

## CULTURAL BELIEFS AND THE CRUMBLING OF AFRICANS' TRADITION: A MYTHICAL APPROACH IN EFUA SUTHERLAND'S *EDUFA*

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**Abstract :** This article discusses the cultural beliefs and Africans' misfortune and confusion. Through a mythical analysis and semiotics approach, this study explores cultural and traditional practices and how they impact and influence African society. So, this paper studies Africans' conceptions on divinities and superstition. Through the use of, semiotics and mythical approach, this study establishes that African society believes in superstition which can lead to misfortune. Thus, this is an awareness raising so that human being can reconsider the use and the existence of spiritual divinities. As some cultural practices may give rise to the decay of morality and even individuals' adversity.

## CROYANCES CULTURELLES ET EFFRITEMENT DE LA TRADITION AFRICAINE : UNE APPROCHE MYTHIQUE DANS L'EDUFA D'EFUA SUTHERLAND

**Résumé :** Cet article traite des croyances culturelles et de la dégradation de la tradition africaine. À travers une analyse mythique et sémiotique, cette étude explore les pratiques culturelles et traditionnelles leur impact et influence sur la société africaine. Ainsi, cet article étudie les conceptions africaines sur les divinités et la superstition. A travers l'utilisation de la sémiotique et de l'approche mythique, cette étude établit que la société africaine croit en la superstition qui peut conduire au malheur.

Il s'agit donc, d'une prise de conscience pour que l'être humain puisse reconsidérer l'usage et l'existence des divinités spirituelles. Comme certaines pratiques traditionnelles peuvent entraîner la dépravation des mœurs et même l'adversité des individus.

### Introduction

Creative writings have explored oral tradition as a form of art to express messages. One aspect of African realities can be included in this study-what may be called-tradition and beliefs. Thus, African beliefs are "strong feelings that something exists or is true" or "something that you believe, especially as part of your religion" A.S. Hornby (2015, p.126). Henceforth, Africans believe in the existence of a mythical, invisible, hidden, spiritual power in the universe. An impulsive glance at the social

custom and rites in Africa in general and in Ghana in particular reveals that many critics have dealt with the issue showing that Africans believe in supernatural spirits, divinities and superstition. Martin Okyere Owusu's *Analysis and Interpretation of Ola Rotimi's Gods are Not to Blame*" deals with how Odewale as a child is cursed by the gods that he will kill his father and marry his mother" O. Martin (2002, p.1). This is the impact of the beliefs in superstition, as our belief can influence or hurt us in the process of our decision making.

Moreover, the influence of divinities is explored. To meet the basic need, man goes, through various means such as divinatory consultations, consultations with seers and marabouts, geomancy, astrology and other similar sciences (Balassa: 2021, cover page)<sup>1</sup>. In fact, in the quest of truth and reflection on divination, human being undergoes many misfortunes. This case is examined here in order to show the attachment to his tradition of divinatory consultations as this phenomenon is recurrent in our society. Some critics consider that the notion of myth is multidimensional.

Dr Felix-Nestor Ahoyo in *Philosophic Explorations* explores the development of positive thought in ancient Greece from myths to philosophy. In this context, it is stated that "The cosmologies of the philosophers take up again and extend the cosmogonic myth" (F. N. Ahoyo, 2012, p. 2). This is a supply of answer to the question of the figures of deities of Greek mythology.

To elaborate on the origin of myths, H. Davies (1985, p.57) puts that anthropological tradition-notably, exogamy, rites of possession establish a context favourable to structuralist anthropology which teaches us the potent origin of myths. Moreover, archaic customs, myths and superstitions that run people's lives project a decayed cultural environment. Then, it is revealed that horrors at the myths hold Africans prisoners to traditions and customs that cripple self-fulfilment. (A. Amouzou, 2011, p.167). Subsequently, myths work as a narrative significance to convey the message on cultural concerns.

It is also the case of Akan people whose tragedy in Sutherland's drama is a belief in diviners, spirits and witchcraft. Efua Sutherland's *Edufa* is based on a very popular African mythical belief that a man can live longer by substituting his death with another person's life. It also shows that Africans have many cultural practices. Then, these practices may influence negatively the society and bring about some barriers which are not conducive to one's fulfilment.

