

**AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY AND RESISTANCE TO NEOCOLONIAL  
(BAD) GOVERNANCE IN *LAKE GOD* AND *DANCE OF THE VAMPIRES*  
BY BOLE BUTAKE**

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**Abstract**

Africa continues to suffer from European imperialism and its related extensive ills like exploitation, ethnocide, corruption, dictatorship, embezzlement, and murder. In his plays, the Cameroonian dramatist, Bole Butake, handles numerous problems plaguing Cameroon and other African countries, and one of these is bad leadership caused by neocolonialism. This study examined Butake's perspectives on the connection between European expansionism and African autochthonous spirituality. Using Cultural Resistance by David Jeffress as the theoretical framework, the work sought to answer the question: What is Bole Butake's vision of the link between neocolonialism and African sacredness? The paper, which is divided into three parts, concludes that Butake projects African traditional religion as a solution to neocolonialism and its negative offshoots. It opines that African spiritual entities should be associated with governance as elements of regulation, control, and punishment so that bad leadership and the subsequent suffering of Africans can be mitigated or eliminated.

**Keywords:** Neocolonialism, African spirituality, Postcolonialism, Resistance, Leadership

**Introduction**

Communities all over the world face different realities and have specific difficulties to deal with. Governments, associations, and individuals in each environment try to get adequate solutions to their problems. Africa in general and Cameroon in particular has its specific challenges to handle. One of these intricacies is neocolonialism which goes together with other ills such as exploitation, corruption, bad governance, dictatorship, disregard for culture, and murder. Africans of all walks of life make efforts to end all these and writers are not left out. Achebe (1975) posits that "Any African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being

completely irrelevant like the absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames” (p.16). Bole Butake in his drama sensitizes his readers about the problems the Cameroonian community, like many other parts of Africa, is facing and proposes what he thinks are African solutions to them. One of such predicaments is the obstacle posed by neocolonialism in the (re)construction of Africa after colonialism and its long-lasting effects on Africans’ economic, political, socio-cultural, and traditional realities. This is in line with Afonji (2013) who opines that “The economic exploitation of Africa by Europe and neo-colonialist politics of the new (economic) world order, themes of actual historical significance in African studies, have preoccupied the new dramatists of Africa in general and Cameroon in particular, as much as the issue of black man’s betrayal of motherland has affected her bards” (p. 46). Agwa (2017) also links creative writing to history, social reality, and the rupture between leaders and citizens as she indicates that “History and social experience furnish the context in which writers have been working especially in the post-colonial period that has been characterized by the African writer’s conception which is contrary to that of the politician” (p.11). In the same way as colonialism and/or neocolonialism are integral parts of African socio-cultural and historical realities, African traditional spiritual dimensions are also unavoidable when examining issues related to Africans and their actualities. These are thus among the things Butake projects in his dramaturgy. A lot of research has been done to analyze Bole Butake’s drama concerning supernatural elements and/or nation (re)building. Mbunda-Nekang (2017) brings out the manifestation of the metaphysical through a character in *Lake God and And Palm Wine Will Flow*; Nkealah (2013) examines how dictators use mysticism to control and exploit the citizens in *Dance of the vampires*; Fai (2018) studies Butake’s plays using Jungian Psychology to project the supernatural as a means of achieving nation building and not an artistic flaw; Pangmeshi (2013) explains through

*Family Saga* that there is need for patriotism, nationhood and reconciliatory dialogue to rebuild a fractured Cameroon; and Nkengasong (2006) scrutinizes Butake's plays alongside Wole Soyinka's to conclude that imported sanctity not embedded in African culture will not help Africans and thus pushes for a move back to African sacred elements for the wellbeing of the people. The novelty this paper brings is the investigation of African pietism as an adequate solution to neocolonialism and its effects that continue to plague African nations and expose their citizens to untold suffering. This work is therefore aimed at analyzing the way Butake presents the relationship between African traditional religion and neocolonialism together with its tenets. Postcolonialism specifically the concept of resistance will be used to examine Butake's vision of how African piety can be used as an instrument to fight neocolonialism among other ills that plague many African societies. A lot of research exists that hammers on Postcolonialism and resistance to (neo) colonial rule. Of specific relevance in this work is the Cultural Resistance framework as presented by David Jeffress (2008). According to this concept, literature plays a key role in resistance to colonialism. For this to take place, colonial narratives must be displaced or postcolonial literature should be constructed as a clear Other to the colonial narrative. Butake's plays under study fall in this category and thus qualify to be analyzed using the concept of Resistance which, as Jeffress (2018) indicates, is used "[...] to examine how works of literature take part in, comment upon, the cultural frameworks of storytelling or narrative that inform colonial authority and the ideal of liberation" (p. 14). *Lake God* and *Dance of the Vampires* will therefore be examined to bring out how Butake presents African cultural/traditional metaphysical constituents as forces that can be used to bring change in societies which is in line with Jeffress' view on resistance. Shahjahan (2011) comments on the pragmatic dimension of Jeffress' view of resistance thus: "Jeffress' objective is to reframe the idea of resistance as an effort to transform social relations rather than simply viewing resistance as a reactive movement, which either opposes or

