Emerging Perspectives on Femi Osofisan
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Section 1

CONTEXT AND PERSONALITY
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Tunde Akinyemi and Toyin Falola

With more than fifty plays, four works of fiction, four collections of poetry, and two books for junior readers already published, Femi Osofisan has emerged as one of the most prolific contemporary African writers. He is one of the very few highly productive African authors whose works are innovative and original. His imagination, vision, and craft distinguish him as a creative writer of the very first rank and one of the few literary scholars yet to come out of Africa. The story of his writings is told by literary scholars across the globe, from Africa to Asia, from Canada to the Americas, from Europe to Australia. In his home country of Nigeria he is arguably the most performed playwright, with audiences of all different levels enjoying the tour de force of his dramatic compositions. This book brings together some of the current thoughts and debates on Osofisan’s literary creativity in a single volume to present a holistic insight into the background of the scholar, his writings, and contribution to the growth of African literature.

Femi Osofisan is a man of many parts. He is a playwright, poet, novelist, storyteller, linguist, theater producer, stage director, songwriter, literary scholar, and social critic. One common trend in all of these aspects of Osofisan is his desire to fight for the marginalized masses and to create a better society for all to live in. Osofisan is not alone in this cause; rather, this is also the concern of most of the second generation of Nigerian Anglophone writers such as Bode Sowande, Niyi Osundare, Kole Omotosho, Zulu Sofola, Olu Obafemi, Wale Ogunyemi, Odia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide, and Ahmed Yerima to mention just a few. In an interview with Muyiwa Awodiya, Osofisan summarizes the burning patriotic ideals of the writers of his generation as follows:

to use the weapon we had our pen, our zeal and our eloquence—to awaken in our people the song of liberation. With our writing, we would wash away the stigma of inferiority, rouse our dormant energies, unmask the pests and traitors among us, preach the positive sermons. Our works would be a weapon in the struggle to bring our
country to the foremost ranks of modern nations. Our songs would call for radical political alternatives. (Excursions in Drama, 25)

A careful study of Osofisan’s works reveals a strong persuasion about the potency of literature in addressing contemporary Africa’s multi-layered problems. Consequently, he devotes many of his works to championing the masses’ revolt against oppressive state structures. In several of his works, he charges the poor and the downtrodden to shake off the shackles of docile acceptance of the tyranny of authority, and rebuff the oppressors and all their agents. Osofisan also uses some of his works to expose the failure of the working class and probe the causes of such failure, while in others he denounces the masses’ corrosive agents and stirs the working class out of their customary apathy into combat, provoking them into anger and active resistance. Osofisan sees the masses as the root of society, the earth to be tended and not to be devastated. He believes that any government that maltreats the masses has devastated the earth upon which its existence is hinged and thus must be made to pay dearly for it. The poor forms the basis of the existence of rich rulers, hence the poor masses should be ready to rise up to fight injustice and bad governance whenever it manifests. Femi Osofisan is a creative writer with a unique concern for the plight of the poor and the downtrodden in his society. He believes that the bane of people’s freedom is bad leadership. He also believes that Africa at large has more bad leaders than good ones. An overview of Osofisan’s works show that the masses are indeed more powerful than the rich because they have numerical strength over the rich. What Osofisan seems to be saying is that the poor need to know this; and, they should also be bold to call their leaders to question whenever the need arises.

Therefore, Sola Owonibi in Chapter Seven explores how Femi Osofisan presents politics as a tool of social organization in his dramaturgy. Owonibi shows how Osofisan presents the evils of fraud, thuggery, intimidation, and murder as the hallmark of political realities in Africa. Osofisan sees money as playing a dominant role in African politics, whereby political offices have become “cash-and-carry.” Unless a politician has a successful gladiator backing and bankrolling his or her expenses, he or she is as good as a loser. African politicians loot government treasuries everyday because they know they can buy their way back into office. In *Once upon Four Robbers* for instance, Osofisan asks whether it is right to kill a group of defaulters when those that sit in judgment to determine their fates are worse, stealing millions in their official positions, yet pronouncing death sentences on those that steal peanuts. He sees crime and armed robbery as a product of bad leadership. The robbers are produced by the politicians as they equip them with sophisticated weapons and use them as tools to rig their way into power. These thugs are immediately disowned after election. These armed thugs graduate into armed robbers as soon as they win or lose elections because they would no longer be relevant. In pursuit of their own brand of politics, the robbers
take up arms against the government in *Once upon Four Robbers*. Politicians in *Who Is Afraid of Solarin?* and the robbers in *Once upon Four Robbers* are virtually the same with very little modifications. While the robbers rob with arms and ammunitions, the politicians rob with their pens.

At another level, Osofisan constantly attacks the educated class in many of his writings for its ineffectiveness and failure. According to Henri Oripeloye in his contribution (Chapter eight), Osofisan reminds the elite class of its historical responsibility, that of leading society from misery into prosperity, from darkness of underdevelopment to the dawn of technological modernity. Oripeloye shows how Osofisan attacks the criminal complicity of the educated class in the betrayal of the masses, showing how the elite formed alliance with the military to mortgage the future of ordinary people in Nigeria. Osofisan reveals, in *One Legend, Many Seasons* in particular that, because some elements of the military have learned how to insinuate themselves into the class, and manipulate it with cynical opportunism, the rest of the society has been successfully cowed, as a result of which corruption has grown into the national ethos. Osofisan, therefore, argues in one of his books of essays that if creative work must fulfill its vocation as an agent of progress, the writer must pitch his or her tent with the common people, and against the formidable agents of the ruling class:

> Indeed, the artist who is merely truthful cannot but reflect in his/her work, the appalling situation of social and political injustice; but when that happens, the artist treads on the open sore of the rulers, and the latter’s response is, predictably, one of repression and persecution. It is at such moments that the quest for relevance is met with terrorism; and the agents of the state become, for the writer, potential executioners (Insidious Treasons, 92).

The relevance of a writer is determined by the useful role he or she plays in the portrayal of the social reality of the time. The committed writer is the conscience of society and it falls on him or her to make the audience aware of the social, economic, and political problems and the causes and possible cure of such problems. Osofisan’s commitment to the struggle of the masses is further demonstrated in his works, where he has taken upon himself the primary responsibility of educating and orientating the downtrodden in his society. His works are politically oriented, and they invite comments on the prevalent social issues in society. This, according to Festus Ogu Idoko in Chapter Ten, is one of the reasons why Osofisan’s plays are usually well received among Nigerian university students. Osofisan uses his works as social and ideological weapons, and he demonstrates this by using these works to call for the restructuring of the present system and a re-channeling of the governmental energies from projects and policies which
benefit the ruling class to decisions and policies that will positively affect the
generality of the people.

It is within this context that Adebola Adebambo Ademeso examines national
development and the concept of compassion in one of Osofisan’s plays, *Esu and
the Vagabond Minstrels* in Chapter Four. According to Ademeso, Osofisan does
not see the problem of society from the political point of view alone; rather, he
perceives the moral question as the yardstick for measuring the sincerity and
credibility of individuals’ commitment towards the advancement of their society.
He questions the sincerity of various governments, be it military or civilian, in
delivering the masses from protracted suffering and contends that this posture
does not seek to heighten the skepticism pervading the minds of people but to
make individuals reexamine and redefine their positions and conscience with the
aim of improving the status of humanity.

In the “Song of Khaki and Agbada” in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* for
instance, Osofisan makes his readers view civilian and the military governments
as the offshoots of corruption, with gross embezzlement of public funds and abuse
of power. One is the “imitation” of the other. The play treats the issue of human
compassion as a pointer to the universal problem of oppression motivated by
the “mad quest for class and power” through the acquisition of wealth. Osofisan
wants us to see man as the sole determining factor in the kind of life in which he
finds himself. He is the foundation and the peak of his society. The immediate
society of Osofisan provides a variety of great influences on his visionary posture.
He sees his immediate society (Nigeria) as a microcosm of Africa and a universal
symbol. As Victoria Adeniyi rightly argues in Chapter Eleven, the socio-political
and economic progress of a nation lies in its ability to disassociate itself from all
forms of superstition about the existence of a god or goddess as the determining
factor for the fate of man. It is only when the reality of the world of illusion is x-
rayed that man can see himself as his own god or goddess. Man is, therefore, not
a property of any god or goddess. Man is also not a property of another man; he
is the property of himself. Osofisan’s views of life in his works are in consonance
with the late existentialist philosopher and writer Albert Camus who expressed
the view that moral value has a primary role to play in the social, political, and
economic life of a society, thus leading to national development.

The thrust of Alexander Kure’s contribution in Chapter Six is to discuss the
relevance of Femi Osofisan’s proposition for conflict resolution in *Another Raft*
and *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage* as alternative models for resolving the perennial
ethno-religious crises in the northern Nigerian state of Kaduna. Kure contends
in that chapter that although conflicts are usual rather than unusual decimals in
human existence, their occurrence should not be in perpetuity. Further, he shows
how the plays discount the idea that only a segment of society will continue to
insist on having its way at all times while others are virtually left to rot and die.
Thus, by creating conflicts and resolving them amicably in the two plays, Osofisan has been able to pass the message that the amicable settlement of conflicts can only be better achieved through the acceptance of the spirit of forgiveness, forgetfulness, accommodation, and a pragmatic interpretation of the place of gods in the lives of adherents. Hence Kure posits that the government and generality of the people in Kaduna State have a lot to learn from the models of conflict resolution proposed by Femi Osofisan in Another Raft and Farewell to a Cannibal Rage.

As part of Osofisan’s vision for an egalitarian society, some of his works are specifically created to redress the oppression of marginalized women in his society. Not only does this master craftsman give adequate attention to women in his works, he accords them some extraordinary power. Because of the attention devoted to women in several of Osofisan’s works, some critics even describe him as a “feminist writer.” Lois Tyson defines feminism broadly as the criticism which “examines the ways literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women” (81). Feminist criticism’s main agenda, according to Greene and Kahn, is to “deconstruct predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstruct a female perspective and experience in an effort to change the tradition that has silenced and marginalized” women (1). While Osofisan has not publicly professed interest in feminism or gender studies, the attention devoted to women in his works and significant roles assigned to them caught the attention of five of contributors in this volume.

Gender-sensitive critics have, for decades, decried the negative image of women in African literature. Works of literature are subjected to scrutiny by these critics for signs of gender bias in the form of exclusion of female perspective or the negative portrayal of female characters, or a stereotypical presentation of women at the expense of the changing role of women. Icons of African literature have all been indicted because of the persistent uncomplimentary image of women in their works. In spite of the fact that these writers have, in their later works, improved their female characters, these critics think they have not done enough. Femi Osofisan is one of the very few Nigerian male writers that escaped feminist indictment for negative portrayals of female characters. Most Nigerian male writers, including Achebe and Soyinka, have been labeled “male chauvinists” and accused of marginalizing and suppressing women in their work. But rather than indictment, Femi Osofisan receives commendation for his positive portrayal of female characters in his plays.

In Consequence of this, Ngozi Udengwu in Chapter Thirteen examines the merits of this claim against the backdrop of the actual meaning of “feminist” and in comparison with core feminist plays. After a conscientious study of Osofisan’s so-called “feminist plays,” Udengwu concludes that, though Osofisan creates strong and emancipated female characters in his works, his writing does not fit
into the definition of feminist writer. This, according to her, is because a careful examination of some of Osofisan’s writings shows that women’s issues are not the focus of his plays and, being a man, he is not grounded in women’s culture and feminist aesthetics which are seen as responsible for the different way women write. She claims, also, that Osofisan’s plays, compared to typical feminist plays, are not blueprints for feminist theater, which does not only focus on female gender specific themes, but is also created, primarily, for female audiences.

Writing in Chapter Twelve, Bose Afolayan investigates women’s rage in Osofisan’s drama with particular reference to Altine’s Wrath. In this chapter, Afolayan focuses on how patriarchy and its structures have militated against women’s expression in society and concludes that there are societal institutions that have conspired to relegate women’s emotions to the background. She beams her searchlight on the reasons why women get angry and posits that anger in a woman is a natural, common, and human emotional response to issues of injustices, unfairness, insecurity, hurt, pain, or betrayal. This chapter is a challenge to progressive and well-meaning people to move beyond the ordinary and try to articulate the reason for women’s anger, women’s response patterns, and to channel or redirect angry energies towards constructive life-affirming ends in society. More than any other Nigerian writer of his generation, Osofisan gives his readers a significant view of women’s experiences in his works, and this is one of the enduring qualities women admire in him. His female characters are not just fictional beings but are also historical and symbolic. Osofisan, in many of his works, has given insight into women’s experiences. In Chapter Fourteen, Oluchi Joyce Igili shows that Osofisan’s female characters are not subservient or docile; rather they confront issues and institutions with the power in their hands. They are sometimes angry, bold, and daring. He has a whole array of them—the rich, the poor, the wise, the foolish, the corrupt, the brave, and the angry.

In Morountodun and Other Plays for instance, we see the legendary Moremi in a moment of anger against the formidable force represented by the Igbo raiders. In defiance of the gods and the priests who make unending sacrifices to avert the terror that the Igbo represents, she leaves the comfort of her splendor, the palatial home where she lives with the king and her only son. She allows herself to be captured in order to save her people. Her anger is an assertive type even if she has used it to serve the state. Moremi’s anger is a galvanizing force that propels her to save her race. Moremi defies the gods, the king, and her personal safety. Her anger provokes her to challenge what stands in the way of her security. Working within the Moremi myth, Titubi in that same play at first responds angrily to the actors’ attempt to mirror what goes on in society. She comes on stage with her mob, disrupts the play in progress, and harasses the director. It is this outrage that leads to her conscription for the search party against Marshal, the rebel leader of the farmers. This anger takes her on a journey of self-development. The suffer-
ings and pains of the poor farmers become her teacher. She is thoroughly bought over by the daily problems of these peasants, and she eventually supports their fight against the ruling class. It is her perception of injustice, whether legitimate or not, that has motivated her into this action. At the end, her initial emotional outburst is channeled and redirected into life-saving acts.

Therefore, the “image of womanhood” that we have in Osofisan’s works is what Sola Owonibi refers to in Chapter Fifteen as “a woman who is recognized for her achievement and not just for being a woman; a woman who commands and earns respect and adoration; a woman who is the symbol of excellence and not a ‘weaker vessel’ that merely cries foul, feels cheated, and lives cheated; a woman who recognizes her energy potentials and taps into it for empowerment; a woman who breaks the ugly yokes of stagnation and discrimination; a woman who sees being called a witch as complimentary and not derogatory.” Furthermore, either in the ingenuity of Tegonni, the political dexterity of Ayoka in the play Tegonni: An African Antigone, or the revolutionary acumen of Titubi in Morountodun and Other Plays, Osofisan has displayed a striking attribute of womanhood that doesn’t only cry for injustice but moves out decisively to curb injustice instead of merely crying foul. For womanhood to win the obvious war of gender equity, therefore, she must address her mind to those innate powers that make her stand out as a human being and not only as a woman, the valor and ingenuity in her that can make her impact in the real world. Then she must push forward for recognition against odds and restrictions. She must be ready to accept and admit being a “witch” and live up to the standard of a witch by beating a man in domains restricted and classified as masculine. She should attribute to “witch” a positive connotation, like “wizard,” that is now linguistically associated with excellence. As long as she sees “witch” as a negative term that is associated with a malevolence spirit that must be avoided, she will avoid the term like a plague and run away from anything that can earn her that title. It is part of prejudice. A male achiever is proud to be called a wizard in his chosen career, so also a female achiever should feel proud to be called a witch in her area of excellence.

Osofisan’s literary creativity is a product of eclecticism and originality which provide a triple level of ideas, action, and entertainment. Embedded in this is his aesthetics which hires and captivates the audience because of its use of traditional African elements of music, dance, songs, stories, and improvisation. The real significance of Osofisan in his drama, for instance, is his experiment with the African theater form. He obsessively creates new forms by mingling conventions with daring experiments. He utilizes the power of comedy to criticize and ridicule his society. But, as he is not satisfied with the conventional genre of comedy, Osofisan in Midnight Hotel for instance, mingles humor with other forms like folktale, music, song, and dance to create a comic opera.
Osofisan’s Yoruba background provides inspiration for most of his writings, as evident in the reading of many of his works. The Yoruba worldview as reflected in their myths underlines the structure of many of Osofisan’s plays and animates the characters therein. He uses critically elements of Yoruba culture such as history, myths, festivals, riddles, proverbs, metaphors, idioms, folktales, music, and songs creatively adapting them for artistic purposes. His works reflect both the physical environment as well as the culture of the Yoruba people. He is also influenced by the Yoruba communities’ worship of numerous traditional gods and goddesses. While one may support the view that the cultural setting of most of Osofisan’s works hardly extends beyond the social, political, and economic life of the Yoruba people, one cannot agree less with the conclusion of Hope Eghagha in Chapter Five that Osofisan’s dramatic radical oeuvres have provided an ambit for making comments on the Nigerian society, using the Yoruba worldview and cultural milieu as a springboard. In Eghagha’s view, Osofisan’s plays speak for Africa, even though the settings are unmistakably Yoruba or Nigerian. He tells the stories of the dispossessed, the minorities whose voices are often alienated from the discourse dominated by the worldview of the center. In order to achieve his radical disposition he makes use of a socialist purview by questioning the rationale behind a primitive acquisition of capital.