This work purports to show that Sutherland used some African realities, values and beliefs in the existence of mystical and hidden power, to dramatize the story of a man facing oracles' predictions of his death. It also underpins the didactic crafting, aiming at teaching lessons in both traditional morality as well as the skills to cope with a changing environment. Exploring literature and culture connection, this work is a view of cultural practices and beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup> My own translation

« pour répondre au besoin fondamental, l'homme passe par divers moyens tels que les consultations divinatoires, les consultations des voyants et marabouts, la géomancie, l'astrologie et autres sciences similaires ».

Furthermore, this work investigates the relationship between myth around the spiritual world and living one. It puts through a mythological approach, and semiotics that African beliefs and myths can cause a chaos and confusion. Subsequently, tradition can be maintained without causing distress to living creatures.

A myth-critical approach generally uncovers or identifies manifestations of mythology in a literary work whether as the creation of an original myth, as the appropriation of a traditional mythological figure, story, or place, or in the form of allusions- and uses these mythological elements to enlighten the work.

This criticism shows that imagination uses myths, symbols to different cultures and epochs. For instance, a central concept in mythological criticism is an archetype that analyses symbols and characters to find a deeper meaning. Elaborating on the understanding of myth, A. Amouzou (2011, p.176) quoted Smith Rawland:

To understand myth, one must dispose himself to listen to it and live it. One must re-create his own mind the totality of the system, all the memories and mental structures conditioning the experiences underlying the myth, and open oneself up to the symbolic structures, images and designs as they manifest themselves within the vast order. A myth can only be understood mythically.

Smith's argument is significant as myth involves supernatural beings or events. It is my thought that myth criticism seeks to uncover meaning within texts. Myth theory lays bare aspects of mythology signs in literature. So, a myth critic will posit that myths are part of our collective cultural consciousness and similar themes will appear in all stories. The relevance of Greek and Roman mythology is carried to an extreme in the work of Friedrich Max Müller. In this regard, it is expressed in such works as *Comparative Mythology* (1856), and the mythology of the original Indo-European peoples that consists of allegorical stories about the workings of nature, in particular such features as the sky, the sun, and the dawn. Stitt Thompson, quoted by I. Okpewho (1980, p.6) posits that

[...] the origin of all folk tales and myths must remain a mystery, just as the origin of language in a mystery. There is of course nothing mystical about it: it is merely impossible to recapture the needed facts. And the absence of the facts, I would wish to leave the ultimate origin of any tale or myth with a large question mark rather than with a dubious answer.

The philosopher E. Cassirer (1925, cover page), whose monumental *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is given over in its second volume to the proposition that

myth is a form of thought. His theory of myth is an attempt to assess the philosophical significance of the data that anthropology has uncovered about man and the origin of culture and to regard a theory of primitive modes of thought as an essential part of a general theory of knowledge.

By this, Cassirer means to insist that myth is a fundamental symbolic form that, like language, is a means of responding to, and hence creating, our world. So, the mythic symbol has its own sphere of meaning different from that created by other sciences.

In regard to semiotics criticism, it follows the belief that there is the relationship between literary texts. In this case, the close relationship of language, text, context and meaning is raised. To put it clearly, M.A.K Halliday and R. Hasan (1991, p. vii) consider that

The notion of register proposes a very intimate relationship of text and context: indeed, so intimate is that relationship, it is asserted, that the one can only be interpreted by reference to the other. Meaning is realised in language (in the form of text), which is thus shaped or patterned in response to the context of situation in which it is used. To study language then is to concentrate upon exploring how it is systematically patterned towards important social ends [...] Such a linguistic theory is also a social theory, for it proposes firstly, that it is in the nature of human behaviour to build reality and/or experience through complex semiotic processes, and secondly, that the principal semiotic system available to humans is their language.

Thereupon, a semiotics reading of the play *Edufa* should aim at showing the narrative as a commentary on Sutherland's intentions. At the same time as the play is concerned with many things such as traditions and customs, and the aspect of a mythical thought, to study language is to explore the relationship of grammar and rhetoric. Then, revealing the meaning and the context, our understanding depends upon a broad text structure. In this respect, R. Webster (1990, p.33) referring to Ferdinand de Saussure opines that

Saussure suggested that language is an arbitrary and conventional system. By arbitrary, he meant that there is no inherently natural reason why the word 'dog' should mean what it does. By conventional, Saussure meant that language is a sign system or code whose conventions are agreed by a particular society so that communication can take place. According to Saussure, the production of meaning is the result of a process of combination and selection within a language system.

Within that frame, this work falls into two parts: Cultural beliefs and practices is the first part. The second part will be devoted to an analysis based on myth opening on to confusion.