subverts colonial rule” (p. 274). The question that this study, which is divided into three parts, sets to answer is as follows. What is Bole Butake’s vision of the link between neocolonialism and African indigenous spirituality? The first part examines how African mystical bodies regulate or control leadership to avoid neocolonial tendencies. The second part scrutinizes the steps taken to prevent neocolonialism and its ills from taking place once such inclinations are detected in leaders. Finally, the third part takes an insight into the punishment meted out to rulers and/or their communities when they go against the norms and continue with neocolonialism and its accruing detrimental repercussions despite the warning and prevention attempts from the gods. Mbunda-Nekang (2017) states: “The gods and ancestors are eternally alive and it is believed they visit the earth to inspect it, regulate it, bestow blessings, and mete out punishment” (p.54). This corroborates the regulatory, preventive, and punitive dimensions of African native piousness as outlined above.

### **I. The Regulatory Role of African Traditional Spirituality**

Spirituality, be it in line with African traditional religion, Christianity, Islam, or otherwise, plays a very important role in the lives of individuals and communities as a whole in many parts of Africa. African indigenous godliness, traditional beliefs, and paranormal practices shape the lives of many Africans and their societies as such religious activities provide solutions to the problems the people face every day. One of the ways native African sacredness does this is by acting as mechanisms of checks and balances to regulate the lives of individuals and the community at large and prevent them from indulging in acts that can bring danger or shame to the people and/or their communities. This is because of the cosmic trinity of the dead, the living, and the unborn which many African traditional societies believe needs to be in shape for life to go on well. Mbunda-Nekang (2017) highlights this in the following words: “The African universe consists of natural and supernatural phenomena. The

ancestors, the living and the unborn are part of a cyclic trinity” (p.53). Thus, the link between the living, the dead, the unborn, and the spirits reflects itself in the daily lives of the people as it guides them on what to do and what to avoid if they are to find happiness. Bole Butake in his plays is very much interested in the quotidian activities of the people in his society and tries to propose solutions to the problems they face and give his vision of how society should function. Fai (2018) confirms this assertion thus; “Butake in his dramaturgy as a whole is engaged in a project of rebuilding a fractured Cameroon nation after the demise of colonialism.” (p.171) One of the notions the playwright dwells on largely in his works is nation building especially the colonial/neocolonial tendencies of African leadership that plunges their communities into hardship. In *Lake God*, Shey Bo-Nyo, one of the custodians of tradition, says “The White man has brought trouble to the land. He has killed our gods and the Fon is impotent” (Butake, 1999, p. 9). As a possible solution, the playwright proposes a move back to African autochthonous spirituality and its regulatory role so that the excesses of the rulers should be controlled and the inimical influence of the white neocolonial masters nullified. From the author’s presentation of characters, mood, title, setting, and props which are key components of dramatic presentations, the supernatural underpinning of his works is visible. A mention of the titles *Lake God* and *Dance of the Vampires* already sends a signal about the paranormal dimension of the drama as “god” and “vampire” relate to the metaphysical. The same image is projected through the presentation of Characters. In *Lake God*, Kimbong is introduced as the “Leader of the women’s Cult”, Shey Tanto as the “Leader of Kwifon, the men’s secret cult, and most important authority in people’s lives” and Ma Kusham as “An old woman who administers the oath of Fibuen” (Butake, 1999. p. 5) while in *Dance of the Vampires*, the author states that Five masked figures are the “Vampire cult” (Butake, 1999, p. 143) and perform the cult dance in “Complete silence. Eerie sounds of night birds of ill omen: owls, bats, etc” (Butake, 1999, p. 144)