Therefore, one feature of Osofisan’s literary creativity is the consistent exploration of African tradition and cultural matrices to make artistic statements. Several scholarly efforts have offered illuminating insights into Osofisan’s exploration of Yoruba traditional lore and performance materials in his plays (see for example Awodiya 1993, 1996, 2002; Richards 1996; and Raji-Oyelade 2003). Some of these materials include the usage of a performance mechanism that fuses storytelling with dance, music, and songs. Osofisan also explores the Yoruba pantheon to comment on the paradox of existence as captured in the creative/destructive icons of Ogun, Esu, and Obatala, with Orunmila as the restorative principle. He revisits myth, legend, and the indigenous monarchical system to interrogate the crises of governance in post-independence Africa. In Osofisan’s theater, one encounters a freewheeling revisionism of traditional religious practices to reflect the absurdities and contradictions inherent in Africa’s contemporary reality as shown in three of his most popular plays: Who is Afraid of Solarin?, Another Raft, and Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest.

The concern of Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju and Edde E. Iji in Chapters Twenty-five and Twenty-six respectively is to engage Osofisan’s own position on what he considers to be the appropriate modality for the deployment of traditional myths as well as past and contemporary history in African drama. In her chapter, Oloruntoba-Oju submits that the theoretical basis of Femi Osofisan’s theater, that is, its embracing a socialist/collectivist approach to societal problems and rejecting animist/metaphysical answers to the human predicament is well established. In
the process, she argues, myth is demystified; history is de-historicized and re-contextualized in Osofisan’s dramaturgy. The chapter attempts to navigate the myth and the reality of Osofisan’s dramaturgy. Consequently, it proposes that the playwright consistently employs a triple “annunciation-aestheticization-denunciation procedure,” leading to an effect that is often meta-historicist, meta-mythologist, and meta-aesthetic. However, as the chapter demonstrates, Osofisan’s dramaturgy presents hidden dilemmas. Indeed, the dramaturgy frequently appears to subvert its basic assumptions and spring its own myths, with concomitant challenges not only for the playwright himself but also for scholars of his dramaturgy and of revolutionary theater in Nigeria. Oloruntoba-Oju’s chapter provokes a broadened view of such challenges.

In her chapter, Edde E. Iji argues that in dramatizing the myth of Moremi in Morountodun and Other Plays, Osofisan attempts to resourcefully manipulate many resources of stagecraft in presenting what can be conveniently termed his pedagogy of the oppressed, wherein he also tries to articulate very aggressively, his gospel of the poor, at the same time laying the foundation for an anti-capitalist ideology. Iji concludes that, “using the dramatic medium of communication as an idealistic tribunal, his handling of myths and anti-myths, theater and anti-theater, Osofisan attempts to weld the historical and the ahistorical, the religious and the irreligious through the platform of Marxist polemics.” Like Brecht’s and Pirandello’s, Osofisan’s anti-realistic method of narrative tries to weld, resourcefully, the illusionary and disillusionary approach to dramatize what appears to be real life happenings. Here, the use of literature as a medium of establishing a workable, proletarian, ideological base, as a medium of propaganda and conscience-provoking instrument of change, appears to be at its ideal stage of formulation in Africa. He attempts to use the medium of the theater and drama, both passionately and dispassionately, as religious and non-religious experiences. From the foregoing, it can be asserted that reincarnation of myths or their ritual coordinates in Osofisan’s dramaturgy is like adaptation of texts in all its ramifications. They can serve the need of arts or literature, invaluably in terms of their regenerative potentialities, among other re-creative endeavors. Thus, Osofisan’s rising profile significantly derives its creative impetus from the regenerative dynamics of myths, like that of Moremi and its relative ingredients that flavor it to an award-winning status, as a great work of a master craftsman.

Another visible imprint of African culture in Osofisan’s works is discussed by Gbemisola Adeoti in chapter Twenty-four where he examines the recurrent usage of the market trope in his selected plays. The market is one of the elements of indigenous culture that feature in Osofisan’s plays; a recurrent element that deserves more attention. The chapter focuses on the nature and significance of the market idea in its different manifestations from play to play. This is done with a view to deepening the hermeneutics of Osofisan’s drama. The chapter contends
that the market as an idea or as a concrete social institution occupies a significant place in the construction of Osofisan’s plays, serving aesthetic, cultural, and ideological purposes. The need for a firm understanding of the trope and the reasons for the playwright’s fascination with it inform Adeoti’s analyses of *Once upon Four Robbers*, *Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen*, *Yungba- Yungba and the Dance Contest*, and *Fires Burn and Die Hard*. The study shows the recurring idea of the market and thematic possibilities generated through this recurrence. It argues that the market is another element of the playwright’s indebtedness to Yoruba tradition and culture. But beside this, the choice of the market trope is also informed by Osofisan’s ideological inclination which sees economic distribution as pivotal to the affairs of man in society. Adeoti’s chapter concludes that the market in the selected plays of Osofisan is a veritable site for interrogating the myriad of socio-political forces that account for Africa’s unending crises of development in post-independence years. It is also an arena for playing out the inevitable conflicts emerging from the unequal economic relations existing among individuals and social classes. From the textual analyses, it is established that the market motif is part of the artistic elements that shape Osofisan’s concept of popular drama, its nature, and its social functions.

At times, Osofisan takes his works out of a Yoruba setting completely, as in the case of the plays *Nkrumah-Ni...Africa-Ni!* and *Reel, Rwanda!* in his *Recent Outings II*. In *Reel Rwanda!* for instance, Osofisan recreates the atrocities perpetrated by the Hutu against the Tutsi during the Rwandan genocide of 1994. This is the concern of James Tar Tsaaioir in Chapter Three where he submits that Osofisan’s dramaturgy has sufficiently demonstrated an unswerving engagement with Africa’s postcolonial predicament and state of perpetual becoming. Tsaaioir showed how Osofisan has interrogated the propensity to fratricidal wars and internecine conflicts whose causal factors he locates in the ineptitude of the political elite and the rabid ethnocentrism of the people. Osofisan indicts foreign governments, especially former colonial regimes, whose interest in the mineral resources of the former colonies is responsible for the instability they always precipitate. As Fiona McLaughlin rightly observes, Osofisan’s dramaturgy “marks a significant departure from the local focus of much African literature and art…evidence of an engagement and willingness by African writers and artists to address a watershed event which is one of the most important and traumatic events of the twentieth century to occur on the African continent” (205). Femi Osofisan’s basic material is the expression of rebellion, an element that recurs overtly or covertly in his work. Discontented with old and static forms, Osofisan finds it impracticable to identify with the existing art forms, government system, or programs, or even to ally himself with any leftist revolutionary vanguard. His revolt against human forces of oppression, corruption, and injustice is a means
of engaging the status quo and agitating for moral, social, artistic, religious, and political transformation.

The versatility of Osofisan in Yoruba notwithstanding, he has chosen English as the medium of his expression. However, he constantly draws materials and inspirations from the rich African philosophy and traditions just like every other contemporary African creative writer. In view of his/her exposure to Western education, more often than not, up to the university level, the contemporary African writer usually benefits from the rich influences of Western dramatic forms and traditions as well. This dual exposure according to Tiziana Morosetti in Chapter Nineteen, immensely contributed to the rich and unique hybridity of form (African and European) associated with what is known today as “modern” African drama. As shown in Morosetti’s chapter, this statement, which refers to Osofisan’s theater and to his highly-acclaimed Brechtian dramatic technique, may also be applied to the author’s collections of critical essays, which gather together most of his criticism published over the last thirty years, and contain some of his sharpest assertions.

With the unprecedented growth of post-independence African drama there exist criticisms which have helped to engender its quality of focus and form. Modern African drama in the words of Diran Ademiju-Bepo in Chapter Eighteen has, indeed, come of age; and it is quite possible to harness such findings as are common with its peculiar hybridity for the purpose of evolving a body of relevant “home-grown” theories and literary canons as are appropriate for its criticism. In the light of this assumption, Ademola Omobewaji Dasylva writes in Chapter Seventeen on the basic forms in Osofisan’s drama with a view to examining how the playwright exploits the advantages of a dual exposure (to Western dramatic concepts and the African loric traditions) to evolve authentic African dramatic forms, among other things.

While still writing on Osofisan’s use of language in his works, three other contributors in Section IV of this volume (Samuel Alaba Akinwotu [Chapter Twenty-one], Uko Atai [Chapter Twenty-two], and Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju Chapter Twenty-three]) come to the conclusion that Osofisan is well known in his drama in particular for soft, easily comprehensible language that is full of humor as he succinctly mixes Standard English with pidgin and Yoruba. Osofisan recognizes that English could be made to blend with local surroundings to produce an artistic work that is aesthetically satisfying to his readers or audience. They argue that he is able to successfully domesticate and indigenize the English language to achieve authenticity as well as to get his message across to a larger audience or readership. While commenting on Osofisan’s language use, Olu Obafemi submits much earlier that,

flora and fauna, images, metaphor, aphorisms, folktales, symbolism, idiom of proximal to African speech, the prose-vernacular of
African speech, the lexis and expression of indigenous thought, elements of Yoruba poetry, rhythm and music are all fused into an essentially Osofisan discourse aesthetic. Another aspect of popular aesthetics evinced in language, are the major categories of linguistic registers that the playwright deploys to embody his social vision and dramaturgy. Language registers are sociologically conditioned or determined—ranging from the elitist standard English, via oracular forms or heightened elevated speech employed by the supersensible and patriarchal agencies (gods, kings, and votive protagonists), to the conventional language of the proletarian masses to the pidginized language of the stereo-typical characters-messengers, servants, maid and house-helps (205).

The concern of Philip Adedotun Ogundeji in chapter Twenty-seven and Laide Sheba in chapter Twenty-eight is to examine the translation of two of Osofisan’s English plays into Yoruba language. While Ogundeji’s chapter centers on his personal experience as a co-translator of Osofisan’s *Who is Afraid of Solarin*, Sheba’s chapter is a critique of another play of Osofisan, *Red is the Freedom Road*, translated into Yoruba as *Ònà Òmìnira Ònà Èjè* by Ademola Aremu. Translation is the interpreting of the meaning of a text and the subsequent production of an equivalent text, communicating the same message in another language. Translation is not merely linguistics conversion or transformation between languages, but it involves accommodation in scope of culture, politics, aesthetics, and many other factors. Accommodation in this sense is taken as a synonym of adaptation, which means changes are made such that the target text produced is in line with the spirit of the original text. A text that is not obviously a translation in the traditional sense because of the additions or loss of information, explanation, rewriting, or recreation, is thus created.

It is the normal practice of African writers to exploit their cultures to create literary works in English. However, according to Akinwumi Isola in one of his critical essays, this practice has greatly impoverished the culture, robbing it of a necessary feedback. Therefore, Isola recommends that if such culture is not to petrify and die, serious cultural conservation measures, including translations into African languages must be embarked upon. Sheba therefore sees *OÌnaÌ OÌmiÌnira OÌnal Êjel* as Ademola Aremu’s effort to retrieve the Yoruba original story back to the Yoruba audience “with all its vital organs still intact despite the suffocating influence of an unfriendly environment it has been made to inhabit.” She argues that Aremu’s effort can be seen as another type of back translation; saying that, what he has done as a translator is just to translate back into the language of the original concept. Arguing that *Red is the Freedom Road*, though written in English, is basically a text whose root, concept, storyline, and other materials are originally from the Yoruba cultural set up.
There are three fundamental issues a translation must aim at. First, it should give a complete transcript of the ideas and sentiments in the original passage; second, it should maintain the character of the style; and third, it should have the ease and flow of the original text. In order to have a good translation, the translator, in addition to having an in-depth understanding of the source-text, must decide whether to translate only “what is there” or whether to look deeper into the external links of the text, the time and place it reflects, and whether or not, and how, to rewrite it when transplanting it into the target culture. The translator must often also decide how to handle quotes in the source-text and the source of those quotes. In this respect, the translator often functions as a critic, a philologist, and an editor of the translated work.

The immediate cultural setting of the play *Who is Afraid of Solarin*, co-translated into Yoruba under the title *Yéèpà Solarin N Bò* by Osofisan and Ogundeji, is Yoruba. It is, therefore, expected that this cultural setting will inform the linguistic structures of the play, especially since culture and language are quintessentially interwoven. Osofisan has deliberately chosen to write the play using the characters’ varying degrees of English-language competence and performance to differentiate between one character and another. Similarly, Osofisan’s choice of the English language is largely informed, and deliberately too, by his Yoruba mother tongue. Therefore, Ogundeji submits that their translation of *Who is Afraid of Solarin* into Yoruba attempts to locate the work in its original and most appropriate socio-linguistic context. According to him, *Yéèpà Solarin N Bò* is indeed an interpretation which reverts to the original Yoruba socio-linguistic milieu to guarantee intelligibility. The histrionics of *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* and *Yéèpà Solarin N Bò*, Ogundeji argues, is the unfortunate tragic reality of Africans’ existence conditioned by their colonial history and our lack of patriotic zeal to liberate themselves.

Ordinarily the procedure of translating the text, or any literary text for that matter, ought to emanate from the indigenous experience to a foreign language where the original language of that work has its normal socio-cultural background. The reversion in Osofisan and Ogundeji’s translation of *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* into Yoruba is therefore informed by sociological considerations to make the text accessible to its immediate or primary audience who are largely non-literate or just partially literate in the English language. The original text which is in English is, no doubt, inaccessible to this indigenous population which constitutes the mass of the people for which the message in intended.

The sociological consideration is itself impassioned by Osofisan’s ideological inclination. This has wielded much influence in the play’s topicality as a materialist text. We consider the time chosen for embarking on the translation very appropriate in Nigeria’s political history. It coincided with the politicians’ preparation for the 1987 gubernatorial election during the infamous Babangida’s aborted tran-
sitional program to democratic rule. The play is a satire on the dislocated values and blurred social vision of government officials at the local government level graphically represented in the malapropitic use of the English language. Regardless of its hilarity, the comedic elements are meant to conscientize the masses of the people so that they would not be taken for a ride by politicians who usually promise good things for the people in their manifestoes but do things grossly against the interest of the masses after getting elected. The play in Yoruba has the potential of achieving this ideological goal more than its English version because of its apparent closeness and accessibility to the popular audience.

It is clear from the foregoing that the aim set at the beginning of this project, to compile emerging critical perspectives on the literary creativity of Femi Osofisan, has been achieved. We hope that this volume will be an invaluable teaching and scholarly resource for African literary scholars and students. We hope therefore, that the book will be attractive to teachers and students of African literature and non-literary scholars interested in learning more about African philosophy, languages, literatures, and cultural practices.

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Chapter 2

FEMI OSOFISAN IN THE WILDERNESS OF OUR GENERATION’S DILEMMAS*

Biodun Jeyifo

Radical: (1) of or going to the root or origin; fundamental (2) thoroughgoing or extreme, esp. as regards change from accepted or traditional forms; favoring drastic political, economic or social reforms: radical ideas; radical and anarchistic ideologues.


The celebrant, Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan, Madam Chairperson, distinguished guests, colleagues, students, friends and compatriots, it is a very welcome, very pleasant task that I am here to perform this evening in my lecture. The task is to welcome my bosom friend and “aburo” into the ranks of “sixty and above”, having myself been admitted into the group barely six months ago. We have cause to be grateful and to rejoice that Femi Osofisan is here and alive today, that he has made it to the age of sixty and that he looks so much younger than his age that we hope and pray that he will be around for several decades more. For it is through grace, that inscrutable principle of unearned good fortune that operates side by side with always lurking disaster throughout the cosmos in which we live, that Osofisan has lived to see this day. By my count, he has survived at least three major road accidents, all of them very scary accidents. One of these accidents was so terrifying that while he was still extricating himself from the crash, news preceded him to Benin and Ibadan that he had died!

* Text of a lecture delivered on June 16, 2006 at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. The Chairperson for the occasion was Professor Abiola Odejide, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), University of Ibadan.
Beyond the bare fact of his physical survival, we have as great a cause to rejoice in what Osofisan has accomplished in the course of that physical survival. As a matter of fact, let me give notice that it is precisely the sheer magnitude of his accomplishments that prompted the very title and substance of my lecture this evening. In other words, were it not for the scale and the nature of his accomplishments, I would not have dared, as I propose to do in this lecture, to use Osofisan’s life and career as a prism through which to explore the dilemmas of a whole generation, this being my own generation.

Indeed, on this particular point, let me state that in the course of the lecture, I intend to show how and why Osofisan’s accomplishments, as embodied in his works and career, seem to me the most appropriate vehicle for exploring the perplexities and dilemmas of my generation. For the moment, let me simply give notice that I am only too aware that there is a great unfairness, a vast presumption in asking one person’s work and career to serve as the axis through which to assess the perplexities and dilemmas of an entire generation. All I will say for now is that Osofisan “ni eyin to le fi ru eru yi”; he has broad, capacious shoulders of insight, generosity and good humour to bear the weight of this ritual, sacrificial burden. And if truth be told, he probably also deserves it, as some of my remarks and observations in the lecture will amply demonstrate. On that note, let me now proceed to the subject of the lecture - the wilderness of the dilemmas of my generation and Osofisan’s works and career as a composite prism for coming to terms with it.

