the stereotype of Chinua Achebe’s Chief Nanga in *Man of the People*, in the novel, we have a hazy tableau of the Nigerian political scene as Characters are found manipulating the laws and pervert the mission of the police force to satisfy their political ambitions Chinua Achebe (1966, p. 115). The playwright appears to explore the diaspora as a pretext to highlight how institutions supposed to secure individual and collective freedoms are bent down to purposes they were not designed for. In terms of weak institutions, the play sheds light on how single individuals can manipulate the laws to achieve their purposes. Institutions are bent to satisfy individual interests. The playwright points at institutional corruption as she has Chief Olowolaye bribes and resorts to allegations to have the police manhandle Kayode after the latter has refused to take the bribe. The closing action of the play is fraught with electoral frenzy and such a democratic institution through which the people are allowed to express themselves is also fettered by irregular and reprehensible acts. Before making sure that the elections are rigged, take unruly measures.

*Nigeria.* Chief Olowolaye is pacing up and down. Kunle watches him.

Chief Olowolaye That imbecile is out there running my name into the ground and... this was meant to be very easy. Now I have headache and all sort of nonsense. My doctor is telling me I am suffering stress. Why should I be suffering?

Kunle Chief, please calm down...

*Silence.*

Chief Olowolaye What are you going to do about this, Kunle?

Kunle Me, sa?

Chief Olowolaye No... me. Who else am I talking to?

Kunle Sorry. I don't know what to-

Chief Olowolaye This man is a problem and you need to fix it. Bola Agbaje (2012, p. 58)

The above interchanges reveal that Chief is asking Kunle to manipulate and undermine a legal process for his agenda. Such practices constitute flaws in democracy, and without true democracy, developmental issues cannot take their normal course. Through this dramatization, Bola addresses the wayward endeavors of political actors who hold up institutions that are meant to provide equal opportunities. I contend that in doing so, Bola chastises undemocratic practices and indicates how it is hard for African countries to make their way to genuine democracy. Chief Olowolaye symbolizes the brute force in democracy and does not hesitate to resort to less recommendable actions to achieve his plans.

## **Conclusion**

Following the purpose of this study, I have sought to analyze the place of the Nigerian and African Diaspora in the homeland and also look at the pitfalls to democracy and development as dramatized by Bola Agbaje, a Nigerian-British playwright who has built on her experience as an expatriate to treat issues connected to the plight expatriates in Britain and how some of them are urged home. Most of the issues are analyzed through the psychoanalytic lens which has allowed me to highlight and relate the characters' attitudes to racialization in Britain and their

yearning to return home as part of the playwright's individual experience, her ambitions, frustrations, and her dreams for Nigeria. The study has addressed three major issues, namely, the urge British-Nigerian to go home, the encounter with realities in the home, and the pitfalls to democracy and development. The study has found that as an expatriate in Britain, Bola Agbaje dramatizes her experience as a black British playwright through her characters. She relies on her British-Nigerian nationality to address issues of racialization and profiling that Africans in the diaspora as represented in the characters of Kayode, Rita, Fola, etc. have to bear with. I have shown the type of discrimination the African diaspora undergo when they consider themselves British citizens. They are not allowed to enjoy the same opportunities as their British counterparts and can even suffer rejection based on their origins and skin color. People in the diaspora are othered and blocked from pursuing their ambitions as illustrated in the character of Kayode who failed in the elections partly because he is black. Such aspects of discrimination justify why many Africans in the diaspora do not hesitate to return home to contribute to national development and their uplift in their home country. However, this study has found that at this point, they become disillusioned by the realities of their home countries. While they seek to resettle, their relatives and people from their ethnic origins rebuke them as Kunle and Kayode's mother do to Rita, Kayode and all other characters who come back from Britain. Even the family circle is hostile to their return. One of the achievements of this article is that it has shown that the home country and immigrant families at home waste resources when they do not make it easy for the relatives to resettle once they come back home. Finally, the study has found that the playwright seeks to alert her kinsmen about corruption and how malfunction of institutions prevents development and the rule of democracy. Bola does this as she shows the corruption of the police and how wayward politicians like Chief Olowolaye bend the state institutions to meet their expectations.

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