“Cults” that appear in the depiction of all these personalities highlight the hovering of occultism in the plays. The same projection is done in *And Palm Wine Will Flow* where Shey Ngong is “Chief Priest of Nyombom” (Butake, 1999, p. 87), Kwengong “One of the wives of Shey Ngong / Earth Goddess” (Butake, 1999, p. 87) and Tapper the “Palm-wine tapper for SheyNgong / Kibaranko” (Butake, 1999, p. 87). As is the case with “gods”, “vampires” and “cults” already illustrated, “Chief priest”, “goddess” and “kibaranko” all emanate from the sacred realms of the environment of the playwright which portrays his background and vision.

Props and setting also highlight sanctity as the sacred grove of Nyombom is characterized by an elaborately decorated pot called “nshanwong” in which libation is usually poured to the gods. In other parts of the grove are several masks which are elaborately decorated with dark fibre or cloth as well as a gourd and sacred gong. Continuing with the grove as an element of the setting being linked with aboriginal mysticism, the author says in *Lake God* “Shey Bo-Nyo’s retreat in the grove by the lake. The only significant prop is a sacrificial pot placed prominently and decorated with nkeng, a shrub of the gods” (Butake, 1999, p. 19). The presentation of the grove from such a metaphysical dimension is in line with the African belief in the holistic nature of the relationship between the living, the dead, and nature which must be in harmony for life to go on well. This is especially true of the grassfield communities like the Bui Division from which Butake hails where the grove has a high transcendental facet not just because sacrifices are offered to several sacred entities like trees, rocks, and rivers in the grove but also because spirits and gods of all dimensions are believed to reside in these groves which have the added significance of providing grass and roots of pious value used for several supernatural practices.

Some of the supernatural occurrences mentioned in Butake’s plays are present today in many tribes of the North West region of Cameroon and

their activities and roles are largely to regulate not just the activities and lives of the people in the communities but also to tame the rulers from developing excessive powers and taking uncontrolled decisions all, of which can only harm the community. This is the case with the “Kwifon” cult in *Lake God* which Shey Tanto leads and for which he (and not even the Fon) is considered the “[...] most important authority in people’s lives” (Butake, 1999, p. 5). In the play as in many communities in the North West region of Cameroon especially in the Bui and Donga Mantung Divisions, the “kwifon” has transmundane powers beyond the reach of the ruler and has the responsibility to advise him to perform certain things deemed beneficial to the community and prevent him from doing deeds that are potentially harmful to the people. It can thus be the ultimate savior of the people with powers above all else. This is highlighted by Tanto who says “This is an emergency, and there are still men in the land. Kwifon will forget the crimes of the Fon to save the land. I will get the seven pillars of Kwifon and they will put their heads together. They will meet here since they can no longer gain access to their sanctuary in the palace” (Butake, 1999, p. 22).

Another traditional religious element of control and regulation of power presented by the author is the “kibaranko”. Present in almost all palaces in the North West region of Cameroon, the kibaranko is one of the most dreaded cult masquerades in the North West region and is one of the pillars that hold the tribes. Like the kwifon, the kibaranko has to help the Fon in leadership by giving him directives, advice, and guidance on key decisions regarding the community but cannot be dominated by the leader as it has the powers to stop his actions and even punish him if necessary. This is brought out when the Kibaranko, under the guidance of the spirits, search the palace for the Fon and palm wine to cleanse the land and appease the gods so that the calamities the Fon's actions have caused an end. This regulatory role is assigned to these cults because they are not human and are guided by the deities whom they link with