“Out of relative obscurity, every generation must discover its mission and either fulfill or betray it”. This is perhaps the most often quoted, the most famous sentence in Frantz Fanon’s book, *The Wretched of the Earth*. That book was first published in the French original in the late 1950s, later to appear in 1962 in its authorized English translation. It was an important book for my generation; indeed, it was perhaps the single most important book for us. And for us, that sentence was perhaps the single most important sentence in the book. Let me repeat it: “Out of relative obscurity, every generation must discover its mission and either fulfill or betray it”.

We believed passionately in the veracity of this injunction, this moral and revolutionary mandate from Fanon, not only in terms of its bare assertion, but also in the very logic of the assertion, this being the absolute demarcation between either fulfilling or betraying the discovered mission of one’s generation. We had no doubt that we had discovered the mission of our generation; as a matter of fact, Fanon himself, among other radical thinkers and activists, had helped us to make this all-important discovery: after the end of formal colonization, the necessary historic tasks were nation-building and social revolution. This was the clear mandate which we had to translate into our own peculiar national and continental circumstances, without any equivocations. Accordingly, we drew a line in the
sand between the solution and the problem, between, on the one hand, the objective forces we either had to work with or fight against and, on the other hand, our own subjective readiness and capacities for the struggle. For the avoidance of any imprecision, any ambiguities and for the benefit of members of the audience who weren’t yet born at the time, let me spell out what we regarded as our mission as a generation. Fanon, in calling his famous book, The Wretched of the Earth, had focused sharply on the wretched of the African continent and both the prospects for, and impediments to their liberation from their foreign and local exploiters and oppressors. Of course Fanon’s analyses and prognostications in the book were found to be relevant to the conditions of all the developing nations and societies of the world, since at the heart of his analyses were the ravages of colonialism and capitalism, the twin engines in the total control and domination of all the regions of planet earth by Western imperialism. We took up analyses and perspectives on this question of the liberation of Africa and the rest of the developing world from Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, C.L.R. James, Basil Davidson, Mao, Antonio Gramsci and other revolutionary thinkers, scholars, writers and activists from all the regions of the world and applied them to our own local Nigerian and African conditions and realities. Specifically, we focused on overcoming the great divisions, which, in our view were responsible for keeping Nigeria and Africa underdeveloped and economically backward. These were the divisions of class, or in plain words of rich and poor and of gender; the divisions based on ethnic and religious identities and their presumed “natural” interests; the division between the rural poor and the urban oppressed, and that between the elite and the rest of the population. We set out to work totally and uncompromisingly for the transcendence of these divisions which, to repeat, we felt were at the roots of the underdeveloped condition of our country and our continent and the situation of the vast majority of its peoples.

The division between the elite and the masses was especially important in our sense of our mission as a generation for it was on this particular point that we drew a line between ourselves and members of the older generation of the Nigerian and African educated elite, especially the writers, artists, scholars and critics, the scions of the national and continental literary intelligentsia. Let me dwell on this particular point briefly since it is of great relevance to the subject of my lecture.

By the time that we became writers, critics and professional academics, the ranks of Nigeria’s educated elite had expanded considerably from how things stood a decade earlier. Simply stated, Nigeria in the decade before our arrival at professional and intellectual maturity had six universities in place of the situation of the old University College of Ibadan, U.C.I., as the only university in the country. Apart from North African countries like Egypt and Tunisia, and of course apartheid South Africa, no other country in Africa then had more than one
or two universities. Some countries did not even have any universities, right up to the eve of political independence. So, in having six universities, Nigeria seemed to have made some progress. But since Nigeria is the most populous country on the continent, compared with the other countries, having six universities is not much different from having only one or two universities. Thus, even though things were different from a decade earlier, the educated elite constituted a very tiny fraction of the national population when we arrived on the historical scene. Precisely because it was so numerically and structurally tiny, this elite enjoyed enormous privileges, privileges that younger people in the audience cannot even begin to imagine.

It was the sum of these privileges and the ways in which they enormously compromised even the most “progressive”, liberal members of the elite in the exploitation and domination of the masses of the population that we assaulted savagely as a very special front in the struggle against all the bases and manifestations of the economic, political and social injustices in our country and our continent. We felt that if we could work to overcome the gap between the elite and the masses, all those other divisions of gender, ethnic and religious identities, and the rural and the urban could also be overcome. We felt that the first, post-independence generation of the country’s educated elite had taken their privileges for granted and had mostly couched their views and perspectives on the prospects for progress and reform in paternalistic, self-serving terms. We felt that even when they wrote with solidarity and in sympathy about non-elite women and the urban and rural poor, they did so without a fundamental belief that the oppressed and the marginalized had the capacity to liberate themselves from the shackles of their oppression and marginalization. Even less, in our opinion, did that first generation of the post-independent “progressive” elite, as a group, believe that the oppressed could actually lead, I mean lead, the struggles against injustice and oppression in our country and continent. These were the articles of faith, the programme of our mission as a generation. For members of the younger generation who have either not read about that period or been given oral accounts of what transpired in that period in Nigerian and African literary and cultural history, a reading of any of the following books, essays and monographs should suffice to give you an indication of the temper of the period: Kole Omotoso’s play, *Shadows on the Horizon* which was significantly subtitled “A Play on the Combustibility of Private Property”; Osofisan’s plays, *The Chattering and the Song* and *Morountodun* and his essay, “Ritual and the Revolutionary Ethos”; my book of essays, *The Truthful Lie*; Festus Iyai’s *Violence*; and Wole Soyinka’s essay, “Barthes, Leftocracy and Other Mythologies”. For anyone interested in reading what we actually wrote at the time on this specific topic of our mission as a generation, the editorials and articles that we published in the journal that we founded and produced ourselves, *Positive Review*, give a fairly substantial
picture of what our thoughts, our hopes and our aspirations were. Beyond the borders of Nigeria and elsewhere on the African continent, important figures in this generational profile are Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Micere Mugo, Ama Ata Aidoo, Pio Zirimu, Attah Britwum, and Issa Shivji. Indeed, in order to give an accurate and concrete flavour of that period of our absolute insistence on a solid line of demarcation between us and the previous generation of Nigerian literary and cultural intelligentsia, permit me to quote at some length from a recent essay that I wrote on what happened within the ranks of members of our generation when, having decided that we had discovered the mission of our generation, we set out resolutely to fulfill and not betray it:

In that period of great revolutionary fervor, we drew a line in the sand between our generation and the previous generation of the country’s liberal, progressive intelligentsia. We said it was time to move far beyond the paternalism, the noblesse oblige that, in our view, had mostly characterized their view of their social and ethical obligations as members of a privileged intellectual elite. We greatly admired the work, the intellectual example of many prominent figures in this older generation. Just to limit myself to the University of Ibadan campus when I still taught there, you had figures like Abiola Irele, Michael Echeruo, Dan Izevbaye and Ayo Banjo, all of whom we greatly admired but radically discounted as models for the kind of committed intellectuals we wanted to be. And we were very loud, very clear on this point and they all knew this and of course watched us very closely as every generation watches “upstarts” who arrive on the historical scene to announce the “irrelevance” of their elders. In our daring, and perhaps our youthful folly also, we went as far as to declare, at the very least, a moratorium on all existing valuations, not only on canonical figures like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, but on the whole edifice of our country’s and our continent’s cultural archives in the encounter with global capitalist modernity, in its manifestations in our super-exploited, peripheral backwater and abroad in the bloated, over-affluent metropolitan centers. One of the seminal essays from the period in which we called for this moratorium was Omafume Onoge’s “The Crisis of Consciousness in African Literature”; another essay was Osofisan’s “Ritual and the Revolutionary Ethos”…And we inspired waves of younger writers and critics to look to us for inspiration and direction. I speculate now that it was the double aspect of a quite deliberate generational positioning entailed here – drawing a line in the sand with regard to an older generation and looking to serve as a model for a younger generation – that finally brought everything down to earth for us… In concrete terms, when members of two or more sets of generational cohorts are looking at your generation with the greatest possible scrutiny for consistency and maturity in
your declared objectives and perspectives, your declarations matter far less than what you actually manage to achieve. By the mid-80’s, the line that we drew in the sand had blurred considerably, even as we kept tenaciously to the radical perspectives and goals we had set ourselves.

If it seems from the last few sentences of this quoted passage that the dilemmas of our generation came from being the collective object of scrutiny of both the generation that came before ours and that which came after, let me hasten to correct that impression. In essence, the dilemmas and perplexities that came to haunt us came from within, not from interlocutors among our elders or the younger generation of progressive academics, writers and critics. As a matter of fact, I believe that considering how much we had savaged the generation which came before us, critical members of the generation that came after us have been much kinder to us since their criticisms have mostly taken the form of rather polite grumbling and have not been couched in the accents of the severe indictments we made of the older generation.

And neither have our dilemmas come from the gap between what we declared as our goals and objectives and what we actually managed to achieve, as vast as that gap is. No, it is from a totally unexpected source that our dilemmas derive and this is the fact that the line that we drew between others and ourselves, between the problem and its solution, and between the objective forces and realities that we confronted and our subjective readiness and capacities to face those forces, that line has constantly and perpetually had to be redrawn and reconfigured. Let me put this as precisely and unambiguously as possible: First, we had no sooner drawn that line than we discovered that we had made the line too rigid, too inflexible; secondly, try as we may to ignore the fact, we have found that the line did not inviolably enclose us in a circle that kept us clear of the problems as we have found that we could and did sometimes individually and collectively seem to fall dangerously close to the other side away from the “solution” within the ranks of the forces of reaction and oppression. At any rate, on the following point I wish to be perfectly understood since it is a fundamental aspect of the things I wish to say in this lecture: Yes, we did face considerable intimidation and harassment from the Nigerian state, and yes some members of the older generation of writers and scholars like Soyinka in many essays and Achebe in long sections of Anthills of the Savannah did attack us as savagely as we had attacked their own generation, but the most crippling blows that we have been dealt by history have come from the “inside” as we have fought within and among ourselves, in private and in public, about precisely that line that we had drawn between the problem and its solution.

Let me try to be specific and concrete here and cite a few instances of this central source of our generation’s dilemmas to show why I call it the “wilder-
ness” of our dilemmas in the title of this lecture. Elsewhere, I have written at length on the vigorous and sometimes bitter private intellectual and ideological quarrels between Osofisan and myself in the mid-70s to the early 80’s in a long essay that is among the essays in the book, *Portrait of an Eagle*, just published to mark Osofisan’s 60th birthday; this book will indeed be formally launched at the end of this lecture. But there have been other quarrels as well between us, the standard bearers of post-independence revolution in our country and our continent who drew a line in the sand between ourselves and others, between the problem and the solution. For instance, there have been vigorously acrimonious and very public quarrels between Osofisan and Niyi Osundare; between Osofisan and Odia Ofeimun; between Odia Ofeimun and Olu Obafemi; and between the late Yusuf Bala Usman and G.G. Darah; and there have been many other fratricidal quarrels within the Nigerian left.

By itself alone, there is nothing strange or unprecedented about bitter quarrels within the radical, progressive camp in any country’s national community and therefore this should not ordinarily be a source of dilemmas that are so crippling as to cause me to characterize them as a composite wilderness, an emotional landscape of desolation and barrenness. The reason that such quarrels became so debilitating in our case is that if at first we drew a line that was too rigid and inflexible, there is now virtually no line, or the line has become so fuzzy, so indecipherable as to be practically useless and unsustaining, like a wasteland. It is this particular conundrum that, I think, explains another acute manifestation of our dilemmas, this being the fact that at the very moment when many of us are enjoying great personal, professional, artistic and social success, the social conditions of the vast majority of the people in our country and continent have worsened immeasurably. Moreover, the community of the left has been fragmented and scattered to the four corners of the country and the continent, indeed of planet earth itself. Well may we ask with the protagonist of Ayi Kwei Armah’s novel, *Why Are We So Blest?* how come many of us are enjoying great personal success when all around us is little more than wreckage and despair. Like the protagonist of Armah’s novel, the “blessing” seems more like a curse than a benediction of fate or history.

This is the territory of the painful, stressful dilemmas of those of my generation who took up the cause of revolutionary change in our society and if it is the case that we have neither fulfilled nor betrayed our mission, we cannot take comfort in this no-man’s land of aporia and disapprobation. Among all the writers of our generation, none has, by the nature and scale of his work in the last three and half decades, explored the imaginative and material landscapes of enigmas, aporias and conundrums as Femi Osofisan and this is why his career constitutes, in my opinion, the most appropriate imaginative and intellectual prism through
which we might gain useful insights into the dilemmas of our generation. And it is to that subject that I now turn in the next section of this lecture.

Concerning the appropriateness of using the nature and scale of Osofisan’s accomplishments to bear the burden of my intentions in this lecture, the first point that I wish to draw attention to is an aspect of his work that is commonly acknowledged by nearly all the scholars and critics of his writings and career as a dramatist - except that virtually no one has to date accorded this aspect its proper cultural significance. Indeed, when I pointed it out to Osofisan himself a couple of weeks ago, he admitted that he had not thought of the matter in the light of the cultural significance I was attaching to it. Let me express this as succinctly as possible before offering a short explanatory elaboration of it. It is this: More than any other playwright on the African continent – and certainly more than any other writer and intellectual in my generation – Osofisan has extensively deployed and exploited the form and content of a particular group or mode of traditional folk-tales called dilemma tales. Now, juxtapose this observation with the interesting fact that more than any other cultural region of the world, Africa has the largest stock of “dilemma tales”. The fact that neither Osofisan himself, nor any critic of his works had ever made any connection between these two facts is easily explained by the fact that very few people know of the second fact, the fact that it is an established idea among the leading comparative folklorists of the world that among the five or six cultural regions of the planet, Africa has the largest stock of dilemma tales. I myself did not know of this fact until I stumbled on it about five years ago while completing work on my book on the writings and career of Wole Soyinka. Now, it is pertinent to ask: what are these “dilemma tales”? Typically, dilemma tales narrate a story that is both woven around and ends with an insoluble dilemma. A common form of these tales is that in which one is left with the following scenario: you are confronted with four options “a”, “b”, “c” and “d” of which you can and must choose only one, without the benefit of being able to refuse to choose any of the four alternatives. If you choose “a” your parents will die; if you choose “b”, your children will die; if you choose “c”, it is your wife who will die. As for option “d” it states that you must choose one out of “a”, “b”, and “c” because if you don’t you will die. A less sardonic but nonetheless fascinating example of dilemma tales is the one narrated in Ebenezer Obe’s famous “Ketekete” song.

In itself, this is an endlessly fascinating aspect of Osofisan’s work as a writer, an artist, especially in his plays, this great love of enigmas, conundrums and dilemmas and many wonderful essays have been written on it. In my view, if you juxtapose this facet of his work with the fact that of all the cultural regions of the world, Africa has been adjudged by leading comparative folklorists of the world to have the greatest and most varied stock of the dilemma tales, this subliminally
makes Osofisan the most African playwright of the postcolonial era. Please note that I am using the word “subliminal” here for it is not out of a conscious desire to be the most African playwright of the postcolonial era that Osofisan has appropriated into the structure and contents of many of his plays the form of the dilemma tale. In fact, he was not even aware that among the major cultural regions of the world our continent has the largest stock of this particular form of folktales. But there it is, all the same: the most prolific playwright on the African continent has constantly woven into the structure of his dramatic plots the form of the most characteristically African mode among the world’s heritage of folktales. I think the subliminal impulse here is rooted in a deeply felt imaginative and emotional response to the perplexities of the postcolonial era in our continent.

At any rate, this love of paradox, enigmas and conundrums also makes Osofisan’s writings and career one of the most fertile for the exploration of the dilemmas of our generation as I have sketched them above. However, this seems to raise a very interesting problem for someone such as Osofisan who is an avowed radical desirous of fundamental political and economic changes in favour of the most exploited and marginalized in our country and continent. Just imagine what it would mean for an individual faced with the bitter realities of poverty and exploitation to be confronted with a dilemma of the nature of having to choose between options “a”, “b”, “c”, and “d” above as a condition of his or her emancipation. For such a character, this is a moment of aporia and students of Osofisan’s drama know that this is a moment, an inscription that we constantly encounter in his plays. And in nearly all cases, such moments of aporia pertain to the prospects and consequences of change, progressive or revolutionary change.

If I had the time in this lecture, I could spend the next half hour citing and discussing the many instances of these fascinating moments of aporia and enigma in Osofisan’s plays. Perhaps the most obvious and widely discussed is the use of alternate endings in his plays, most famously in Once Upon Four Robbers and Eshu and the Vagabond Minstrels. But there are other expressions of these moments in his dramas. Some of the most notable among these are the role reversals that often take place between the characters of his plays, the play-within-the-play device which adds layers upon layers of meta-theatre to the realistic plane of the action of many of his plays, and above all else, the effacement of the dividing line between the stage and the auditorium, the performers and the audience. Osofisan constantly uses this particular device to considerably complicate the line between the “solution” proffered by the stage action and the “problem” in the real world.