### **1. Cultural Beliefs and Traditional Practices in *Edufa***

In *Edufa* by Sutherland, there are many issues that show Africans traditional beliefs and their culture. In this drama belief in diviners, spirits and witchcraft is an evidence. The use of traditional and cultural practices songs ceremonies, folktale and legend. Given that the source of this play originates from tales and legends, P.J Conradie (1997, p 76) posits that "A young man or woman must die in the prime of his or her life. He asks Death to spare him, and Death agrees to do it if he can find somebody who is willing, until a mother, sister or loved one agrees [ ...] if it is a maiden who is prepared to sacrifice herself for her lover."

As *Edufa*, a male character consults a soothsayer he learns his imminent death. In his search of well-being, *Edufa* comes across a test whereby he should be able to make

someone accept his plight. Edufa's misbehaviour that negatively impacts the life of his wife can be seen through the dialogue between the son and the father:

Kankam: [*With terrible self-control*] The life of your wife Ampoma, from you.

Edufa: [*Very nervous*] And you mean by that?

[*Kankam only stares at him*]

What makes me keeper of her life?

Kankam: Marriage, and her innocent love [*a chilly pause*] Oh, I know it all.

Edufa. You cannot hide behind impudence and lies; not with me. Diviners are there for all of us to consult [*Edufa winces*] And deeds done in secret can, by the same process, be brought to light. (Sutherland, 1967, p. 15)

This passage is pregnant of meanings as it shows the horror of traditional beliefs and the power of soothsayers. The use of 'diviners' in this context has a negative connotation. As it impacts negatively the health of Sutherland's character Ampoma in the sake of love. Based on this, Ampoma's lover used it to escape his misfortune. This is a proof that ancestors can influence individuals' life. Commenting on this odd event, the supernatural power, and its influence on human being A. P. Balassa (2021, p.12-13). asserts that

La parole du détenteur de ce pouvoir ou de cette connaissance occulte, chargée de puissance, requiert l'adhésion inconditionnelle de tous les membres du corps social [...] Elle sécurise l'homme en libérant sa conscience de ce qui l'inquiète : le doute, l'incertitude, la peur, la maladie, la mort, etc. [...] Dans la plupart des cultures africaines, le devin est considéré comme une personne dépositaire d'un pouvoir [...] Le devin est toujours consulté et a le dernier mot. Sa parole n'est jamais remise en cause.

The excerpt illustrates the impact of divinatory consultation on the followers of traditional African religion and the power wielded by the supernatural. The diviner is considered to be a person who has power in most African culture. As a result, the seer is consulted and has the last word. Even, his word is never questioned. Here, the character in worries is Edufa. The latter's fear for death, the consultation of the soothsayer and illness of Ampoma are proofs that the diviner's word is never cross-examined. Then, he has the last word. That is the way to show the African traditional context whereby the role played by the soothsayer or a 'dibia' in Igbo context is undeniable. So, this play can be perceived as a means of valuing the role of divinities as S. Salami- Boukari (2012, p.57) puts that

as such the role played by medicine men or *dibia* in Igbo traditional societies [which] is very significant in the sense that they are the ones who foretell the future, explain the significance of some events and even prevent some mishaps by warning the person concerned.

Whence, Sutherland calls the reader for responsibility in the couple, families, even society. In this context, she calls to mind the events that brought disaster in Edufa's for a change of behaviour. Moreover, the reader is informed that some facts or events can frighten an individual. For instance, the owl held by Sam, the idiot servant. That bird could be viewed as being evil. In the African context, most people believe

that hearing an owl foretells death or disaster. This symbolic meaning of owls in prophecies and omens is made known in Sutherland's *Edufa*. The following dialogue is a case in point:

Sam: Are you pleased to see me? [*Lifting up the cage*] Look, he is my bird.  
Seguwa: [*Horrified*] Don't bring it near me. It is an owl [...] Take it outside  
Edufa: What is it, Sam?  
Seguwa: An owl  
Edufa: [*Terrified*] Take it out (Sutherland, 1967, pp. 33-34)

In this particular context, the presence of an owl heralds dread. Here again Africans beliefs in predicting future events becomes a principle that governs traditional communities. The following quotation by S. Salami- Boukari (2012, p.56) is significant enough:

The existence of gifted who are able to predict the future and/or prevent a mishap is found in traditional African societies. Unlike in the modern society whereby the medical profession has different specialized areas and physicians are there to help patients with a particular health problem, in Igbo society the 'dibia' uses a holistic and wholesome approach to healing. He is there to help people live in harmony with their cosmic environment. He is a 'jack of all trades'. His primary role is to diagnose the causes of misbehaviour, or anything people feel to be wrong.