spiritually through incantations, sacrifices, and libation. When Shey Ngong asks Tapper who acts as the kibaranko why he did not bring the wine for incantation as he was asked to, he replies “What did I bring, then? When the spirit of kibaranko takes you, it is hard to remember anything” (Butake, 1999. p.112). The regulatory power of these traditional metaphysical bodies is therefore what African rulers who want limitless power fear and this is exactly Psaul Roi’s preoccupation in *Dance of the Vampire Dance* as he laments “Real power, absolute power is in the hands of the vampires. What to do? Psaul Roi, what to do to have absolute power” (Butake, 1999, p.144)? In *Lake God*, when the neocolonial powers represented by Father Leo want to dominate and exploit the community through the Fon, their first effort is to neutralize the regulating powers of the traditional spiritual entities of the communities and that is why Father Leo masterminds a plot for the Fon to get the kwifon arrested and detained by the government. This is because the colonial masters are aware of the strong bond and awe Africans have for their traditional religious entities like the kwifon and that they cannot mislead the rulers to appropriate limitless powers on themselves and exploit the resources for the benefit of the whites if these regulatory constituents are in place. Lagham disappointingly blames the neocolonial activities of the Fon on the absence of indigenous sacred systems and activities as he states:

I do not question the wonderful things Father Leo has brought to this land. But I blame the Fon for allowing himself to be misled by Father Leo. Was it not the late Fon who allowed Father Leo to start the school? But he continued to rule the land in the way that it had always been ruled. He continued to lead the people to the yearly sacrifice to the lake god. He always listened to the Kwifon and never allowed the cattle grazers to settle in the land. Is there Kwifon in this land today? The Fon has reported Kwifon to gomna and Kwifon is in detention (Butake, 1999, p. 31)

It can be seen that indigenous spirituality plays a vital part in the lives of characters and communities in Butake’s drama and that can be extended to Cameroon in which the plays are set and other African societies with the same realities. The absence of such bodies of checks and balances



leads to poor leadership and the suffering of the people as seen in *Lake God* and *Dance of the Vampires* irrespective of the presence of Christianity and government structures.

Since many Africans generally and African leaders particularly dread the African spiritual powers for the punishment they bring to offenders as seen in Butake's plays, African political leadership and instruments of control should be decolonized to have leaders who do not practice neocolonial exploitation, corruption, dictatorship and other forms of bad governance that bring suffering to the masses. In this light, instead of using the Bible or the Quran to swear in leaders at all levels, African native supernatural entities and chief priests should be used and such leaders who know what can befall them if they break their oaths will be obliged to work by the principles of their oaths. In the same dimension, oaths in courts and before national and international bodies of auditing and control should be done using African traditional spirituality and as Butake has indicated in *Lake God* and *Dance of the Vampires*, the fear of such spirits will not allow those under the oath to be dishonest and Africa will get rid of neocolonialism and its related vice that inflict hardship and suffering on Africa and its people.

## **II. Indigenous Spiritual Entities and the Mitigation of Neocolonialism**

As indicated above, Butake has presented mechanisms of checks and balances lodged in African aboriginal spirituality that are used to control the powers and actions of communities and especially their leaders to prevent them from carrying out acts that are detrimental to the people and the communities at large. However, some leaders go against the provisions of such bodies and make attempts to indulge in undesirable activities such as neocolonialism and the subsequent corruption, dictatorship, exploitation, murder, and ethnocide that bring hardship to their people. When such cases present themselves, the custodians of spiritual aspects of native tradition take steps to prevent the perceived

excesses from materializing. In *Lake God*, the first glimpses of the Fon's neocolonial tendencies that are a danger to his people are seen in the stage direction where the author says "Stage decoration should reflect the Fon's bias for Western civilization at the expense of traditional culture. Even his costume reflects his obsession with Western culture" (Butake, 1999, p. 9). With this mindset and the guidance of Father Leo who epitomizes neocolonialism, the Fon gets one of the traditional cults of power regulation, the kwifon, detained. He thereafter becomes a dictator and listens to nobody except Father Leo who lures him to exploit his people and neglect all tradition. The firm grip of the colonialists on African leadership is projected when the Fon tells the priest "Father, sometimes I ask myself whether without you I would still be on this throne" (Butake, 1999, p. 36) and goes on to add "But Father, I owe everything to you. You brought me up" (Butake, 1999, p. 37).