There is of course absolutely no doubt that Osofisan was, in the period I am talking about, and remains today, a radical playwright and intellectual. So the prevalence in his plays of such moments of enigma and aporia about change is not so much an expression of a loss of revolutionary nerve as the homologous
rendering of the experience of a whole generation. And if anyone is of a mind to read such moments in his plays as indicative of loss of radical energy and nerve, then so be it: only let us recognize that this pertains to the collective experience of a whole generation. I shall return to this problem at the end of the lecture but for now, I wish to examine about three or four aspects of Osofisan’s work that combine to make him perhaps the best prism for a productive engagement of the dilemmas of our generation. These are respectively, the formal, technical aspects of his works, or put differently, his aesthetic predispositions as an artist; the issues, themes and concerns that pervade his writings; and his general philosophical temper as an intellectual and thinker. For want of time, and because most of these aspects have received considerable treatment by other scholars, I shall be very brief in my elaborations on these issues, being content only to introduce in each case a dimension that in my opinion has either been left out by other critics or has not received sufficient emphasis.

Concerning the celebrant’s fundamental aesthetic predilections as an artist, I wish to juxtapose three distinct but related elements: he is extremely productive, extremely prolific; he is endlessly playful and experimental as an artist; and he is very peripatetic, because at any one time, he is at work on many plays, many projects. No matter from which of these three dimensions you look at it, the fact is inescapable: we are talking here of a prodigiousness of talent, execution and jouissance. Indeed, Osofisan is one of those okanjuwa artists who demand of art nothing short of the power and scope of the creative principle itself as an elemental force of nature. I have long observed this aspect of his sensibilities and gifts as an artist and have been amazed by it and I can report now something I have never told him or any other member of our generation before. What is this thing? It is the fact that it was because I very closely observed and experienced this gift, this predisposition in Osofisan to ask of art and creativity a scale of expression no less than the elemental force of nature itself that I was finally able to make my peace with the unruly, anarchic and germinative power of art and the imagination before the claims of revolutionary projects or, more narrowly, revolutionary programmes of progressive, radical movements.

The tendency of art and the creative principle to be anarchic, to exceed the claims and objectives of progressive or revolutionary movements and programs is of course a perennial problem and it can never be resolved once and for all time. Except with regard to the fierce debates that we once waged with Soyinka, this problem has never been seriously or extensively debated in Nigerian and African literary-critical discourse; and as far as I am aware, it certainly has never been discussed in relation to Osofisan’s location in the radical literary and cultural movements of the past three decades. In the light of this fact, all I can say for now is the following cautionary observation: any future revolutionary government or successful popular-democratic movement in Nigeria will undoubtedly
have problems with artists like Osofisan; on the other hand, artists like Osofisan who are inclined to make common cause with radical democratic movements must strive to prevent that anarchic, elemental force of artistic creation to be used against them and the causes they passionately espouse. At any rate, contemporary African drama and theatre, especially of the experimental, progressive type, has been enormously enriched by the work of Femi Osofisan.

Of the recurrent themes and issues in Osofisan’s works, this is the area of the least contention in critical and scholarly commentary on his writings, even if there have been critical discussions on the ambiguities of his popularizing tendencies. The power and agency of women to take charge of not only their own lives but to chart the course of progress for all of society in our patriarchal social order has been an enduring concern of the celebrant. So have the plight of the poor and the oppressed, as victims but also as self-empowering agents of their own liberation. In this there is a shade of sentiment, or even sentimentality in some of his treatment of these issues but he is one artist whose vision of the human condition is so capacious that he can afford to convincingly take the humanity of the poor and the marginalized for granted and not feel the need to idealize them by clothing them in the garb of spontaneous, “natural” virtue. On all levels of his exploration of these issues and themes, he is very attentive to the fact that nobody, the poor included, can escape the burden and freedom of responsibility and this is one reason why many of his plays are open-ended, leaving the audience or the reader with choices and options to make what they will of the plot of his plays; by implication this opens out to making the lives of his readers and audiences available to their own self-transforming intervention.

This last point leads me to the fundamental philosophical temper of the celebrant as an intellectual and thinker. For me, two separate but interlocking elements conjoin to define Osofisan’s thought and vision. First, there is the fact that even though he is a master of elegantly persuasive prose, he thinks mostly in images, in metaphors and stories. Read all of his prose essays carefully and you will be struck by the profusion of tropes and images and tales deployed as vehicles of thought. Secondly, he is deeply invested in the philosophical system surrounding the gods Orunmila and Eshu of the Yoruba pantheon. Orunmila is the god of wisdom and prophetic, anticipatory knowledge. Eshu, on the other hand, is the trickster god of confusion, chance and contingency. And yet in the visual and iconic representations of these two gods on the Opon Ifa, the tray of divination, they are always shown side by side, the principle of benign, prophetic wisdom standing side by side with the principle of disruption, confusion and indeterminacy. It is thus a matter of deep ambiguity, of what in Western thought is called paradox or even aporia, to conjoin these two deities together in the same conceptual and imaginative force field. I leave you to imagine the implications of Osofisan’s deep and abiding investment in this philosophical conjoining of order.
and disorder, prophetic wisdom and destabilizing contingency both for his work as a radical playwright and writer and, on a much larger plane, for the present cultural misdirections of our society where the tertiary institutions of the land have been overrun by fundamentalist religious fanaticisms which preach terrifyingly simplistic notions of water-tight, dualistic divisions between good and evil, light and darkness, salvation and damnation, and spirit and matter. On that note, let me now come to the issue on which I promised earlier to conclude this lecture: the implication of all I have said so far for Osofisan’s unquestionable identity as a radical playwright and intellectual.

Not too many people know it but the word “radical” actually has two fundamentally opposed and even contradictory meanings. This can be seen from the epigraph to this essay, a dictionary entry on the word that gives us an indication of the extraordinarily antonymic opposition between these two meanings of the word. One meaning, the one that is more commonly known, is the understanding of a radical as someone who believes and works for far-reaching and thoroughgoing changes to the existing social order, the existing institutions, values, habits and practices of the social order. So far in this talk, in every single instance in which I have used the word “radical” in this lecture, I have had this particular meaning of the word in mind. But then there is also the less well-known meaning which implies the roots, the foundations of any phenomenon, as distinguished from the more contingent and superficial aspects. In this usage of the word, a radical is one who, where there is confusion and instability and alienation, returns to basics, returns to tried, tested and sustaining values. In other words, the term radical in this second and lesser known usage implies the spirit of conservation of values considered to be the most enduring and stabilizing in a culture.

From all I have said so far, it ought to be clear that Osofisan is a radical in these two seemingly mutually opposed or contradictory meanings of the term. This is hardly surprising, given the fact that his use of tropes from the Yoruba pantheon involves both Orunmila and Eshu. This is one source of the great richness and depth of his work, despite the deliberate surface simplicity. That, and of course his extensive use of songs, dances, music and folktales. But being radical in these two senses of the word is also the source of Osofisan’s very ambiguous location in the community of our continent’s radical and progressive writers and artists. If this is a cause for interpretive and ideological concern, the fault is not Osofisan’s but that of the community of radicals for the poverty of the received and prevailing notions of radicalism.

On that note, I wish to end this lecture with a provisional conclusion and a song, both of which go to the heart of this ambiguity, this dilemma of being a radical in the two seemingly opposed meanings of the term. First, the provisional conclusion.
I have said several times in the course of this lecture that in the days of our youthful fervor as revolutionary writers, critics and academics, we drew a line in the sand between the problem and the solution, between ourselves and the forces of reaction. And I have also argued that in time, we came to discover that that line in the sand was rather too hastily and immaturely drawn, that the “enemy” could sometimes be found within our own ranks, within a closely-knit group or even in a self-divided person who seemed impeccably virtuous as a revolutionary. That was the major source of our dilemmas and our perplexities, especially when it came to pass that the line not only became fuzzy, it seemed non-existent.

Now we know that we are not necessarily limited to those two extreme choices of a very rigid and inflexible line in the sand and a fuzzy, absent or invisible line. In place of those two polarized extremes, Osofisan’s work suggests an orita, a crossroad. As we know, in a crossroad, many paths, many possibilities intersect. This is the special iconic and imaginative habitation of Eshu, one of the two deities whose repertoire of metaphors and tropes Osofisan has explored again and again in his writings.

And now for the song. It is a song that Osofisan and I and others in our cohort used to sing a lot when we were undergraduate students, during rehearsals for stage performances and in carousals as we pub-crawled the bars and nightclubs of the city of Ibadan, the future still open and promising before us. The song has three stanzas, but I will sing only two of these, for a special reason. The first stanza speaks of a spirit of combativeness, of a playful but heady readiness to reject all putdowns and mistreatments. The second stanza speaks of a retreat into a deliberate, world-weary individualism, a sort of cynical self-absorption. It is like Orunmila and Esu standing side by side on the Opon Ifá tray of divination. Pick your choice:

Sekere o, ara mi, sekere…
Sekere o, ara mi, sekere…
Ko se f’opa lu oooo
Bo to mi pere, wa gbo’ro l’enu mi!

Eniyan o, ara mi, eniyan…
Eniyan o, ara mi, eniyan…
Ko se finu han oooo
Bo ba ti l’ogbon, fi s’ikun ara re…”

** “The gourd rattle, my friends, is not played with a drumstick, (so) if you cross me, you’ll get a tongue lashing from me!/Human beings, my friends, are never to be trusted, (so) whatever wisdom you garner, keep it to yourself!”
VISION, PORTRAYAL, AND POLITICS
INTRODUCTION

Femi Osofisan’s basic material is the expression of rebellion, an element that recurs overtly or covertly in his work. Discontented with old and static forms, Osofisan finds it impracticable to identify with the existing art forms, government system, or programs, or even to ally himself with any leftist revolutionary vanguard. His revolt against human forces of oppression, corruption, and injustice is a means of engaging the status quo and agitating for moral, social, artistic, religious, and political transformation. His theater reflects both his sympathy for human suffering and his outrage at human absurdity.¹

In his dramaturgic engagements and theatrical practice spanning over three decades, Osofisan has consistently and courageously interrogated the postcolonial African condition. This gravitation to interrogating the continent is essentially based on historical contingencies and the conspiracies of the moment which have yielded a corpus of inherent contradictions.² The contradictions defining the postcolonial African condition congeal in the fact that Africa is so prodigiously blessed by benevolent nature and yet remains so unconscionably accursed by a malevolent and decadent rule. Africa has supposedly achieved political autonomy from the colonial overlords of imperial Europe, but the continent is still enmeshed in the sticky web and orbit of international monopoly capital.

Paradoxically, though Africa is circumscribed within the metropolitan economic network, as a peripheral space the continent exists on the margins of the very
circumference of these dominant industrial economies as a consumerist neighbor. Africa’s contradictions are also present in a failed bourgeoisie which inspired hope during the nationalist ferment but has turned it into dire despondency. This group, in collaboration with their alien counterparts, has institutionalized crass corruption, unbridled greed, and naked thievery. It has plundered the continent’s resources, fouled its patrimony, and plunged it into an ostensibly eternal cycle of avoidable fratricidal armed conflicts and internecine civil wars, and a harvest of blood. In the place of democracy, which African nations have hypocritically embraced, are military adventurism, autocracy, and a martial culture. It is this mesh of contradictions that has precipitated the persevering apprehension over what has happened to the dreams of the emergent ideal of this troubled continent and the overwhelming frustrations this has occasioned.

It is against the significant backdrop of these contradictions and frustrations that Osofisan’s dramaturgy is unabashedly historicist and uncompromisingly progressive and sympathetic to the mass of the people. This is understandable because the peoples of Africa have been severely dehumanized, oppressed, exploited, impoverished, and emasculated by their enemies, both in the province and in the metropolis, in their combined predation on the continent.

Osofisan’s dominant and abiding concern in this regard affirmatively inaugurates an alternative aesthetic and, indeed, “a new way” in the radical articulation of the continent’s mesh of contradictions. This “new way” represents a revolutionary vanguard, an elemental progressive force that promises to serve as a counter-point, and counterfoil to the welter of contradictions plaguing postcolonial Africa, inexorably dragging the continent to the precincts of a gaping precipice.

Similarly, the “new way” constitutes a new gnosis. It unveils the progressive interpretation and reinterpretation of history, myth, and African cosmology and their subtracting cultural tradition with the epistemological strategy of distilling relevant lessons from an agonistic history whose lineaments are fraught with violence, and the bloodstains of forced slavery, colonization, and re-colonization by European and American imperialist forces of domination. The interest in history is neither romanticist nor blandly celebratory and idealist. It is nurtured by the legitimate and genuine desire to engraff the edificatory verities of history on the contemporary realities of the continent for the attainment of the dreams of justice, equity, peace, progress, and the indispensable gifts of knowledge and wisdom. This becomes a new hermeneutic project, a mediatory enterprise through literary and cultural productions which exists at the interface of time past, time present, and time future as in the future, our past and present will both be present.

The enduring concern with Africa’s postcolonial condition has necessitated an Afrocentric trajectory and galvanized a progressive and humanist vision in Osofisan’s dramaturgy and theatre. This he has demonstrated through the creative appropriation of the resources of (African) history, (oral) tradition, and culture
which are requisite literary surrogates for the articulation of this vision. As a committed and engaged artist whose sympathies reside with the people, Osofisan has mobilized his art and etched it on a visionary pedestal as a revolutionary imperative for the social transformation of society and the re-humanization of the people. This partly accounts for his improvisational and experimental dramatic and theatrical forms deeply moored in his indigenous Yorùbá culture and the accompanying African signifying elements of drumming, music, song, dance, mime, and storytelling.

In deploying these dramaturgic elements, which are peculiarly African, Osofisan establishes that revolution is after all an intensely social and political rite of cultural expression and remains a viable and vital option for the socio-cultural and econo-political reconstruction of society. As Biodun Jeyifo rightly argues, of all African playwrights, “Osofisan perhaps presents a more comprehensive and intriguing pattern of this refraction of revolution, nothing short of it,” and inscribes “this grand subject of revolution into his plays through elaborately celebratory and ironic masks and disguises” in ways that have “never compromised the belief in the prospects and necessity of revolution.” Jeyifo further states, “this artistic swerve, this technique of engaging a revolutionary ethos … with estranging masks and disguises” remains the quintessence of his oeuvre.7

THE AFROCENTRIC VISION IN OSOFISAN’S DRAMATURGY

Discursive and critical interventions negotiating Osofisan’s dramaturgic and theatrical output are varied and wide-ranging. These perspectives are particularly pronounced in the very attribution, derivation, or genealogy of his productions. For instance, some perspectives argue for the Western origination of his works in the area of Greek adaptations suggesting, at least obliquely, that the works are not entirely autochthonous to the African cultural hemisphere.8 Other critical responses are vocal in pointing at the influences of Brechtian epic theatre in Osofisan’s dramaturgy.9 Still others identify a Marxist temperament in his works through the presence of dialectical materialism reminiscent of class-centered dramaturgy.10 Attempts have also been made by some scholars to establish a homology or correspondence between the Yorùbá and Greek pantheons.11

Despite what may seem to be the propriety and legitimacy of some of these critical elicitations and discursive navigations, they have come under intense meta-critical interrogations. This is the essential concern of Olu Obafemi in his deconstruction of the assumptions of genealogical attributions in Osofisan’s works to Greek drama, Brechtian epic theatre, and Marxist dialectics. To him,
The debate over the extent of ideological and aesthetic dependence of radical African playwrights on established European cannons (sic) and models refuses to abate. In rather uncritical circles, there is a wholesale attribution of radical Nigerian dramaturgical aesthetic to Brechtian epic. It is indisputable that there are correspondences and coincidences in the Brechtian canons and the African folk performance in the areas of audience performance, style of acting and the use of music and songs. Yet, the critical question of chronology - of which theatrical style precedes the other - remains indeterminate.

But beyond the indeterminacy or specificity of theatrical style which better defines Osofisan’s dramaturgy, there is also the focal question of which tradition—Yorùbá or Western—Osofisan is more indebted to and has more cultural influence on his art. Obafemi again comments on these taxonomic paradigms and pronounces them inadequate and limited in defining Osofisan’s dramaturgy thus:

These taxonomies have however fallen short of a rounded study of Osofisan’s dramaturgy. It is obvious that some aspects of Osofisan’s style agree with materialist precepts, but these also coincide with African folk performance aesthetic. Therefore, Osofisan’s approach could be said to be a fusion of African thought structures and foreign forms.

Obafemi’s rather philosophical resolution of the critical skirmish in the dualities of the African and Western dramatic forms, philosophic traditions, and intellectual thought patterns is not sufficiently convincing as it delicately balances the two traditions which are, in any case, locked in asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination. He has remained silent about, for instance, the particular tradition or form that predominates. Again, if there is a fusion of the indigenous and foreign forms in Osofisan’s oeuvre, for what purposes have the dualities been fused to serve? Obafemi does not elaborate on this.