What comes out from this quote is that traditions and customs side with African society in which seers are endowed with supernatural forces. It is my contention that, the playwright, by endowing diviners with some force beyond scientific understanding, she empowers culture and tradition.

Likewise, after becoming aware of the load, Edufa cannot carry, the hidden secret is revealed by Sam who considers that the house is an awful place, and then one should inquire into that house so that facts and information can be ascertained. Moreover, towards the end, the playwright unveils the suspicion through the denouement as the secret is released. We are informed that something is buried in Edufa's. The following dialogue shows this:

Seguwa: What is there left of sacredness?  
Chorus: By the souls of our fathers, speak.  
Seguwa: It is that evil charm on which the oath was sworn, we cannot ever forget it. We cannot reason without it now.  
Senchi: What? Charms in Edufa's house?  
Chorus: What charm?  
Senchi: Edufa! It's Senchi  
Seguwa: And yet he buried it. But the deed was done. He buried it, but it was her he buried.  
Chorus: Buried?  
Seguwa: Oh, speak, tongue! Women, you did your ceremony here, but you left the evil one himself behind you, Edufa. He is on there with his victim. This is the day when Edufa should have died. Another has died for him. His wife Ampoma. She loved him and she has died to spare his life. (Sutherland, 1967, p. 57)

Sutherland's craft and her hidden secret release is a fact that nothing can be done without being physically exposed to view. Through this method which uncovers the secret out of sight in Edufa's house, it is revealed that a charm was buried and it should be burnt. This dialogue between Sam and Edufa is illustrated in this way:

Sam: [...] What does such a nice man live in an awful house like that for?

That's the awful part.

Edufa: [*Very anxiously*] Never mind. What did he say?

Sam: Ah! [*Secretively*] Let me fetch my box of goods.

[*He produces an old leather pouch which is spectacularly designed and hung with small talismans*]

Edufa: [*Trembling*] Give it to me

Sam: Now listen. He says burn it

[*Edufa snatches the pouch from him*]

Edufa: [*To Seguwu*] Get fire-in the back courtyard. Quickly

[...]

Sam: [*With emphasis*] The man says, burn it with your own hands, before you bathe in the herbs for the last time.

Edufa: [*Eyes shut*] We are saved...

[...]

Edufa: [*Gripping the pouch in his fists with violence*] This is the final act. I will turn chance to certainty. I will burn this horror charm, and bury its ashes in the ground; the one act was small hazard if left undone (Sutherland, 1967, pp. 34-35-36)

This dialogue shows the process of dismantling the attitude of Edufa assembled from scratch. It is admitted that a peaceful home has become an awful house due to the "talismans" that brought about anxious mood. It is my firm conviction that this state of mind cannot allow peace in any family. For this reason, the playwright deals with an awareness raising so that people who may fall in this trap may change their minds or avoid this misbehaviour because supernatural power influences human being in various ways.

Conducting critical criticism on the power of gods, E. Siro (2011, p.193) quoted Killam by stating that:

A powerful female principle pervades the whole society of Umuofia and sits in judgement of events in the community [...] Chiolo, priestess and oracles to Ani borrows Ezimna, Okonkwo's daughter [...] She approaches despair as she follows the priestess through the nine village where Ani's power of life and death is successfully proclaimed.

Here again, we are shown the power of gods and how punishment or misfortune befall people once some regulations or principles are not followed. In line with the idea that gods and superstitious faith can determine your destiny, S. Salami-Boukari (2012, p. 94) pinpoints that "the functions of minor gods determine the behaviour and conditions upon which human beings' relate with them"

It is my thought that, the diviner's role in this context is not relevant because everyone would die one day; even including the main character, Edufa. But being proud of his wealth, he is in pursuit of "eternal life". This state of affairs leads him to

be haunted to keep his position of fame. This is what the playwright suggests when he has the former put "Had my position not been well evaluation in this town you might have turned tongues against me as the man who drove his own father out" (Sutherland, 1967, p.13-14). The latter is impressed by his position, and deems that "he's worth [*and no one can be counted his*] value in the homes that eat [...his] enterprises feed them." (Sutherland, 1967, p.38)

So, he was eager to change his destiny and remains wealthy without any end by influencing his wife lifetime. The choice of the character Ampoma, as being victim of traditional practices, has changed the atmosphere. That peaceful life has become a nightmare. Abena, Edufa's sister 's revelations in the story can show this "My brother Edufa, your orders are done, though I obey without understanding... [*Walking about*] Here in this house, where there was always someone laughing, suddenly no one feels like smiling. I've never known such silence in my brother's house" (Sutherland, 1967, p.3)