The image of white neocolonialists controlling African leaders and making themselves perceptibly indispensable is also seen in *Dance of the Vampires* when Albino threatens to abandon Psaul Roi and Song pleads "Wait a while, Mr. Albino. Your Most Royal Majesty, if he leaves now then we are finished. ...paying the military, etc" (Butake, 1999, p. 164). With all these, the ground is fertile for the whites to exploit Africans through their leaders who act as stooges. The Fon and Father Leo buy cows and give Dewa, the Mbororo herdsman, to look after and allow him to lead his animals into the villagers' farms to eat their crops with impunity. Father Leo himself tells the angry Christian women who want the cows sent away from their village that when he receives money from his country, he gives it to the Fon to invest in the buying of cattle (Butake, 1999, p. 32). There is an aspect of corruption in this as a priest is not supposed to own private businesses or investments. This is the same way the Fon got himself enthroned as Shey Bo-Nyo states "But that is how he came to the throne: bribing kingmakers with money and meat" (Butake, 1999, p. 21). Shey Bo-Nyo makes this revelation when he learns from Tanto that part

of Dewa's cows belongs to the Fon and subsequently the priest. This is a contained presentation of the neocolonial method where the whites use bribes and corrupt money to enthrone the people, they can easily manipulate to exploit resources in total disregard of African principles of governance and leadership.

The use of bribery and corruption to ascend to power is also seen in *Dance of the Vampires* where Psaul Roi bribes Song with money to hatch a plan for his initiation into the vampire cult and after the forceful initiation which is against the guidance of the tribe, he tells the other members of the cult that "After the initiation we shall all go to the palace in procession and I will give you money. That is what you need, not power" (Butake, 1999, p. 156). Achieving power through corrupt means in this manner is usually for personal interest and those of the neocolonialists who are in the background and hardly for the general good of the people. Little wonder, therefore, that Psaul Roi tells Song shortly after achieving absolute power by initiating himself into the vampire cult, the only sacred unit that could control him, to send emissaries to all friendly kingdoms and exaggerate the figures related to deaths and injuries from the disaster so that much money will come in as help (Butake, 1999, p. 150). The countries that help is requested from are white countries like Albania represented by Albino who uses help to control the ruler and exploit the area. This is highlighted when an infuriated Nformi says:

Shut up your mouth, Mr. Albino. You have no business in our land. Our people have suffered too much in the hands of exploiters like you. (to soldiers) Chain him up. We shall expel him and the other Albanians whom he brought to our land to rape and loot our wealth. People who enter our land without authorization and become masters while sons and daughters of the soil are enslaved, impoverished and exiled. The land was cursed, indeed with the cult of vampires. Never again shall that happen in our land. (to Psaul Roi and Song) Strip now before you are bound in chains. (Butake 1999, p. 173)

This shows that Psaul Roi, like many other African leaders, serves the interest of European neocolonial powers above those of their citizens and

they start by limiting the powers of the traditional spiritual bodies meant to control them. Psaul Roi achieves this by integrating the vampire cult and using it for his advantage thereby transforming it from a blessing to a curse as indicated by Nformi. It is exactly because Psaul Roi is not there for the interest of the people that he does not mind killing all those who raise their voices in protest to some of his actions. Song says “Calm, Your Royal Highness. The army has done a very good job. The marketplace and roads leading therefrom are littered with corpses” (Butake, 1999, p. 161).

In *And Palm-Wine Will Flow*, the Fon also becomes a dictator who does not consult the council of elders before taking any major decision. He singlehandedly decides to award titles to undeserving people like Kibanya, seizes farmlands from Shey Ngong’s wives and gives them to Kibanya’s wives, usurps Shey Ngong’s palm bush, ties up Nsangong a respectable elder to a kola tree proceeding to whip him in public and orders Gwei to kill people in the bush (Butake, 1999, p. 103). In an attempt to intercede and prevent things from getting out of hand, Shey Ngong goes to the sacred grove and while pouring libation wine, he incants:

Oh! Nyombom! Creator and guardian of the land, and you our illustrious forebears, grant me strength and wisdom to weather the surging storm. The Fon has lost vision. The noblemen and elders of this land now listen only to the inner voice of greed, and fear of a man who has surrounded himself with listeners and watchdogs to do his bidding. Nyombom and you, ancestors, grant me strength and wisdom, grant me patience and love. (Butake, 1999, p. 89)

After realizing, like other people, that the Fon is no longer ruling within the confines of the powers traditionally given to him and not acting for the general good of the people, Shey Ngong foresees danger and decides to intervene spiritually with the help of the gods in order to prevent the looming danger resulting from the actions of the misguided Fon.