Harry Garuba also raises the fundamental specter of this interrogation of critical theories and taxonomies in an attempt to transcend Osofisan’s dramaturgy. He identifies critical gaps, discursive absences, and silences on the “locatedness” or “situatedness” of Osofisan’s art in his Yorùbá cosmology and cultural tradition as if his art exists in a vacuum. He states:

A casual reading of Osofisan’s criticism reveals a curious vulgarity: obtuse theoretical formulations are smuggled into a decadent, empiricist, sociology of literature which equates content with message and vice versa…There are certain cultural modes of expression to which not only the artist but also the community as a whole share collective inheritance and it is the artist’s relationship to this which often deter-
mines his vision and therefore relevance. The critic who ignores this and gives the artist a convenient label before attempting to define the relationship is guilty of condescension and arrogance...an act of undiluted fraud. Enticing phrases such as ‘radical and prescriptive’ and even sometimes more puzzling theoretical words such as ‘Marxist’ have been attributed to Femi Osofisan’s plays.\textsuperscript{14}

In unmasking these labels as unrepresentative, fraudulent, and condescending, Garuba submits that the literary texts have their contexts and even pretexts, and as such the totality of the cultural experience of the artist and the community are strategic and crucial to the interpretive grids of a text. This is because, the text is neither “decapitated” nor “lynched” as it is a product of a particular cultural extraction.\textsuperscript{15} This is also why “Osofisan stresses the local grounding of plays as a prerequisite for universal appeal.”\textsuperscript{16}

The local grounding of plays advocated by Osofisan as a marker of authenticity and cultural locatedness is not without its paradoxes, especially when refracted through the prism of Western adaptations and the sticky genealogical or ancestral problem. This calls into question fundamental issues among them the very politics involved in the appropriation of a foreign form and the inevitable opening of old colonial wounds which have refused to heal despite the intervention of time. Barbara Goff intimates in this regard:

Adaptations of classical drama by writers of African descent are increasingly important to students of classics and the humanities generally, not least because classical drama has been integral to the notion of the Western tradition, and African adaptations raise questions about what it means to claim a ‘Western’ tradition in the wake of colonialism. Such adaptations also struggle with the fact that the very presence of the Greek and Roman classics within African culture, however, fruitful for creative endeavour, testifies to the disruption of African history by decades of colonial exploitation. Most of such adaptations address more or less explicitly the ways in which the conditions of their possibility can also undermine their project.\textsuperscript{17}

Viewed within this agonistic and contradictory schema of adaptations, we propose in this chapter that Osofisan’s dramaturgy is quintessentially Afrocentric. The Afrocentric character is such that even when Osofisan appropriates and domesticates foreign forms, it is ultimately for the ideo-political strategy of privileging Africa. This becomes a powerful espousal to the revolutionary ethos of transforming Africa from the margins to the core of things. But beyond merely privileging Africa through an Afrocentric vision and temperament, Osofisan’s dramaturgy secretes a seething and searing interrogation of Africa and its cultural traditions which compromise and diminish our humanity and undermine societal
institutions as well as our “beingness” as a people. The Afrocentric, according to Molefi Kete Asante,

is African genius and African values created, recreated, reconstructed, and derived from our history and experience in our best interests. It is an uncovering of one’s true self, it is the pinpointing of one’s centre, and it is the clarity and focus through which black people must see the world in order to escalate.\(^{18}\)

By foregrounding the continent with its possibilities and impossibilities, Africa becomes a major character in Osofisan’s dramaturgy. Africa, therefore, constitutes the centerpiece and fulcrum of the dramaturgic proceedings. Creatively processed for this dramaturgy are the agonistic history of slavery and slave trade, the destabilizing colonial experience with its inherent contradictions, and the contemporary postcolonial condition. The present condition is defined by unequal patterns of socio-economic and political realities, cultural denudation in the epoch of globalization, and moral atrophy and stasis. These are the postcolonial challenges that Osofisan’s dramaturgy confronts.

**POST-COLONIALITY, TEXTUALITY, AND MEANING IN OSOFISAN’S DRAMATURGY**

The empire-building project of European nations in peripheral spaces provides the animating and galvanizing force for discourses surrounding the colonial and the postcolonial. European colonization of the African continent was comprehensively mapped and executed with the Berlin conference of 1884-1885 during which the scramble for and partition of Africa among the dominant European imperial powers was officially ratified. Thus, temporally, the postcolonial refers to the historical moment after colonialism when colonized nations of Africa and elsewhere won political autonomy but is not limited to it. It gestures back to the actual moment of the colonial encounter.\(^{19}\)

This is essentially the position by Barbara Goff who uses the terms colonial and postcolonial “in a way that has become fairly received so that colonial refers to the actual historical period of occupation while postcolonial is temporally later.” She, however, insists that the postcolonial also casts itself back to “various kinds of critical thought about and dissent from the ideologies that accompanied colonialism.”\(^{20}\) This argument by Goff corroborates the temporal dilation of postcoloniality to include the time before the independence of the colonized territories suggesting a contiguity of historical experience. For while the postcolonial refers to the historical moment after the actual experience, the colonial period is complicit in and crucial to the understanding of the former.
In response to the question, “Who is the post-colonial?” Trivedi asserts that “the post-colonial is an English-speaking theoretically inclined westward-looking writer or academic of (or more likely from) a former colony which ‘gained independence’ from Britain during the last half-century.” This characterization of the postcolonial individual by Trivedi is rather too restrictive and reductionist. It refers only to the academic, thus making it too elitist. Similarly, it screens out other European imperial powers like France, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, etc. and includes only Britain. “Commonwealth” would have been a better term for this kind of characterization by Trivedi.

There is no doubt the terrain of postcolonial studies constitutes a contested and contestable site as it is defined by controversial perspectives. It is refracted as a contact zone of hybrid cultures, values, and worldviews where the colonial and the postcolonial enact their energies in asymmetrical relations of putative domination and subordination. Even the term “hybridity” is not a settled one in postcolonial discourses. This has occasioned the need for specificity in postcolonial studies and negotiating it, “one recent trend being not so much to develop post-colonial theory in general as to focus on reading individual texts, and rely on those readings to make their contribution to develop theory more widely.”

In a similar perspective, Gayatri Spivak has also called for more specificity, careful readings, and the awareness of informing local cultures in postcolonial and comparative studies against the generalist approach which obfuscates rather than illuminates. In culmination of the argument about the paramount need for specific attention paid to particular cultures in postcolonial studies for the understanding of the full range and complex of meanings embedded in postcolonial texts, Felix Budelman observes concerning

(t)he long-standing concern about lack of specificity in postcolonial literary criticism. The ‘postcolonial…is a concept that goes beyond particular spaces, moments and situations. There has been increasing dissatisfaction with the blandness of some postcolonial literary criticism that is not sufficiently attuned to the specifics of cultures, literatures and texts.

The post-coloniality of a text inheres, among other things, in the complex of ideas and the aggregation of epistemologies involved in the fabrication of nationhood and the challenges concomitant with the project. The challenges inherited from the colonial experience by the so-called emergent new nations in Africa and elsewhere in the post-colonial world have cast their shadows diachronically and continue to exert ramified implications and impacts on efforts by the post-colonial nations to come to terms with the realities of forging coherent nationhood. It is the sum-total of these issues, among which are the perpetuation of imperial domination through subterranean influences, political corruption, and failure of
leadership by the indigenous elite that constitute the fulcrum of postcolonial discourses in texts.

Although Femi Osofisan himself resists and even rejects the label of post-coloniality as “merely intellectual discourses…which are currently fashionable because they serve scholars so well in the Western academic circuit but which are so remote from the concrete concerns of the people on our continent,”26 there is a sense in which his dramaturgy is itself eminently postcolonial. This is because of the shades or webs of meanings it yields or incarnates as well as the peculiar issues it relentlessly grapples with and participates in. Osofisan’s protestation against notions that post-coloniality is synonymous with writings based on the tradition of protest against the imperial center is understandable. Appropriately, he has advocated a rigorous engagement with the challenges of contemporary existence in Africa as constituting the hallmark of post-colonial becoming. The challenge is to transcend the amalgam of hostile forces ranged against the continent as a result of a similarly hostile and violent history.

Thus, Osofisan’s dramaturgy elicits the trajectory and temperament of coming to terms in a visceral sense with the contemporary problems and challenges of Africa. These range from military dictatorship, political perfidy and economic corruption, ethnic nationalism, violation of fundamental human rights by the state, to official injustice, mass pauperization through decadent economic policies scripted from the Bretton Woods financial institutions, disease, communal wars, death, etc. The issues Osofisan contends with remain dominantly the same: the re-humanization of our dehumanized world through the creative process. Osofisan’s dramaturgy evinces that post-colonial spirit which is quintessential of all post-colonial literatures, whether it is in The Chattering and the Song, which thrives on the deft deployment of the relevant lessons of history for contemporary needs; Moróuntódùn, which explores myth and its cognitive interpretation for the realities of the moment; Tegoni and its unambiguous political overtones; Once Upon Four Robbers, and the engagement with official corruption and malfeasance in our society; or Women of Ôwu and its scathing condemnation of conflict and war; or Reel, Rwanda! which specifically periscopes the Rwandan crisis but also other communal debacles in Africa. I shall proceed to look at the last play here, Reel, Rwanda! as a representative refraction of the postcolonial state and its texts of meanings.

POST-COLONIALITY IN OSOFISAN’S REEL, RWANDA!

Reel, Rwanda! is a dramatic specimen whose thematic engagement is war and civil conflict. This concern springs principally from the Rwandan genocide of 1994 between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi. War is of vital interest to human-
ity because of the devastation, ruination, as well as physical, psychological, and spiritual wounds it inflicts on humanity. Some of these wounds and the memories they always evoke refuse to heal because of the luridness of the events and the stubborn process of remembering. War and the literary imagination are no doubt catalytic and symbiotic as they feed on each other. War provides literature with raw resources which literature processes for its creative needs. Literature also stokes the flames of the war spirit through its capacity to influence the human imagination.

Osofisan’s preoccupation in *Reel, Rwanda!* therefore is to call attention to the fate of postcolonial Africa and its peoples who are bound to violence and war. The play is a dramatic interrogation of Africa’s postcolonial experience defined by recrudescent wars and fratricidal conflicts and their accompanying dehumanization, brutalization, destruction of human life, waste of natural resources, and the violation of individual and people’s rights and freedoms. This war with the self and the communal annihilation it causes is of particular interest to Osofisan because when such debacles are not reported as they should be, they reoccur, instituting a cycle of destruction, poverty, and developmental arrest which has remained the bane of African states and their developmental challenges.

In another sense, the denunciation of war in Osofisan’s dramaturgy as evidenced in *Reel, Rwanda!* proceeds from the historical experience of his indigenous Yorùbá political culture. Osofisan is heir to a history enmeshed or immersed in war and conflict commonly called the Yorùbá Wars which lasted for centuries up to the nineteenth century. Yorùbá kingdoms like Ìjàyè, Òyó, Òwu, Ìbàdàn, etc. were involved in cataclysmic conflicts which impacted negatively on their developmental strides in history. Osofisan exhumes and interrogates this history of violence and war and its possible repercussions on postcolonial African socio-political engineering. It is perhaps part of his aversion to, and condemnation of war that informs his choice of Òrúnmìlà, the Yorùbá god of knowledge and wisdom as a creative daemon over Ògún, the god of metallurgy and martial arts who is Soyinka’s favorite. As Obafemi and Abubakar corroborate, “Osofisan’s theatrical precept advocates changes that are predicated on a desire to provide an alternative to war and bloodshed, tendencies found among the ruling class … He particularly opposes Soyinka’s adoption of Ògún’s philosophy of war and opts for Òrúnmìlà’s wisdom and justice.”

*Reel, Rwanda!* is a one act play which is temporally set sometime after the Rwandan pogrom. It, as such, does not pretend to be an eyewitness or auto-dramatic account of the crisis. What is significant is that it retrospectively captures the events in its evocative power of memory and re-memory and thus becomes a textual refraction of the genocide. Chris Dunton provides the circumstances of the play’s emergence:

*Reel, Rwanda!* was commissioned by London’s Tricycle Theatre and first performed in March 1996 as part of a programme of new plays.
commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Nuremberg trials and intended to stimulate awareness and the discussion of the responsibility of the international community in respect of crimes against humanity…. Osofisan did not visit Rwanda before planning and writing his play, but researched the events of 1994 and the background to these at the School of Oriental Studies, University of London.²⁸

Dunton further informs that Osofisan was appalled by the inadequate coverage the Rwandan crisis attracted especially in his native Nigeria, and for him, “this kind of neglect, willful or otherwise, provides the context within which subsequent atrocities can take place. His priority … was, then to counter ignorance, indifference and amnesia and to address” in the process, “the negotiation of knowledge and self-knowledge.”²⁹

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 and the events surrounding it have a historical context which dates back to pre-colonial and colonial times. One of these is the ethnic rivalries among the peoples of the Great Lakes region, in this case the Hutu and the Tutsi. The other is the complexities these rivalries assumed with Belgian colonization and imperialist stranglehold. Related to this is the failure of postcolonial political leadership. Oshita Oshita elaborates on this argument that:

(t)he indigenous war between the Tutsi and Hutus in the Great Lakes region, more than anything else, has internationalised ethnicity as a vehicle of conflict generation and sustenance. The ethnic content of the crisis in the Great Lakes Region accounts for the passion with which the entire conflict is being presented. Fundamental to the crisis is the invocation of primordial sentiments by the Hutus and Tutsi, sentiments uncritically passed down from generation to generation. The political economy of the Tutsi-Hutu conflict in the Great Lakes Region shows that the indigenous wars are propelled primarily by a combination of intolerance and leadership failure in the Central African region as a whole.³⁰

On the surreptitious involvement of former colonial governments and the irresponsibility of successive regimes, Oshita states:

Most authorities have found a convenient diversion from the need for good governance, and are pre-occupied with extirpating rival elements. The external actors – US, France, Belgium, the multi-nationals, and other proxies – have continued to enjoy the illegal business in solid minerals in an environment of unequal exchange. In all these, underdevelopment and increased instability remain the constants.³¹
One other major complexity is the spatial distribution of the populations in the Great Lakes region which include countries such as Burundi, Congo DR, Central African Republic, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. The Hutu and Tutsi, for instance, are found not just in Rwanda but also in Burundi and Uganda, a situation which has been aggravated by the displacements occasioned by the internecine wars. As it is consistent with colonization and imperialism and their informing psychology, these ethnicities were indiscriminately massed into artificial nations fabricated by imperial Europe without regard to the ethnic configurations and cultural affinities. These nations, as Osofisan observes, were fashioned by “colonial fiat from disparate ethnic groups and rival kingdoms.”

The spatial setting of the play is the Rwandan capital city of Kigali in a bungalow. The action is after the events of the genocide. The two major characters are Francoise, a former, university professor and his friend and former student, Rose, who is a Hutu lawyer. The play is a dialogic encounter between the two characters while Francoise, in a demonstration of harmonious affection, plaits Rose’s hair. This is, however, punctuated by Rose’s refusal to look at herself in the mirror because of the horrors, trauma, and excruciating memories her reflection in the mirror floods back to her consciousness. Immediately, the play’s evocative power of recalling the physical abuses, psychological splits, and heightened levels of dehumanization the genocide occasioned as well as the wanton deaths, is called to service.

Rose, for instance, suffers the agony of the murder of her husband and children and the sexual abuse she experienced in an extended revelatory session of reminiscences. Francoise, who earlier on came back from France to re-unite with Rose, is planning to take her to France to facilitate the process of healing of memory and remembering. Rose’s reminiscences of the atrocities during the Hutu-led Habyarimana regime and the brutality of the Interahamwe militia underscores the very nature of communal conflict involving ethnic nationalities. McLaughlin avers:

In the chilling face of genocide, where the identity of an individual is subjugated to a nebulous collective category such as Tutsi or Hutu, the most human response is to seek the uniqueness of individual experience and memory, to tell the individuals story...It is through these individual accounts that the horrors and atrocities of the genocide are revealed, from the initial fear and disbelief on the day that Habyarimana’s plane is shot down, to the horrifying and often tedious details of the massacres and tortures, to the self-questioning and reflection that goes on afterwards in the minds of the survivors.33

But this reminiscence reaches a counterpoint soon. Rose is accused by Jean-Baptiste, a Tutsi government functionary and Francois’ friend, of participating
in the genocide when she fired into the crowd of helpless children, killing many. Jean-Baptiste is accompanied on his visit by Alain, a Belgian lawyer and staff of the human rights commission that is meant to report the proceedings to the Goldstone Tribunal. The moment of epiphany in the play arrives when, in open confrontation, Jean-Baptiste, a Tutsi minority, accuses Rose of being part of the Hutu majority and perpetrators of the genocide, and of complicity, followed by Rose’s admission of guilt after initial feeble protestations.

In this play, Osofisan focuses penetratively on the sufferings, agonies, betrayals, and deep wounds that armed conflicts and wars exert on the human psyche. In the process, the wars tear apart individuals who have been living in harmonious relationships. This, Osofisan insists, is the plague ravaging postcolonial Africa today, thus reversing the hand of development and meaningful growth. He deplores in this play the seasons of war and the harvest of bloodbaths Africa has been experiencing not just in the Great Lakes region but also in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Algeria, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, among others. Africa, as it were, is at war with the self in a vicious cycle of self-decimation and self-decapitation. It is this postcolonial dystopia that Osofisan laments in his dramaturgy and denounces in unmistakable funereal cadences.