It is demonstrated in the play that Edufa, in the quest to escape his death as predicted by the seer, hides the truth from his wife Ampoma and manipulates her into promising her love for him. Under normal circumstances, Edufa is the one who should die but, being malicious, he made his wife Ampoma be victim. The exchange between Edufa and the matronly of the household who was taking care of the household reveals that:

Seguwa: You can trust my secrecy; that I have sworn; though what I have sworn to keep secret, now frets against the closed walls of my skull. I haven't sworn to have faith against all reason. No, not in the face of your wife's condition in that bedroom there. Let's call for help.

Edufa: [*With indications of despair*] From whom? We are doing everything we can. Also, it is Ampoma's wish that no one should be allowed to see her.

[...] It is most unnatural [...] Ah poor mother no one knows the secret only Seguwa knows (Sutherland, 1967, p.7).

The foregoing dialogue testifies that this matter is a secret. It also indicates that Edufa hides something. His wife was unaware and got involved without thinking of consequences. He does not tell her the consequences of her pledge. Hence, making her a substitute for his death. When Ampoma falls seriously ill, the entire household lie to the Chorus that she is well and is only sleeping in her room. Edufa, again refuses to admit the truth to his father Kankam when the last-mentioned character accuses him of being the cause of Ampoma's illness. By the same token, Edufa quarrelled with his father Kankam and forced him out. This break of tradition and customs is seen through the ambiguous attitude of Edufa, "...the man who drove his father out of his home" (Sutherland, 1967, p.14) and disobeyed his father. This is what is captured through the heated dialogue below:

Edufa: Do you want me to take you seriously? You cannot believe all this, you who educated me to lift me another plane of living.

Kankam: That is all right, my man. Most of us consult diviners for our protection. All men need to feel secure in their inmost hearts.



[...] Kankam: [...] Your diviner saw death handing over your life-normal mortal condition, I could think. But what happened, coward, what happened, when he said you could avert the danger by sacrifice of another life?

Edufa: He lies

[...]

Edufa: Father, are you mad?

Kankam: [*Shocked*] Nyame above! To say Father and call me mad! My ntoro within you shivers with the shock of it!

Edufa: [*Aware that he has violated taboo*] You provoked me. (Sutherland, 1967, pp. 15-16-17)

Once again, there are reasons to believe that Edufa hurts his wife by using credulous belief but refuses to acknowledge and take responsibility. This denial is seen through his posture when his father discovers the truth. Though his father comes upon the hidden reality, Edufa does not acknowledge it. Then, one can assert that this character lacks integrity and loyalty to his moral beliefs. In describing this character with such an attitude, we can allude the question of ethical code. With regards to events in the play, it can be suggested that this character is not pure and wholesome. He is morally headstrong character. In addition, he is shameless and careless. This dishonest mantle is not required in the society. Society needs a good character who is compared to someone who takes the law more seriously. In view of this fact, K. Gyekye (2013, p. 115) opines:

A person of integrity is one who has undivided loyalty to his moral beliefs, values, and principles and would strictly adhere to them or abide by them under all circumstances, without making exceptions for himself. A person of integrity would hardly succumb to the temptation to do that which he knows to be wrong, one who carries out his moral beliefs with commitment, and would not experience moral failure, one would stand by and act on his or her moral convictions and principles.

This foregoing explicitly addresses Edufa who is crooked double-dealing. To my mind, a good character makes personal integrity possible as “a character is a crucial element in morality, [...] central to moral practice, the focal point of ethical life.” (K. Gyekye (2013, p.116). In this incident, Edufa behaves without taking into consideration the moral rules of the society. Here, he faces many situations of moral conflicts and dilemmas. Under normal circumstances, one should not build his future on another’s plight. Unfortunately, Sutherland’s crafting reveals a character full of embezzlement.

Africans hold rites and customs as an important integral part of their being. This is the reason why some traditional practices are described by Sutherland to show the sense of community in the dramatic sphere. In the African context, solidarity matters. In *Edufa*, this question of communal way is portrayed in manifolds. Indeed, traditional practices such as funeral songs, traditional medicine, marriage, libation are handled. By crafting *Edufa* with despair, lamentations and regret as indicated in the dramatic events “night... so deceiving” (Sutherland, 1967, p.3), the playwright discloses the

mood that cannot help every character feel at ease. Furthermore, songs of sorrow are chanted along these lines:

"O, child of Ama

[...]