Another instrument of occupation, control and exploitation used by the whites is religion. This is exactly what father Leo uses by converting the Fon and other men and women into Christianity and then dictates the

tone for their deeds from the background. Father Leo prides himself in the fact that he has converted many people into his ways of spirituality except the likes of Shey Bo-Nyo to which the Fon answers very much to the annoyance of the priest “He will never be converted, Father. He is the priest of the lake god just as you are the priest of the Almighty God in heaven” (Butake, 1999, p. 10) Therefore, one of the ways to resist imperialist domination is by avoiding the white man’s spiritual configuration which is an instrument of exploitation and embrace African spirituality just like Shey and others have done.

When the women have had enough after complaining to the Fon about cows destroying their crops and seeing no serious action taken, they tie up Dewa and bring him to the palace. The women complain bitterly not just about the destruction of their crops by Dewa’s cows to which the Fon has turned a deaf ear but also about his lack of desire to perform the much-needed sacrifices to the lake god for them to have good harvest and prosperity. To this the Fon replies “How many times must I tell you that this is a Christian kingdom? How often must I drive into your heads that the heathen era of idol worship is history” (Butake, 1999, p.13)? This line of argument held by the Fon presents a daunting precedent and convinces the villagers that they need to go back to the age-old spiritual mechanisms of power control to prevent him from leading the community to an unavoidable doom. The fear is confirmed when Shey Bo-Nyo throws the cowries which is a traditional divination element five times and all the times they indicate that if the Fon refuses to offer the sacrifice to the lake god as his forefathers and fathers before him have been doing, then the village should gear up for a serious calamity. Normally, the body to handle such cases is the kwifon but unfortunately, the Fon and Father Leo have gotten it arrested by the government to which he is a close collaborator and which serves the interest of the neocolonial masters epitomized by Father Leo. To cover the regulation vacuum created by the absence of the kwifon and prevent the impending tribulation caused by

the untamed actions of the Fon, the women take things into their own hands. One of the women, Kimaa, says “So we put our heads together and said, ‘If Dewa says the Fon has ... the Kwifon, the Fibuen which has been asleep all these years must come to our rescue’” (Butake, 1999, p. 15). The Fibuen in question is a powerful sacred group whose members are women.

The women decide to force their male folk to compel the Fon into action not just by sending away the cattle that eat their crops but also by offering the much-awaited sacrifice to the lake god. They decide to starve their husbands of sex and food and take a nocturnal oath to make sure that nobody discloses what they had agreed upon. As Ma Kusham administers the oath to all the women present, she says “These are the things of the land. The things of our gods and ancestors which the white man has fooled us to abandon. Things of the white man have brought suffering to the land” (Butake, 1999, p. 25). The playwright puts these words in Ma Kusham’s mouth to let Africans know that the best path to happiness is if they abandon the destructive ways of the white man and embrace their autochthonous culture, tradition, and religiosity.

Given the stakes, some elders suggest that the kwifon should keep aside their quarrels with the Fon and save the community. One of those is Tanto who says “This is an emergency, and there are still men in the land. Kwifon will forget the crimes of the Fon to save the land. I will get the seven pillars of Kwifon and they will put their heads together. They will meet here since they can no longer gain access to their sanctuary in the palace” (Butake, 1999, p. 22). So, the men plan to meet and decide what to do to prevent the Fon from causing more havoc in the land thereby avoiding the wrath of the gods. This is an indication that Africans should seek the help and guidance of their deities when faced with serious problems that need urgent solutions.

While all these groundworks by men and women's sacred institutions are going on, warnings are sent from the spiritual realm to the Fon and his wife to guard them not just from the danger they face but also from what may befall the entire community. The Fon complains to Father Leo that he sees his late father in his dreams warning him of the dangers that await him due to his actions. He equally tells his wife that he dreamt of being in a dungeon with Father Leo. Angela herself warns the Fon, her husband, to retrace his steps and do what the people want because the recent happenings, the Fon's dreams and visions as well as her intuitions tell her that something terrible is about to happen. Instead of listening to the warnings of the gods that want to prevent a catastrophe from occurring to the Fon and the village, the Fon reprimands the wife for not being Christian enough if she believes in such premonitions. In reply, Angela advises him directly to abandon the ways of the white man and follow the spiritual biddings of his people as she says "I beg, lef me da white man palaver. You ought to listen to your people sometimes" (Butake, 1999, p. 45). Thus, the spiritual powers in place pass through dreams and Angela warns the Fon to act accordingly and prevent his misfortune and that of the whole village.