As a playwright who is committed to the least of the least in society, Osofisan sympathizes with women and children who are the hardest hit during moments of armed tensions and wars. Women are dehumanized through serial rapes and many are reduced to widowhood, childlessness, and contract terminal diseases. Rose suffers the first two effects. Children are turned into child soldiers and some become orphans with nobody to cater for their education and upbringing. It is in the light of this singular commitment to the downtrodden, the weak, and the wretched that Obafemi comments concerning Osofisan’s dramaturgy:

Osofisan has consistently enlisted his art in the service of the downtrodden and alienated masses…The ardent message of his committed art is the urgent need for the wretched of the earth – the mere pawns in the political elite’s predatory game of ‘hide and steal’ – to liberate his/her consciousness, in readiness for the imminent and inexorable struggle for regeneration and social rebirth.\(^{34}\)

Osofisan himself, in a conversation with Budelman, comments on the manifold abuses, travails, and tribulations of women and children during moments of war and conflict which have become, unfortunately, a ritualized presence in postcolonial Africa, thus:

Women and children are the ones who suffer most from the effects of war-brutalised, raped, disfigured – and are then left alive to face the consequences…In a way therefore it is easier for the men, they
are gone from the scene and so beyond pain. But think of the widows and orphans, the mutilated women left with their wounds and memories.\textsuperscript{35}

Rose suffers this unfortunate fate as her husband and children are victims of the genocide and she has been brutalized and raped by the Interahamwe. It is rather ironical that she metes the same inhuman treatment to children by firing at a crowd of children in a demonstration of ethnic hate and retaliation against the Tutsi.

In the dramatic enactment involving Alain, the Belgian lawyer, Osofisan foregrounds one of the defining features of the postcolonial state in Africa and elsewhere. This is the interventionist propensity of the former colonial overlords. Through the character of Alain, the collaborationist involvement of Belgium, the former colonial power and its imperialist policies, first as a causal factor in the genocide and as a supplier of arms to the Habyarimana government, is underscored. Also implicated is the French government’s clandestine support for the Hutu majority regime which was privy to the killings and gave it institutional backing and support. As Oshita observes, Belgian decadent colonial policies aggravated the ethnic tensions in Rwanda and “hierarchized” the Hutu and Tutsi in a way that encouraged potential conflict. He states:

During the 20th century, the Belgian colonisation of Rwanda tended towards a reinforcement of the existing hierarchy in the socio-political system. The Belgians perceived the indicators of potential conflict in the system, and engaged their missionaries to preach submission.\textsuperscript{36}

The meddlesomeness of the former colonial administration and other foreign governments is further emphasized through the Goldstone Tribunal. It is instructive that, curiously, as the dramatic tensions mount between Jean-Baptiste, a Tutsi, and his friend Francoise and Rose, a Hutu, Alain does not intervene to bring peace. His eloquent silence suggests complicity and active collaboration or, at best, aloofness and indifference. It is hypocritical and paternalistic that with this complicity of silence, he represents the tribunal which is meant to bring justice to the victims of the genocide. Even though Rose finally confesses to the crimes she is guilty of, there is an atmosphere of uneasy calm, meaning that there is latent tension which may erupt in another conflagration. What is obvious is that the Hutu-Tutsi confrontation is still real as Jean-Baptiste is unwilling to forgive Rose and allow Francoise to take her to France. Crawford Young is of the view that, “when cultural communities collectively perceive threats to communal status in the political environment, group solidarity tends to increase.”\textsuperscript{37} This is the advocacy by Jean-Baptiste especially in the wake of the new minority Tutsi-dominated regime following the assassination of Habyarimana, a Hutu.
CONCLUSION

Osofisan’s dramaturgy has sufficiently demonstrated an unswerving engagement with Africa’s postcolonial predicament and state of perpetual becoming. In Reel, Rwanda!, to be specific, he has interrogated the propensity to fratricidal wars and internecine conflicts whose causal factors he locates in the ineptitude of the political elite and the rabid ethnocentrism of the people. He also indicts foreign governments, especially former colonial regimes, whose interest in the mineral resources of the former colonies is responsible for the instability they always precipitate. Osofisan’s dramaturgy, to Fiona McLaughlin, “marks a significant departure from the local focus of much African literature and art…evidence of an engagement and willingness by African writers and artists to address a watershed event which is one of the most important and traumatic events of the twentieth century to occur on the African continent.”38

To Alain Richard, this shows Osofisan is “not a cabinet Marxist” but one whose “analysis of social reality” is always based “on examples.”39 In Reel, Rwanda! and his entire oeuvre, Osofisan has uncompromisingly engaged the postcolonial state and its texts of meanings, distilling large and representative statements in the negotiation and interrogation of these textual meanings. This he does with the genuine revolutionary desire to midwife a positive difference. As Osofisan himself states in an interview with Biodun Jeyifo, “I establish the contingent nature of all experience, and hopefully reveal through the process the fact that we are not programmed by any supernatural force to failure or defeat; that society is always determined by the interventions we bring to it; that our present sorry predicament is not permanent or incapable of emendation.”40 Africa, Osofisan is convinced, can transcend her wars, conflicts, and predicaments, re-enact a drama of possibility, and pave an alternative path for growth and development.

NOTES


13. Ibid. 153.


20. Goff, 114.
27. Obafemi and Abubakar, 155.
29. Ibid., 137.
31. Ibid., 46.
32. Osofisan, 23.
34. Obafemi, 55.
35. This is an undated telephone conversation between Osofisan and Budelman.
36. Oshita, 44-45.
38. McLaughlin, 203.
39. Richard, 43.
40. Osofisan, 617.
INTRODUCTION: DRAMA AND SOCIETY

The most prominent preoccupation of drama in society is in its function as a tool for social change. If drama cannot be designed for the good of society, it means then that it is a wasted enterprise, according to the Marxist ideology of literature (Eagleton, 1976). Drama may be based on the historical, political, social, religious, and economic events of a society, and if it is meant for the promotion and appraisal of the status quo without a considerable and practical motive for the advancement and upliftment of the masses, it is not to be considered as a functional drama. Drama as Marxist literature is masses-oriented. It is a medium of expression for the oppressed. Such drama is tilted towards a better society, and a redefinition of man within the ambit of humanity. Thus, it attacks man’s inhumanity to man.

Humanist literature, on the other hand, promotes the qualities of life of man. It re-emphasizes the nature and the relevance of man to his society, fellow human beings, and to himself. The aim of such literature is not to change the society through “radical” means but rather to maintain the “good” qualities of man. Religious plays are meant either to bring man closer to God or to promote religious doctrine, while morality plays are meant to make man to reexamine his conscience in relation to his attitudes to his fellow man and his society at large. This of course gives support to the religious plays, for morality and religious life of the people are for both the spirit and heart of man. This is a means through which man sees himself as man and not as animal. The focus of the above premise is to outline the various reasons why drama exists in a society and to assert that it
is aimed towards a changed society and for the betterment of man. It is from this angle that Femi Osofisan’s *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* will be discussed in this chapter.

**RECONSTRUCTING A SOCIETY THROUGH MORALITY PLAYS**

Marxist aesthetics promotes the good of a society by identifying with the good condition of the common man in that society. The humanist sees humanity as the basis for a better society, while the religious doctrine targets the conscience, man’s heart, the general behavior of man in relation to his fellow human beings, society and God, without being compelled to be just only for material gains. The ability to discern truth from lies, the just from the unjust, and right from wrong is the attribute of morality. However, morality is an ideological basis for the plays that seek to change the status quo, or deconstruct the social and political class polluted by the materialistic desire of man. Therefore, it is only a moral man (a man who holds morality as a basic condition for the existence of man) who will postulate various ideological theses for a better society. His ideological view, perceived as moral, could use political, economic, social, or religious theses as its bedrock.

In the late Middle Ages, morality plays developed after the religious plays which were regarded as mystery plays. It was termed a morality play:

by the fact that it was a dramatized ALLEGORY in which the abstract virtues and vices (like mercy, conscience, perseverance, and shame) appear in personified form, the good and the bad usually being engaged in a struggle for the soul of man. (Thrall, 293)

The essence of morality plays was therefore not to determine the moral upbringing of man alone but to lay a good foundation for a better society through man that lives in such a society. Man is the bedrock and the mainstay of society; he determines the economy, politics and religion of his society.

Femi Osofisan’s *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* is an example of a morality play that is meant to tune the various human perceptions to the reality of class structure with a guided hold on the social, political, and economic views of man using the myth of Eṣu, a deity in the Yorùbá pantheon, as the illustrative medium. The thrust of the play is in its explicit illustration of the opposing views between humanity and inhumanity, between human compassion and the blind quest for material values at the expense of an oppressed society. It is a play that seeks to examine the basis of change in the society. Man is seen as the catalyst for a revolution, and if such a man is corrupt and inhuman, society is bound to
go back to the gutter and chain. Man is at the center of his society and the tool for self-determination and emancipation. The society, to Osofisan, is filled with oppressive conditions in the form of class disparity, unequal distribution of wealth and material means, corruption of all forms, killing and assaults, lawlessness, and injustice. As reflected in many of Osofisan’s works: Birthdays are not for Dying, The Inspector and the Hero, The Chattering and the Song, Who’s Afraid of Solarin?, Once Upon Four Robbers, Morountodun, and Midnight Hotel, the only thing that society needs is to embark on the creation of a new order through a “new” man. Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels as a morality play is a thesis aimed at searching for a new man, for a total reexamination and redefinition of a man who could truly live above human temptations in the world of dialectical materialism.

A SEARCH FOR A NEW MAN AND THE OPPOSING IDEOLOGIES

Osofisan sees modern society as being dominated by opposing ideologies; the world of materialism, and the world of humanity where the need to survive does not rely on the amount of wealth one is able to acquire but on how much one can give to the needy; how much relief one can give to the people in pain or how much water one can give to a thirst. The class structure in this way does not preoccupy itself exclusively with the material well being of the elites alone. It means, however, that amongst the poor or common people, or the masses, there prevails oppression, as pointed out by Paulo Freire. The Minstrels are poor and they have a common goal-to-survive, but only one of them, Omele, could see things beyond material acquisition. The search for a good society does not necessarily mean that the common man is the most prefect man for the job. The poor man must be examined so that if he finds himself at the helm of affairs, he would not turn against the masses.

The man who would lead the society out of its predicament does not have to be a poor man alone; but if a rich man, with a pure heart, and full of compassion for humanity is available, the revolution could start from there. The bottom line of Osofisan’s canon in Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels is that through compassion a new society could be created: the society of Omele where charity brings the people of different races, minds, and origins together. Omele, a character in the play affirms:

Charity! That was the creed we were all raised on, and the whole village practiced it! Not even a stranger passed by without finding a roof, or a warm bed. They taught us to always give, freely, like
Mother Nature. They said God owned everything, and that every man was a creature of God. Created in his image! (7)

Compassion and charity must also be supported with the fear of God, and it is upon this premise that society could be seen as truly egalitarian. Human compassion gives rise to the blessings of God, if man can have the fear of God. The balance on which the world is created, according to Osofisan, has “the forces of Good and those of Evil” (17) and these, in turn, are represented by human feelings, and the quest for material wealth. This is why Esu puts all the Minstrels to the test by giving them a charm that will make them rich, provided they are willing to help any human being that comes their way and is in need, the reason being, according to Old Man, that:

Esu loves to help man but only when they show that they can live happily among other human beings. For human beings are greedy…

Esu does not see into the hearts of men, only their actions… (18)

Man’s virtues and vices determine his closeness to glory and eternal poverty. It is an attempt on the part of Osofisan to create a balanced judgment through the deeds of man: what he has been able to achieve through his effort. The trick in the charm could only work if the minstrels sing and dance with a suffering man. The Minstrels are the representatives of the individual members of society, especially those that are pursuing the same goal: survival. While Epo Oyinbo would prefer to invest his magical power on an impotent rich man for “House,” “Lands,” and to “be one of the wealthiest men in the land” (24). Sinsin takes a wealthy man who uses human beings to make money as her choice, and all the other Minstrels choose material things, the only things they could invest their healing charm on, thereby denying the suffering of the healing power. Only Omele could save a woman who has been pregnant for nine years from the agony and shame, for nothing and against the wishes of his friends. He also relieves a couple with leprosy because he sees them as human beings in need of help. To Omele,

It’s my choice! It’s no use now. If I let you go, I’ll never grow old. For I’ll never know happiness again! I’ll be thinking only of this single moment of cowardice, when I turned away some…human being in need…I’ll do it, even though I’m trembling (52)

Omele prefers to “gamble” with his life just for the protection of humanity and to denounce all the riches in the world as the sources of happiness, which his fellow musicians preach. Apart from this, the lepers also appeal to his emotion to restrain him and also to put to the test the extent of his willingness (true conscience) and commitment, as reflected in the words of Female Leper:
Young man, may be after all…may be you shouldn’t try. I’m afraid suddenly, afraid for you! Look at you. You’re so young! We’re older at least. We’ve known life, given birth to children, made something of our lives! Even if death comes now, it cannot come with too much regret… (52)

It is a way to discourage Omele, but if true commitment is the bedrock of an action, no matter the implication, one would be ready to bear it. The positive result of an action (especially for the benefit of the majority) should be an over-riding impulse or motivating factor for a cause. Omele knows that he is taking a risk just for the happiness of the leper – couple against all pressures from his friends and the condition for using the charm. Omele’s words affirm this:

It doesn’t matter. I accept. Don’t blame yourselves, it was my decision. What was I before now anyway? A Corpse! So what does it matter? I remain a corpse. I accept… (5)

This statement is in consonance with the idea that no life is thrown away or wasted for the sake of humanity. If a sacrifice is made for the progress and advancement of society or individuals in need, the joy derivable from this gesture is more than living in a world of affluence. What is in the life of a common man if he cannot make a sacrifice? This is quite different from the theory of “scapegoatism” in the Soyinka plays—*The Strong Breed*, *Death and the King’s Horseman*, and *The Bacchae of Euripides*—where the playwright deals with the issues of carriers that are compelled to carry out the spiritual cleansing of the society because of their class or social status. Society forces Eman to be a carrier; tradition, as a unit of society, turns Elesin Oba into a purifying tool for the progress of society, while Tiresias accepts his fate as the carrier of the societal burden. Omele’s disposition is a clear indication that man can, if the need avails itself, submit, willingly, for the progress of humanity. He deprives himself of all the immediate needs and the material quest, for the salvation of humanity and the continuous existence of the will power of man. Omele says:

Because it doesn’t matter to me. I have only one life, and it’s not worth much. I’ve always lived in want, as a vagabond. Oh yes, my life itself has been like leprosy. So I am used to it, I can live like this for the rest of my wretched life. But look at them, aren’t they handsome as they are? They have a name, a career, they have kid. They have money in the bank, an insurance policy no doubt, THEIR LIFE IS A HYMN TO THE FUTURE. SOCIETY NEEDS THEM, NOT THE DREGS like me. (66)
Omele’s gesture towards a total submission to leprosy for the sake of the leprous couple is not of self-glorification or gratification or in expectation of the material rewards. Compare the above speech of Omele to the speech below, by Epo Oyinbo:

We have reduced suffering for ourselves! No more hunger and no more wandering for us! Finished, the Vagabond life. We’ve planted our feet down firmly in fortune! (59)

One may therefore conclude that society is purely dialectical in all the spheres of human endeavor, especially in the material and wealth acquisition. In spite of his outright rejection by his friends, Omele still identifies with them. He sees himself as the product of his society and therefore cannot dissociate himself from the society or isolate himself. An individual must, however, be ready to accept both the good and the bad side of life, even if he is not a part of the creation of such results. When Omele’s friends chase his witness away, he is asked by the Old Man to put up a charge against them, but out of his compassionate feeling he does not see the need for a fight. According to Omele:

Nothing. What shall I do against them? They were once my comrades. They taught me all I know. How to sing, and lie and fight. Shall I turn all that against them? I am part of them (65).

OSOFISAN AND THE GODS

Omele’s punishment (or is it reward?) for his compassionate disposition is caught in the webs of dialectics when the Old Man (Esu) appears in his characteristic trickery, by allowing the audience to subscribe to the debate. Omele is therefore rewarded while his friends are “writhing in agony as they are caught by the dreadful god, and gradually covered in spots” (68). In some of the plays of Osofisan, such as *No More the Wasted Breed*, he sees gods as non-superhuman, as the people see them to be when they cheat and oppress humanity. The status of the gods is given to them by man and they can be derobed by man. The gods can also fall or make mistakes like men; they are not perfect. In *Another Raft* the gods do not exist but the muscles and the forces of man can make man survive his predicaments. In *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, Osofisan demystifies the age-old perception of modern man’s attitudes towards the issues of Esu. Most Christians in Africa believe strongly that *Esu* is the same person referred to in the Bible as the Devil or Satan, whereas the appropriate parallel or the equivalent of the Christian’s Devil does not exist in the Yoruba pantheon. Esu is one of the deities in the Yoruba pantheon known as the “errand boy” of Orunmila. He is a “trickster god of revolt and unpredictable forces,” an embodiment of
“the principle of justice whose operation often eludes man’s predictive abilities” (Awodiya, 73). To any ordinary human being, Esu is synonymous to all forms of negative thought and deed of human beings. The tragic end of man and the eventual death, collapse, or total extinction of a society is regarded as the manifestation of the handiwork of Esu as replicated in the study of traditional African philosophy and religion using Western paradigms by Western trained scholars (Sophie B. Oluwole, 2007).