How my mother pondering

Why wand'ring in the night" (Sutherland, 1967, p.4)

Getting illumination from this standpoint, this is a song of sorrow, song in which there are lamentation because of a mother's health "mother pondering", she is wandering. It means that mother wonders and thinking deeply about her situation. At night, one should sleep and have a rest but, in this situation, Ampoma moves without purpose, without specified destination. This, in search of livelihood. This sad and suffering situation can be seen as follow "loke dying" or being in "wakefulness" (Sutherland, 1967, p.4) These songs that have a meaning in this situation of sorrow, are dirges sung in funerals. Thus, the choice of those specific songs and circumstances highlight African realities. African communities used to celebrate social events as marriage, naming ceremonies and funerals. These celebrations may occur through together gathering and songs. In *Edufa* songs are chanted during the illness of Ampoma. In fact, a chorus of women from the town were organized throughout the play and sing in chorus as follows:

Chorus: [*chanting to the rhythm of wooden clappers*]

Our mother's dead

Ei Ei-Ei

We the orphans cry,

Our mother's dead,

O! O -O!

We the orphans cry. (Sutherland, 1967, p. 6)

The exposure of the strategy used in such a situation whereby, Sutherland uses the words 'dead', 'orphans', 'cry' is a deduction that there was bad news that made people cry, that changes the status of children who became orphans. As a matter of fact, this can be a funeral tune. The question of Edufa when he heard the song is exemplifying: "why are they doing a funeral chant" (Sutherland, 1967, p.6).

In the light of what precedes, I think that issues of communal life are raised, life that involves many people. In this state, the problem of one is that of the other. Moreover, in the play, Edufa is known for his hospitality: "the house of the open gate" (Sutherland 1967, p.22) This is one of the chorus words when he recalls. The chorus three affirms that "In the house of He-Whose-Hands-Are Ever-Open" (Sutherland, 1967, p.22). Then, there is a proof of hospitality. This is also shown throughout the play when the chorus of women from the town comes to support Edufa's family morally. Besides, a matronly member of the household helps to cure Ampoma by bathing her in herbs.

Another issue raised is marriage. Marriage is a union of two people of different genders -male and female- as partners in a personal relationship. As she talks of this,

Sutherland describes the marital life of Ampoma and her husband when the former was suffering. It can be observed that Edufa offered flowers to Ampoma. Besides, the latter affirms: “My husband, you have honoured me by your words and by your precious gift of flowers” (Sutherland, 1967, p 52); besides, he organised a party in order to drink, to [his wife’s] health (Sutherland, p.50). Here, the playwright explores an irony. In this play, Edufa’s wife asked her husband not to marry again. This would be explained as Ampoma condemns and criticizes her husband asking him to promise that he will never place their children in another woman’s hand after her death. This marriage as experienced by Ampoma is let out in what comes next:

Edufa: [...] Think of me. Is not your bed that sunny place in which we plant out children? There has never been anything but warmth and happiness there, and never will be, as long as I live and love you so.

Ampoma: Don’t speak of it. I have strayed into the cold. Yet, how good that I should not be one to live where you are not. I could not live without you, my husband.

Edufa: Ah loving wife

Ampoma: Yes, that is the truth. I have loved you.

Edufa: You have. And I have still to fill days with joy.

*[he puts his arm round her protectively]* (Sutherland, 1967, p. 10)

As it is portrayed, a loving couple is the one in which partners exchange permanently. And an analysis of Ampoma’s decision in the dialogue above shows that she loved her husband and dies for him. But the attitude of Edufa can be qualified as a marriage of convenience. Because, it seems that he has other reasons than that of love and commitment. Instead, it can be qualified as being a union for personal gain or strategic purpose. A good couple should share joys and sorrows. For this reason, S., Salami-Boukari, (2012, p. 65) states that “the marriage ceremony emphasizes the importance [...] the new statuses and the behavioural expectations associated with them, both for individuals and the community”. Thus, being beloved, Edufa should not victimize his wife. Unfortunately, that is what we experienced.

What’s more, traditional medicine, many customary actions are performed in order to improve the health of Ampoma. Some herbs are used to bath the patient with; incense is even burnt. In this sense, dramatic scene is described through a dialogue between Seguwa and Edufa:

Edufa: [...]

Keep the incense burning while Ampoma and I bathe in the herbs.