Here again, African leadership and administration at all levels should be given an African indigenous supernatural touch. In this case, those with leadership positions capable of making decisions that can affect the lives of many people and communities should be associated with spiritual bodies that can see through their actions, divine the happenings of the future, and take the necessary steps to prevent foreseen danger from unfolding. Equally, members of such sacred institutions should offer incantations, sacrifices, or libation to the ancestors and deities before and after meetings and other serious events instead of uttering the imported prayers that have seemingly not saved Africa from neocolonialism, dictatorship, corruption, murder, and the disrespect of African culture. These factors have put many African countries and

communities on their knees while other parts of the world like Europe, Asia and North America that stick to their cultures and spiritualities in line with their ancestral and societal realities are progressing.

### **III. The Wrath of the Punitive Autochthonous Gods**

African traditional metaphysical elements are very dynamic and systemic. The community is often aware of the norms established by the spirits in conjunction with the living. Consequently, people always have sufficient knowledge of what is permitted, what is compulsory, and what is forbidden. The punitive consequences on individuals and entire communities if the compulsory sacrifices are not performed and/or the forbidden like intentionally killing a kinsman are always known by the people. When any of these occur, the sanction can be immediate or delayed; and may or may not be preceded by a (series of) warning depending on the magnitude of the offence and the provisions of the divine constituent(s) involved. In Butake's drama where offenses linked to neocolonialism are concerned, there are instances in which punishment, whether individual or collective, is preceded by warning and preventive measures but there are others in which such warning does not take place. In *Lake God*, the actions of the Fon attract the wrath of the gods as he is guilty of deserting his obligations and practising what is forbidden. The Fon declines to marry a wife that tradition approves and also refuses to offer sacrifices to the lake god as tradition demands. To make things worse, he desecrates the crown and leadership by allowing the colonial representative Father Leo to lure him into disrespecting culture and tradition, getting involved in corruption, and exploiting the very people he is supposed to lead. All the villagers know that such acts by the Fon can only bring calamity to him and the entire community. The gods send several warnings to him through the voices of the kwifon, the Fibuen and Angela his wife as already mentioned. They equally send his father to him to warn him as he says "I...don't know...how to put this. But ...I have been having some terrible dreams. I have been seeing my



late father...and he is always blaming me for the trouble in the land” (Butake, 1999, p. 38). Unfortunately, the Fon refuses to listen to all the warnings of the gods. Consequently, the villagers generally and those in contact with the spirits particularly know that it is just a matter of time before the gods strike. When the deities decide to punish, they do not only hit the Fon who is at the centre of the offenses but strike the whole village. Death wipes every living thing from the community leaving just two children and three adults as the surviving Shey Bo-Nyo turned Narrator ponders “Wonder how a scrawny fellow like him was spared when every man, woman and child, fowls, dogs and cats, cattle, goats and pigs, wild animals in the bush including rats and flies, every living creature the Lake God of death swept them all into his kingdom in a swift, silent whirlwind” (Butake, 1999, p. 6).

Here, the gods have dealt a serious blow in the guise of vengeance to the entire community. This is exactly what happens when a people either due to their collective actions or, as is the case here, the action of their leaders face, in the words of Shey Bo-Nyo, “The anger of an already vengeful god” (Butake, 1999, p.7). This kind of collective punishment is not meted out to the people in *Dance of the Vampires*. In this play, the sanction for the dictatorship, disrespect of traditional norms, and killing of people committed by the ruler, Psaul Roi, falls on him alone as he is abandoned by his people and later dethroned and humiliated. Here again, the retribution of the gods comes after warning. When Psaul Roi decides to get initiated into the vampire cult that has the power to control him, become an absolute dictator, and cooperate with the colonial powers to exploit his people, he is warned by Town Crier who is one of the members of the cult and a custodian of tradition at his right. Town Crier warns “Your majesty, are you ready...are you prepared for the consequences...of your initiation. No monarch in this land [...] has ever been initiated” (Butake, 1999, p. 151). Psaul Roi, like the Fon in *Lake God*, ignores the warning of the gods and his ultimate doom is just a matter of time. This

finally happens when he is overthrown by the military led by Nformi, arrested, tied up, and caged like an animal by the very people he is ruling. In African traditional setups where leadership is linked to divinity and rulers are considered god-sent, no worse fate can befall a ruler than to see him dethroned by his people and treated like a petit thief. This is the punishment of the gods to Psaul Roi after their warning that he decided not to heed.