Osofisan wants us to believe that Esu, as a bad god, is only in our minds and does not exist, but that our own efforts and deeds bring about whatever results or situation in which we find ourselves. However, God creates the world with two sides like a coin – the good and the bad attributes – and therefore leaves man to make his choice, and the responsibility of Esu, according to Osofisan, is to oversee these affairs and dispense justice. Esu sees his power in the affairs of men as a divine one. Old Man says: “The owner of the World has created a balance between the forces of Good and those of Evil. He appointed Esu to watch over them...” (17). It is in this light that Osofisan finds the motif of Esu as the most relevant in determining the fate of the Minstrels who are in need. Their fate, of course, hinges on how their compassion can yield to the need of humanity. He does not go to them but they come to the crossroads to meet him with the hope of dining with him. Redio says: “We’ve come to the end of the road. And it looks like you can help us, as a priest of the gods” (17-18).

SEPETERI: THE CROSSROADS AND THE DESTINY OF MAN

The crossroads where Esu resides is the meeting point for the good and the bad attributes of humanity. It is a symbol of confusion which Esu himself represents. It provides a variety of choice for people to choose. Man could, through the crossroads, choose the road that leads to eternal tragedy or poverty. It is the choice of man that determines his success in life. Esu allows man to use his will power, through determination at the crossroads, to determine his doom, failure, or success. The Minstrels find it difficult to proceed on their journey when they get to the crossroads in search of food because they are unsure of where to get food. Symbolically each of them represents a road, which they must take. Their decision becomes a way out of their difficult situation. The crossroads, then, become a chessboard to the human beings and the gods. A man who cannot use his brain well in the game becomes a successful pawn in the hands of the gods. Esu puts the Minstrels to the test here in order to seek a new man who will change society through his selfless service and sacrifices to humanity. Male Leper says:
Esu Laaroye, lord of crossroads, trickster, he set you a test, to see whether between compassion and greed, you would know the road to take; between material wealth, so ephemeral and the unseen riches of tenderness… (68)

Osofisan sees both the crossroads and the Minstrels as metaphors to the contemporary social, political, and economic situations in society. Every society is at the crossroads as far as the situations of life are concerned. Man is therefore free to choose either the right panacea to his problems or pursue ‘worldly material’ and lead himself to eternal doom. The progress and the fate of man are therefore in his hands. Revolution should thus begin from within the man.

Orunmila is the molder and the symbol of knowledge and wisdom of humanity but the examination officer is Esu. However, *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* could be seen as the springboard for social change for its strong diagnosis of man’s attitude towards material acquisition and oppression. Materialism, to Osofisan is the bane of modern society because the average individual wants to consolidate his selfish and corrupt gains, leaving the idea of better society in the hands of the powerless, the oppressed. The political and economic life of society is being controlled by the greedy and corrupt few, and the only way to change society is to embark on a search for compassionate men. The oppressive class that the oppressed tries to break is seen as the model for the oppressed. What some oppressed people try to avoid is the immediate pains afflicted on them by their oppressors; they, too, want to oppress the people below them. In the case of the Minstrels they aspire to be in the position of affluence so that they can determine the life of the class below them. Consider Redio’s words:

Come here, boy! Have you swept the carpet this morning? The cars, you’ve washed them? And madam’s dirty clothes? Yes? You’ve bathed the kids? What of the dog, have you taken it for a walk? And, God, all this dust on the furniture! Why do you think I’m paying you all that money? As soon as you take your pay tomorrow, you have… you are sacked! Pack your load and leave the boy’s quarters! Don’t ask me where you’re going, idiot! Go to hell if you wish!… (42)

Osofisan strongly believes that the oppressed exhibit the trait of “dog eats dog” because they do not fight for true causes but selfish needs. He sees Omele as the only person aspiring to be nothing in his quest for struggle. This raises, therefore, a question left unanswered. How can collective force work when there are people with selfish motives outnumbering the few committed ones? If the collective force is strong with a true determination and conviction, society would be better for the collective good of the majority.

In his attempt to portray the gods as the reasoning entities, like man, Osofisan makes the gods – Esu, Obaluaye, Orunmila and Yeye Osun – to participate in
the play of man. He brings them closer to man as in the Greek plays. Though the Minstrels are made to see Esu as the Priest of Esu, Old Man, Orunmila, and Yeye Osun as Male Leper and Female Leper respectively, as part of the dramatic technique in the contradiction that makes the play a symbolic one. It should therefore not be interpreted as a play of lies and deception. Esu is known as trickster and Osofisan sees this motif of deception as the only way to test the nature of man in the world of an unending quest for wealth. In Soyinka’s *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973), Dionysus appears as the ordinary man but Osofisan uses this technique of making the gods to appear on stage to test man’s knowledge of himself. He believes that man must be brought out of the world of perpetual illusions to the world of reality. The reality in this case is in his self-realization.

*Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, like *Twingle-Twangle: A Twynning Tayle*, has some historical events that need to be pointed out. The play, *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, is set during a period when a coup has just taken place, and it has a metaphorical relevance to the Nigerian coup of 1983 led by Major General Mohammed Buhari and Brigadier General Tunde Idiagbon which dramatically sent the elected civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari packing. The excuse was based on the gross abuse of power and high level of corruption and sycophancy among the government officials. See Chief’s sarcasm:

> With the coup d’etat and the change of government in the capital.
> “The government changes, the people remain”. Let them go on with their fighting over there in the Capital! (1)

With the arrival of the new government the people are exposed to all forms of torture and inhuman treatment. For a proper understanding of why the military struck in 1983, another work should be read, for Osofisan catalogued this in his play, *Midnight Hotel*, and *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* provides the dilemma of a nation in transition and strong effect of the military take-over. Many of the civilian government apologists, sycophants, contractors, and businessmen were cowed with the various decrees, all in a bid to stamp out all forms of corruption and indiscipline. Nigerians never forget the historic WAR AGAINST INDISCIPLINE (WAI), which later became a common song and later changed to WAI-C during the late General Sanni Abacha’s regime, many people were either imprisoned or beaten and those who had the opportunity to escape went into exile.

The musicians in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* are the types of Minstrels (praise-singers) in the era of the Second Republic of Nigeria who became scavengers in their land because they were jobless. Epo Oyinbo’s words below justify this:

> The band has been proscribed. They said we play too much for the politicians. We were banned, and all our assets seized! So when do you think the new government will change its mind about us. (11)
The unbearable conditions of the Minstrels are a metaphor for the experience of the masses during the reign of a dictator. The only consolation is that, “Governments are not eternal. Some day there’ll be another one, with its ideas” (11), according to Redio. Osofisan converts and subverts history in order to give strength, in terms of relevance and authority, to his metaphor. It should be seen as a thesis that tries to project the idea that the society should not be made to suffer beyond human endurance if revolution is to be effected. It is only the living that carries on the revolution. To mix historical events with fiction in a dramatic piece like *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* is to make society to see itself within the ambit of the overall result of such a play. The dilemma of the crossroads, Sepeteri, the residence of Esu according to the Yoruba mythology, is the dilemma of the society that is going through a socio-political and economic transition. The dilemma in this case is as a result of the conflicting and vague (ambiguous) ideological points of view expressed or postulated as the panacea to the society’s problem.

Osofisan, in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, does not see the problem of society from the political point of view alone; he sees the moral question as the yardstick for measuring the sincerity and credibility of individuals’ commitment towards the advancement of their society. How sincere is the military or the civilian government in delivering the masses from protracted suffering? This posture, of course, does not seek to heighten the skepticism pervading the minds of people but to make the individuals to reexamine and redefine their positions and conscience with the aim of improving the status of humanity. In the “Song of Khaki and Agbada” Osofisan makes us to view the civilian and the military governments as the offshoots of corruption, gross embezzlement of public funds, and abuse of power. One is the “imitation” of the other:

Khaki and Agbada  
De two dey waka together  
Khaki comes to power  
Imitate Agbada!  
Agbada come to power  
And go dey do like Khaki  
Power dey sweet man pikin! (2)

The most fashionable ways of leaking (looting) the national treasury is “with immediate effect” or “with immediate dispatch” by buying a “jet for Mecca” or “going to shop in Rome.” They have also perfected the art of buying up food available in the market to the detriment of the common man. But “still Agbada no go care and then Khaki go thunder.”

The play treats the issue of human compassion as a pointer to the universal problem of oppression (in all ramifications) motivated by the “mad quest for class
and power” through the acquisition or wealth. Osofisan wants us to see man as the sole determining factor in the kind of life in which he finds himself. He is the foundation and the peak of his society. The immediate society of Osofisan provides a variety of great influences on his visionary posture. He sees his society (Nigeria) as a microcosm of Africa and a universal symbol. The socio-political and economic progress of a nation lies in its ability to disassociate itself from all forms of superstition about the existence of the god or goddess as the determining factor for the fate of man. It is only when the reality of the world of illusion is; x-rayed that man can see himself as his own god and goddess. Man is, therefore, not a property of the goddess. Man is also not a property of another man; he is the property of himself. Osofisan’s views of life are in consonance with the late existentialist philosopher and writer, Albert Camus who expressed the view that moral value has a primary role to play in the social, political, and economic life of a society, thus leading to national development.

REFERENCES


A WASTED BREED AND A GRASSHOPPER’S ORIKI: INTERROGATING IDEOLOGICAL CONCERNS AND CHARACTER METASTASIS IN SELECTED PLAYS OF FEMI OSOFSIAN

Hope O. Eghagha

What is the justice, when you hack a tree down, and blame the handle of the axe? (No More the Wasted Breed, 108)

A wasted Breed, we’re ready, at a signal, to forsake our deepest dreams, and take out a canoe in savage weather. (No More the Wasted Breed, 109)

INTRODUCTION

In most of his dramas, Femi Osofisan’s thematic preoccupations are firmly and consistently rooted in a strong didactic ideological paradigm—a conflict between the forces of capitalism and the oppressed people of society. The eternal struggle between social classes provides a focal point for us to appreciate his abiding concern for the plight of the ordinary man. In order to achieve this goal there is often a movement in character, a shift in ideology in the character. Metastasis comes in two forms: 1. a conversion from a bad case of extreme capitalism to understanding the injustices meted out to, and the dilemma of, the oppressed, or 2. an attempt to abandon ideals for the lures of capitalism. It is in this context that we use the Grasshopper’s oriki’, a predilection to move on, to abandon ship once the milieu or circumstances become inclement. Principles
are abandoned for the smell of filthy lucre. This predilection for metastasis is a graphic depiction of crass opportunism which currently bedevils the Nigerian political class. Within the context of this study the wasted breed refers to characters who fail to apprehend society from a progressive perspective and so are locked in time and condition. These concerns as explored in such plays as *The Oriki of a Grasshopper, Morountodun, The Chattering and the Song,* and *No More the Wasted Breed* shall be the focus of this chapter.

Femi Osofisan is easily a writer with a radical consciousness as demonstrated by both the ideological issues which the characters in the dramatic canvas of his plays experience and the choices which they are compelled to make in the process of self or communal reaffirmation. His heroes are invariably pro-people as they engage the forces of oppression, disunity, and retrogression. In his drama we encounter some characters who understand *ab initio* the contradictions of their societies and attempt to effect change through dissension or rebellion.

Some other characters change their predisposition in the process, either positively or negatively. Even when we read his other “ritualistic” plays like *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrel* or *Many Colours Make the Thunder King,* the quest for supremacy by the forces of oppression are clearly in contention over control of the structures of power—traditional or modern. Economic and political considerations are also crucial to the general concerns of Osofisan. Power is not (and should not be) an end in itself; it is and ought to be a means to an end.

The ordinary people are not in control of power, the aphrodisiac which the mighty people in society deploy in the process of exploiting the masses. Even the socially conscious are sometimes dispossessed of political power until they re-group and initiate survival strategies. Osofisan seems to believe in the need to empower the downtrodden in preparation for the radical change that society needs. Empowerment comes through knowledge, through exposure, and radicalization of thought.

Osofisan has been persistent and consistent in the three genres of literature which he has experimented on. His forte is drama, however, with more than fifty published plays to his credit. Published in poetry, as Okinba Launko, this prolific and metaphorically ambidextrous writer has shown an infinite capacity to reflect on the condition of humanity using a framework provided by Yoruba society. In “He Strove to Rise” (*Commemorations,* 2007), for example, writing as Okinba Launko, Osofisan expresses the dilemma of the artist in the form of questions:

how does one weld dreams  
Into the soles of running feet?  
He asked, how do you carve your pain  
Into the ears of the uncaring?  
........................................  
And he found the answer one day
On a stake,
When they put the rope round his neck. (68)

It is a society in a state of flux, confronting new realities, new and strange acts of madness, new cultures, dynamics hitherto foreign and taboo to the traditional values of the microcosmos which we are familiar with. In this new society a writer is allowed to stand apart and x-ray the world set adrift by the men and women who control the levers of power. It is not enough for the artist to be an entertainer or a jester; he has to intervene as a critic, an active, if vicarious, participant-observer in the scheme of things. To keep aloof and refrain from proffering solutions would be endangering both one’s safety and the body politic. The traditional saying that, “when one fails to warn a neighbor against eating cocoyam in the evening one should be ready for a night call to treat the neighbor” is very apt here. This, in my view, is the abiding image of the writer as his neighbor’s keeper particularly in Africa.

But being a neighbor’s keeper when the neighbor is a scoundrel or a dictator in the mold of Field Marshall Idi Amin Dada or General Sani Abacha is tantamount to endangering one’s life. The writer is then perceived as a busybody, fit for the goals of bloody tyrants. It is worse for the writer if his ideological orientation is “perverse,” fundamentally opposed to the dominant ideology. A writer with a radical orientation therefore becomes an isolated man. This phenomenon however is not strange to Osofisan. He once remarked in a theater workshop class which this writer invited him to in 1986 at the University of Lagos that a writer, “is a lonely person and gets the more isolated if he has to stay away from Friday funeral ceremonies and Saturday weddings in order to practise his profession of writing.” But to be isolated as a result of one’s ideological convictions is a different matter. It is the price a principled writer has to pay.

Osofisan’s radical and/or socialist orientation is as evident in Morountodun as it is in Another Raft, Once upon Four Robbers, and No More the Wasted Breed or even Midnight Hotel. For example, according to Ukaegbu, in Another Raft Osofisan demonstrates the “irrelevance (of ritual) and by implication, the inefficacy of (the) scapegoat and Yemosa to society’s survival” (187). The need for man to strive to put his fate in his hands, not in some supernatural force is emphasized by Another Raft, a play that takes up the thematic concerns of J.P. Clark’s The Raft. To be sure, these issues are not rigidly compartmentalized in the plays, for we find a platform for radical consciousness provided through the framework of ritual and myth.

The correlation between myth, history, and contemporary consciousness is aptly explored in Morountodun and to some extent in The Chattering and the Song. History ought to be employed to create or recreate positive values in society; understanding history removes the element of fear for the events in contemporary times. It also challenges deification of characters who ordinarily would be seen
as men of great talent and skill. Indeed, with such an apprehension of history, the pantheon of gods would be reduced or completely obliterated. And so, even when the superstructure of an Osofisan play has a mythic paradigm the overriding concern is to appropriate it for a radical purpose. Myth, as we know, is not exclusive to the past; some are created or recreated in tandem with the dynamics of modern society. In Osofisan’s worldview, traditional myths have to be deployed not from an essentialist point of view, but from a progressive and radical standpoint. Biodun Jeyifo makes this same point in his seminal essay, written in a reflective and celebrative essay which he wrote in the wake of Wole Soyinka winning the Nobel. He asserted that Marxists “expect that a contemporary writer would write of myths and essences with a view to relativize them historically by showing how they are transformed by historical forces” (178). Our thesis therefore is that in his plays Osofisan has transformed the mythopoeic concerns contained in traditional Yoruba cosmogony into a tool of radical conscientization.

Myths, and indeed rituals, as essences are somewhat antithetical to radical thought and progress. These traditional forms for expressing latent fears or perception of the cosmological order are located within a paradigm of superstition. Adopted as metaphors however they can serve as propelling forces for social change. Thus the Moremi myth in Morountodun propels Titubi initially into a defender of the state, of entrenched capitalist interests. Metastasis comes later through association and enlightenment resulting in a repudiation of what her previous heroine stood for.

Within the context of this paper “a grasshopper’s oriki” refers to the characters who abandon their original philosophical or ideological convictions as a result of existing challenges. In The Oriki of a Grasshopper, Moni the ideologue sums it up in the form of a question: “Don’t you know the oriki of a grasshopper? When the forest heats up, in a hot season,” the grasshopper moves to another field (191).

Osofisan’s plays are located culturally within a Yoruba milieu, so established by use of Yoruba language in songs and expressions (including proverbs, wise sayings), background worldview drawing upon the Yoruba pantheon of deities, and costuming. For, as we know, these histories in dramatic form are meant for the stage, to entertain and to raise the level of awareness of the reader. The cultural milieu of the plays remains familiar, drawn from folklore and history, with a view to using the familiar as a means of expressing the unfamiliar.

RITUAL APPROPRIATION AND OSOFISAN’S DRAMATURGY

Osofisan has said that he appropriates ritual to unmask the hidden, unresolved tensions inherent in traditional myths. He states further that this has become imperative because ritual is no longer adequate as a rational explanation
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or prognosis in the challenges of the modern world. The playwright expresses this view succinctly in one of his scholarly writings, “Ritual and the Revolutionary Ethos”:

And it is not only that the machinery provided by the old society for dealing with chaos has lost its capacity for total effect, it is also that the very metaphysical raison d’être of that machinery has been eroded with the advent of a new socio-political philosophy…the flux of social transformation stands unrelieved in the crisis of ritual (92).