Seguwa: It seems to me that the time has come now to seek some help. All this bathing herbs and incense burning. I don’t see it bringing much relief to your wife Ampoma in there. (Sutherland, 1967, p. 7)

Efforts deployed to cure Ampoma prove vain and useless since the sickness has mystical roots. Edufa is believed to have caused the illness with his magical powers. Such way of bewitching innocent people epitomizes the limits of traditional medicine and also the negative nature of supernatural power. Corroborating this point, A.P. Balassa (2021, p. 76) offers that

une analyse approfondie du phénomène des consultations divinatoires nous laisse découvrir que c'est un phénomène malsain, un art habile qui séduit et exploite le consultant. Cette pratique a de graves conséquences dans la société car elle amène les soupçons, les accusations mutuelles, la peur, la méfiance, les conflits et les divisions.<sup>2</sup>

What can be inferred from this survey is that this seductive phenomenon is unhealthy and exploitative. It even has a negative impact on society through fear, suspicion, conflict and division.

In the play, we are informed that, libation and incantations appear when Kankam arrived at Edufa's. The way he is welcomed and all processes before greetings. In the Akan way of life, strangers are welcomed with water, and libation follows as the final procedure. To lay bare these practices the following dialogue is illustrative:

Kankam: [*Walking deliberately to the seat near the kitchen*] Yes [...] Had I entered the house of a total stranger, he would have given me water to drink, seeing I'm a traveller.

[*Edufa is embarrassed, but at that moment Seguwa is already bringing water from the kitchen.*]

I happen to be your father, and you a man in whose house water is the least of the things that overflow

[*Seguwa gives the water to kankam, who pours little on the floor stylistically for libation, drinks it and thanks her. She returns to the kitchen*] (Sutherland, 1967, p. 4)

A scrutiny of the process and stylistic way of pouring water demonstrates the aesthetical way whereby customs are implemented. This is a way of promoting African traditions.

In so doing, Sutherland portrays some aspects of the cultural practices and concepts of the Akans and the significance of these references. The conclusion gives a reflection upon this playwright having insights into cultural practices and beliefs and how they should be upheld. It also shows that language and style enhance the presentation of the themes in this works. It is worth mentioning that the playwright shows the influence of African tradition. Insofar, he satirizes these events as a means to expound African traditions' misdeed as far as seers, the imminence of god's prescription and supernatural powers are concerned. This will enlighten them in the process of pursuing fame. By raising reader's awareness, it will help them escape from tradition misdeed which can bring about Africans' supernatural power crumbling. This leads us to the current focus, the crumbling of Africans' tradition which brings about confusion.

## 2. African Myths and Confusion in *Edufa*

This section deals with the influence of myth on Africans' development. Traditional story is usually apparent historical events that serve to unfold part of the

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<sup>2</sup> A thorough analysis of the phenomenon of divinatory consultations lets us discover that it is an unhealthy phenomenon, a skilful art which seduces and exploits the consultant. This practice has serious consequences in society because it brings suspicion, mutual accusations, fear, mistrust, conflicts and divisions.

world view of a people. They also explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon creation. I. Okpewho (1980, p. 5) posits that “no other concept in the entire field of the humanities has attracted as much debate as ‘myth’ [...] The ancient mythus, [...] combines to some extent the qualities of fairy tale and legend”. Myth is a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone. A.S. Horby (2015, p.1023) considers that a “myth is a story from ancient times especially one that was told to explain natural events or to describe the early history of a people”

*Dictionary.com* defines myth as a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation, especially one that is concerned with deities or demigods and explains some practice, rite, or phenomenon of nature. <https://www.dictionary.com>

This part seeks to relate the mythical conception to the status of a woman in Africa, and the challenges her conflation of traditional African cultural forms create.

In Sutherland’s *Edufa*, a liability to oral tradition in the area of sacrifice is shown, and this is made through oral tradition, folk art forms of song showing the past of Africa. Instances such as rituals and purifications are practised to cleanse impurities. In this process, the myth about these customs and traditions have become people’s habit and wrapped people’s daily life. It is important to point out at this juncture that myths that are sacred and sacrosanct are questioned in African society. They are usually referred to as sacred truths, which are often associated with ritual. For B.B.Jabbi (1980, p.132)

myth and ritual complexes within living cultures tend, in their own right, to the intrinsic systems of ideas and general world-views, of modes of perception and sensibility. A more or less cohesive set of propositions about reality and life, about man’s place in the world and in time, may often be deduced from them, though always as an act of interpretation. As Achebe puts it, they are created by man ‘to explain the problems and mysteries of life and death-his attempt to make sense of the bewildering complexity of existence’.