In *And Palm Wine Will Flow*, the tyranny of the Fon is witnessed in his seizure of people's farmlands and palm bushes to give to those he likes, the giving of titles to undeserving men without the consent of the council of elders, the public whipping of elders and the murder of his detractors typical of neocolonial African leaders cannot go indefinitely without attracting the anger of the gods. This is the opinion of many people including Shey Ngong who is one of the greatest victims of the Fon's tyranny as he states "The gods and the ancestors will fight their battle with the Fon. I am only their servant" (Butake, 1999, p.93). When the gods decide to fight their fight, they first send a series of warnings through Earth-Goddess, one of which states "The sun shines on the hills, the sun shines in the valleys, the sun shines in the depths of the streams, the sun shines" (Butake, 1999, p. 94). On hearing this, Nsangong immediately exclaims "A drought! A drought! We are undone" (Butake, 1999, p. 94). This is a warning from the gods that the sentence from the actions of the Fon can hit the entire community. However, Kwengong the Earth-Goddess, and Tapper the Kibaranko make sure, each in his or her capacity as custodians of tradition and spirituality, that only the Fon is punished by the gods. While the Kibaranko, under the guidance of the spirits, searches the palace for the Fon and palm wine, Kwengong gets elderly women to carry out traditional rites and urinate to force the Fon to drink as a sanction which he refuses and still dies. The Fon's death is retribution from the gods as Shey Ngong declares "The land has pronounced judgment! The gods be praised" (Butake, 1999, p. 100) When

the Fon is punished to die such a shameful death, the women led by kwengong decide and others agree that there will be no Fons anymore and people will decide who their leader should be and take decisions about major things in the market square (Butake, 1999, p. 111).

As seen here, therefore, the African spiritual setup has provisions for the punishment of recalcitrant individuals individually as is the case with the Fon in *And Palm Wine Will Flow*. The sanction can vary from destitution as seen in *Dance of the Vampires* to death as witnessed in *And Palm Wine Will Flow* with much between those ends. It can equally happen that the gods decide to punish the entire community for the wrongs of the leaders as seen when almost the entire village is wiped out in *Lake God*. Again, if African traditional religion is associated with African leadership with both the leaders and the people knowing their rights, duties, obligations, and limitations and that there is both individual and collective inevitable punishment when a person or people go out of the norms, the degree of transgression will reduce. This is surely what Africa needs to cut links with colonial powers and the dictatorship, bad governance, exploitation, corruption, annihilation of culture, and manslaughter that go with it.

### **Conclusion**

This work uses the Cultural Resistance framework by David Jeffress to reveal that Bole Butake through *Lake God* and *Dance of the Vampires* projects African traditional spirituality as an adequate weapon to fight neocolonial bad governance and its related ills such as exploitation, corruption, dictatorship, ethnocide, murder, and economic stagnation. Firstly, indigenous pietism plays a regulatory role in the lives of characters and entire communities in Butake's drama as they control and limit the powers and/or actions of the people, particularly the leaders. The absence of such metaphysical bodies of checks and balances leads to poor leadership and the ultimate suffering of the people as seen in *Lake God* and *Dance of the Vampires* irrespective of the presence of Christianity and government structures. Secondly, deities are used in

Butake's plays to prevent the rulers from continuing with perceived neocolonial tendencies and thus prevent them from persisting in implanting hardship on their people. Lastly, the African supernatural setup has provisions for the punishment of recalcitrant personalities individually as is the case with the Fon's death in *And Palm Wine Will Flow* or shameful destitution in *Dance of the Vampires*. The gods can also decide to punish the entire community for the wrongs of the leaders as seen when almost the entire village is wiped out in *Lake God*. Therefore, practically, since many Africans dread the African spiritual powers as seen in Butake's dramaturgy, instead of using the Bible or the Quran to swear in leaders and administer oaths as is the case in many parts of the continent, African native supernatural entities and chief priests should be used and such leaders will work by the principles of such oaths. Therefore, African autochthonous religions need to be valorized and preserved.

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