We can infer from the foregoing that this ambiguous phenomenon wrapped many Africa societies. Some dramatic actions are made clear when, the narrative describes the atmosphere during a ceremony by saying: “During this rituals Seguwa stands attentively in the background. Edufa remains just above the courtyard steps, intensely quiet, eyes shut in private prayer. The Chorus finish up on the steps below, facing him” (Sutherland 1967, p.26).

The principles observed by Seguwa and Edufa as conventions in their society create an unbearable social environment full of doubt and deceit. It is observed that people are linked to some superstitious facts that create sufferings and misfortune that bring about dissatisfaction in their daily life. In an analysis of “Operative Myths and the Requirements of Cultural Emancipation in Asare Konadu’s *Ordained by the Oracle*” A. Amouzou (2011, p.170) made the point that “Among a people enslaved by myths and superstitions the claim of the association is considered a sacrilege which requires sacrifices to appease the gods. The confusion generated in this community create social

uneasiness and a threat to self-fulfilment". These embittered revelations show the extent to which the rites alienate, disconnect people even made them undergo various plights.

At this level of the discussion, it can be asserted that the dramatic achievements have been the conscious desire to translate traditional material and there are doubts from certain disbeliefs, or people are ignorant of certain phenomena, myth provides an authoritative answer and then cushions the misunderstanding that may arise in the society. Consequently, the general psyche of a particular group of people is greatly determined by the myths of that particular people.

It is symbolic and expresses the essential facts of the people's philosophy, beliefs, concepts, ideas and culture. Relatedly, it serves as an instrument of identification with the people's past, present and future. It also shows the way the people are related to the divine and the transcendental.

Moreover, Africans' belief in superstition can engender a precipitous decline in fortune, a deterioration even death. Each culture possesses its own particular values, traditions, and ideals. Thus, tradition is a belief or behaviour -folk custom- passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past. As a matter of fact, traditional beliefs in superstition and myth are close and involve living human beings. This force terrifies people and gives rise to ambiguity or death. To explain our point clearly on this unpleasantness it is opined that "the supernatural has stronger hold on the oral tradition than on the literate tradition. Belief in magic, witchcraft and the gods tend to be the inverse proportion to scientific progress and control of the environment" E. Obiechima (1975, p.33).

In the play under study, we experience areas of sacrifice, and this is made to counter the potency of the charm by washing and rites of purification. As the story unfolded, we are told that the play is based on a very popular African mythical belief that a man can live longer by substituting his death with another person's life. In other words, one can die for another person thereby postponing the death of the person he has died in his place. And in this case, the help of diviners to ascertain what the future holds for a person and that of medicine men to prepare the charms, are needed. It is from this belief system that Efua Sutherland has successfully developed a new art form, which is deeply rooted in the tradition of the Akan people of Ghana. She has succeeded in blending the elements of African myth to achieve dramatic success. The use of this technique is meaningful as it raises people awareness on the misdeeds of superstitious beliefs and advocates a sense of responsibility in decision making. Furthermore, the playwright displays untenable sufferings in order to require cultural promotion because not all traditional practices are useless. One can bear in mind that Africa is identified through its culture and Sutherland has really gone a long way to show that myth, folklore and tradition have a strong place in the modern drama.

Therefore, one can infer without mincing words that Sutherland is heavily beholden to and has been greatly influenced by the cultural milieu of her people, thereby enriching their cultural heritage. She has indeed exploited the resources

available in the myth, folklore and tradition of the African society using the Akan socio-cultural environment as backdrop.

### Conclusion

This study has highlighted the cultural beliefs through a mythical evaluation. It has examined cultural and traditional practices and how these ones affect African society. It has also argued focusing on African conceptions on divinities and superstition. Through the use of, semiotics and mythical approach, it has demonstrated that African society has credence in superstition and this led them to misfortune and confusion.

Thus, by creating characters who hold dear their custom and tradition that have impacted their daily life, the playwright has succeeded in raising people awareness on the double-edged role of African tradition. This is to bring about positive change so that one can give a positive connotation of African traditional beliefs. The playwright has displayed the values and the feeling on people's daily basis throughout customs and folktales. Moreover, it has focused on the responsibility of human being beliefs and choice as the myth surrounding some custom can turn an individual away or pull him down. In this perspective, cultural practices should be identified and revisited so that it may help the rebranding of African practices.

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