So, whether Osofisan is exploring myth or ritual, the declared goal is ultimately subversive. Poignantly, it is the Priest of Olokun who makes this allusion in No More the Wasted Breed. In the very presence of Olokun and Elusu, their chief priest declares:

Most of the things which mattered at the time of my father have ceased to count. The laws of our youth have turned overnight into the relics of history. The times have changed, and so did our people…the old customs have crumbled, the old gods fled into retreat (99).

This recourse to myths and history to question political tyranny, observes Sola Adeyemi, serves to “distance and shelter the dramatist from the menace of present terrors on the continent….Osofisan’s dramaturgy draws heavily on African myths and ritual forms, whose repertory he has raided and subverted to propose an alternative ideological position” (127).

In the course of teaching Osofisan in the university system in the last twenty-odd years, most postgraduate students I have referred to the playwright for consultation or interviews have been shocked when confronted with the writer’s “I’m not a Marxist” stance. According to Muyiwa Awodiya, Osofisan does not preach any of these misunderstood ideologies but prefers to simply stay around a core of ideas that, “I believe in and let this group of ideas coalesce towards a progressive political resolution of our problems” (37). What is the underlying ideology in Osofisan’s dramaturgy? With the blurred or disappearing edges on ideological blocks, is it still fashionable to label writers on the basis of political ideology? How may one deal with the fundamental issues raised in Morountodun, and the oblique innuendoes in Who is Afraid of Solarin for example? Are we capable of reconciling the extremes represented by the character of Shango in Many Colours Make the Thunder-King and Saluga in No More the Wasted Breed? What about the robbers’ whose propensity to dispossess people of their wealth is given an ideological coloration?

There is a continuous flexibility in experimentation to reflect the dynamics of the society so faithfully depicted in the fifty-odd plays ascribed to the prolific
pen of our honored playwright. In all of this the playwright’s ideological convictions remain firm, whether he is combating the menace of official corruption in *Who is Afraid of Solarin* (translated into Yoruba as *Yéèpà, Solarin N bò*) or in *Midnight Hotel*. Osofisan stands on the side of the people, the oppressed majority in the Nigerian political landscape. One general worry about the prodigious output of Osofisan is why his works have not been published by the notable publishing houses around the world. Athol Fugard continues to be referred to as the most active living dramatist in Africa today. Perhaps that title ought to be Femi Osofisan’s. If Osofisan had relocated abroad, perhaps publishing his enormous contributions by the so-called reputable houses would have given him much-deserved international attention. The playwright himself has resisted pressures to relocate. In an interview which he granted Ugbabe and Aire in 1995, he observed: “I have never felt totally comfortable outside the country. It’s not that the pressure hasn’t been there, a tremendous amount of pressure for us to relocate. As I said, if you look at the problem with publishing, what is the point in writing if you don’t have an outlet for people to even read it” (63). On the Nigerian political scene where political patronage can only be guaranteed when subscribed to the ethos of corruption, can an academic who ventures into politics make headway without abandoning sound ethical principles? Too many highly-reputable persons have gone into government in the past only to be sullied by allegations and counter-allegations of corruption.

**OSOFISAN’S APPREHENSION OF SOCIETY**

Writers, particularly in Africa, have an obligation to society, both as writers and as the social consciences of the nations and countries in the continent. The many years of military rule placed a huge burden on all citizens, and in particular writers who started functioning as activists. In Nigeria the writers’ community led by Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and J. P. Clark attempted to prevent the military junta of Ibrahim Babangida from executing a writer, Maj. Gen. Mamman Vatsa, who had been accused of plotting a coup to overthrow the government of the day. Soyinka’s personal and risky intervention in the prelude to the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War was also an act of serving as a conscience of the voiceless majority.

Against this background we can appreciate Osofisan’s predilection for the political, social, and cultural challenges of the Nigerian State. Whether he draws from a contemporary character such as Tai Solarin in *Who is Afraid of Solarin* or from a mythical cum historical character like Shango in *Many Colours of the Thunder King*, he expresses concern about the politics of using power for the communal good. In *Who’s Afraid of Solarin* for example, fashioned after Nikolai Gogol’s *The Government Inspector*, the image of a Solarin sworn to fighting cor-
ruption in the modern Nigerian State is evoked. Officials of the local government have dipped their hands as usual into the public till. As Commissioner for Public Complaints in the Western States of Nigeria, Solarin had created a reputation for fearlessness and confronting corrupt politicians. An impending visit to the local government therefore forms the background to the play.

_No More the Wasted Breed_ is Osofisan’s response to Wole Soyinka’s _The Strong Breed_ and the latter’s contention that his generation of Nigerian citizens were a wasted breed, owing to their failure to leave a worthy legacy for succeeding generations. Soyinka’s hero, Eman, sacrifices his life for the rest, albeit in a round-about manner. In Osofisan’s retort, the playwright takes on tradition and concludes that the past can only be relevant if we appropriate its spirit in tune with contemporary and empirical thinking. To remain subservient to the dictates of tradition without a thorough interrogation is tantamount to retrogression. It is not the duty of individuals to alter the course of events; change is the effort of the collective. As a result, even when an individual fails in acts of courage, the struggle continues. This is the lesson in Marshall’s death in _Morountodun_. The wasted breed would seem to be fixated in old ways, the culture of unquestioning acceptance of traditional values. As we read _Another Raft_, for example, the playwright demystifies the gods and the world of the supernatural.

THE IDEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Fundamentally, Osofisan seems to be concerned with how the conscience, constructed on sound ideological principle, can be compromised in the face of debilitating odds. His perspective of society is predicated on a radical view of change. And, as we know, perspective is crucial to appreciating the nuances of art. Perspectives, writes George Lukacs, helps to define “the course and content (of literature); it draws together the threads of narration; it enables the artist to choose between the important and the superficial, the crucial and the episodic” (34). As writers or activists there is the raw knowledge that society is inherently hostile to a firm commitment to ideals, which often clash with the operative philosophy of “Chop make I chop.”

In _Once upon Four Robbers_, set after the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970, Osofisan takes up the issue of armed robbery and gives it an ideological face. The four robbers are ideologically motivated to rob and survive as a group as a sign of protest against the inequities of society. At the end of the play the audience is called upon to debate the appropriateness of a public execution for the robbers. The cause of the “the group” instead of individual gain is highly stressed. The targets of the robberies are mindless capitalist women who are crudely interested in exploitation and profiteering. The playwright captures this approach to business in the _Song of the Market_.

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69
The lure of profit has conquered our souls
and changed us into cannibals;
oh praise the selfless British
who with the joyous sound
of minted coins and gold
brought us civilization

................................
and strutting round like lords,
let’s count our sons!
Let’s also say
As we collect our profit
That life is heaven on earth! (46-7)

The unrelenting capitalist, represented by the market women need to be dispossessed of their loot. This duty falls on the armed robbers.

I ideology currently carries a hostile toga, attracting itself a certain aura of anachronism. Such characters are perceived as antediluvian and do not fit into the compartmentalization of contemporary discourse. But when we situate The Oriki of a Grasshopper for example within its historical context, the attempt to abandon ship becomes lucid. In modern terms, therefore, we speak of standing by sound ethical principles in spite of their seeming unpopularity in a world of tumbling cultural and social values. It is in this context that we understand Imaro when he makes that tumultuous declaration to his lover/student/acolyte: “Run away then! And shout it to all the comrades! Imaro has turned tail and joined them! The tall socialist obelisk has crashed down in the market place of capital, and broken into fragment! Imaro is down! Three cheers for capitalism...All because I spoke to Claudius, my friend, at a moment of stress, and I allowed him to comfort me!” (202).

THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

The exigencies offered by the postcolonial experiences of most African societies have made the desire and need for freedom highly imperative. Udenta recognizes the phenomenon of “utilisation of the dramatic medium as a means of propagating contrasting and irreconcilable ideologies, and the struggles for the control of the conscience of men” (25). Bertolt Brecht’s oeuvre was his strong views on how drama can be used as a tool for reawakening. In this regard, the works of Osofisan have paralleled that of Brecht. For Osofisan, too many people are in one form of bondage or another. In No More the Wasted Breed, no less a character than Olokun himself attests to this desire for freedom when he warns Elusu his goddess wife, “time is no longer on our side. See men have changed. They have eaten the salt of freedom and moved beyond our simple caprices” (109). Freedom therefore becomes crucial in appreciating the thematic thrust of the plays
of Osofisan. The Chattering and the Song which preaches a revolution to overturn
the spirit of waste echoes strongly the values of unity, tenacity, fusion of progres-
sive forces against an inimitable foe. To be sure, there are different dimensions and
connotations of freedom, for in some of the plays the struggle is to extricate people
from the shackles of ignorance and the binds of sentimental atavism.

Osofisan dwells on the theme of freedom in The Oriki of a Grasshopper,
using the framework of a students’ or campus’ resistance to the government of
the day. Guided by the intellectual contributions of lecturers, the students believe
in creating a society where the fundamentals of human existence are guaran-
teed. They recall the students’ opposition to a pact that would have been signed
between the government and a foreign power which would have made the country
permanently subservient to the control of the power in question. The students
are still young and vibrant, full of idealism which often fires the imagination of
patriots. Moni, the young lover of the Imaro the radical lecturer, becomes disil-
usioned by the demonstrated weakness of her mentor.

CHARACTERS’ METASTASIS

Why do people change? What accounts for a repudiation of past values and
the embrace of new ones? Is character change simply a psychological experience
or something determined by one’s social class? Is it a manifestation of inher-
ent weakness? When can character change be said to be progressive? Imaro the
revolutionary is at a loss about this phenomenon when he asks his rich friend
Claudius, “Perhaps this is the chance I’ve been seeking all these years, to find
out what breaks them. Even our best students. Why they never come back except
to show off their Mercedes. Their glittering lace garments and gold teeth, their
bejewelled mistresses” (Oriki of a Grasshopper, 190). Therefore, the comfort-
able and bourgeois Claudius almost sweeps Imaro the die-hard socialist from the
struggle represented by the microcosmic world of the university campus. Claudius
protects his friend Imaro from arrest during a students’ demonstration. As far as
Imaro is concerned, Claudius’ act of kindness has turned him into an “outcast,
denounced by friends.” It is a period of illumination for Moni when she comes
to realize the fundamental contradiction in the character of her lover, friend,
revolutionary inspirer, and mentor. In a moment of revolutionary epiphany, she
declaims her erstwhile revolutionary ideologue:

I needed someone who could fly. And you gave me a promise of
wings. But alas! You are only a grasshopper, powerless before the
wind. When the forest begins to burn, you’re just as trapped as all
things... (201).
The different characters try to confront the realities of the Nigerian situation, what Onookome refers to while discussing the Nigerian home video industry as, “confusing representations of these postcolonial realities of the present and the incomprehensible logic of the post-modernity that drives the eccentric currents of globalization” (5). Confronted by the harsh economic climate of the 1990s (particularly the contradictions in the Structural Adjustment Programme [SAP]) and the fatal attraction offered by juicy appointments which the different military junta dangled before them, some members of the left secured positions with the ruling government. Indeed some credible and respected academics were offered juicy political appointments by the Ibrahim Babangida administration. Babangida gave the impression of a true freedom lover, a man who needed intellectuals to bolster the program of his military dictatorship.

Even Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka worked as Marshall (head) of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), an organization committed to restoring sanity on Nigerian roads. Whereas Soyinka approached and performed his duty as a national assignment, the military dictator seemed to have perceived it as another apple dangled before a critic. A credible and respected Nigerian academic, the late Professor Olikoye Ransome-Kuti also functioned as Health Minister during this period. Strictly speaking these were not ideological turn-coats in the Osofisan sense. However, working with the military at that time as a way of getting on affected a lot of academics. A distinguished Nigerian radical who served the Abacha regime as Federal Attorney-General was considered a disappointment by many. Sadly he suffered at the end when his son was brutally murdered by men of the Abacha death squad.

Therefore, change in character in the drama of Osofisan is a reflection of the dynamics of Nigerian society. Imaro nearly undergoes this metastasis in *The Oriki of a Grasshopper*. In the aftermath of arrests on campus, Imaro does have a rethink about the whole idea of struggle to liberate the people from poverty. His acolyte, a mere student, succeeds in restoring his sanity. It is a trying period both for his principles and his commitment to liberation. At such times the character calls to question the very *raison d’être* for struggle, by focusing on the never-ending conflicts, the betrayals, and the uncertainty about the future.

In *No More the Wasted Breed*, Saluga alludes to this change when Biokun weakens during a moment of crisis and offers to bear sacrifice to Olokun in order to save the life of his only child. “Biokun,” he says, trying to say that, in a time like this, filled with confusion and distress, it is quite normal that some of us should break, that some of our idealism should dissolve like sea-salt” (93). In *Morountodun* the change is positive, with Titubi killing the conservative and exploitative spirit of Moremi in her to become the heroine of the struggle. She declares after a period of self-evaluation and change, “And that was it. I knew at last I had won. I knew I had to kill the ghost of Moremi in my belly. I am not
Moremi! Moremi served the State, was the State, was the spirit of the ruling class. But it is true that the ruling class is not always right” (70).

The pressure groups and temptations are formidable. Often they are hinged on material rewards, enveloped in political appointments. The Obasanjo administration, from 1999 to 2007, restated this philosophy of governance when a minister declared that a colleague who was invited to “chop” abused the privilege by breaking the code of silence. The invitation to “chop” was a poignant reference to the pervasive corruption among the political class. Access to privileges in an unjust society is the driving force in some of the characters’ decisions to change their ideological belief or to self-compromise.

CONCLUSION

Osofisan’s dramatic radical oeuvres have provided an ambit for making comments on Nigerian society, using the Yoruba worldview and cultural milieu as a springboard. The plays speak for Africa, even though the settings are unmistakably Yoruba or Nigerian. He tells the stories of the dispossessed, the minorities whose voices are often alienated from the discourse dominated by the worldview of the center. In order to achieve his radical disposition he makes use of a socialist purview by questioning the rationale behind a primitive acquisition of capital. We have noted his refusal and objections to labelling. A play, that is to say, an author’s work, should speak for itself.

The tensions reflected in the plays remain unresolved. The perennial conflict between forces sacred and forces profane, for example, remain part of the consciousness of most traditional African societies. In some cases, animism has been replaced by the spiritism of the new-generation churches, the so called Pentecostal Movement. Thus, as Osofisan’s plays come to an end, he leaves the issues to the audience for deep reflection having provided enough food for thought. This is a deliberate strategy; if conflicts among and between human beings have not been resolved, it makes no sense whatsoever portraying a fade of conflict resolution in drama. This is the point made in Morountodun when the Director says:

But still, you must not imagine that what we presented here tonight was the truth. This is a theatre, don’t forget, a house of dream and phantom struggles. The real struggle, the real truth, is out there, among you, on the street, in your homes; in your daily living and dying. (79)

As we have contended in this chapter, characters of any gender who abandon or sacrifice their principles, friends, and age-long commitment on the altar of power or any other contemporary convenience believe in the Oriki of the grasshopper. Biodun Jeyifo dwells elaborately on this theme of betrayal in the introduc-
tory essay in the festschrift in honor of Osofisan referring to the philosopher who vigorously asserted that if it ever came to the choice of betraying one’s friend or one’s country he hoped he would have the courage to betray his country first (See Biodun Jeyifo’s essay in *Portraits for an Eagle* edited by Sola Adeyemi.).

Based on the prodigious and diverse output of this great playwright, Osofisan deserves greater critical and more profound attention from the international community than he currently enjoys. In Nigeria, he is arguably the most performed playwright, with audiences of all different levels enjoying the *tour de force* of his dramatic composition. We have contended that perhaps if his plays had been published by the so-called big houses the story would have been different. Prose writing seems to enjoy greater patronage from the publishing houses and international awards.

**Note**

1. This is a near approximation of live and let live; yet, its connotations are deeper, immoral. It means one should shut his eyes to corruption and help himself as well. Simply put, it means let’s all plunder the wealth; don’t stop anyone from stealing; just steal.

**References**


________. “Ritual and the Revolutionary Ethos: The Humanistic Dilemma in...”


CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN FEMI OSOFISAN’S ANOTHER RAFT AND FAREWELL TO A CANNIBAL RAGE: MODELS FOR THE ATTAINMENT OF PEACE IN KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

Alexander Kure

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is essential in literature especially in drama. Without conflict, the plot will have very little dramatic action. Meanwhile, conflict, as a result of overt or covert ethno-religious differences among a people, a very regular feature especially in Kaduna State, Nigeria, has not led to any dramatic progress in terms of the desired infrastructural development or the strengthening of human relations. In Kaduna State, at the slightest opportunity, it is not unusual to hear rumors of impending or real conflict. This chapter briefly examines the causes, form, nature, scope, and impact of the major conflicts that have occurred in Kaduna State since its creation on August 27, 1987. It also discusses the different unsuccessful methods that have been adopted to resolve the conflicts. Because the various methods of conflict resolution have continuously failed to yield the desired effect hence the persistence of conflicts in the state this chapter proposes a way out through an exploration of the conflicts represented in two plays by Femi Osofisan, Another Raft and Farewell to a Cannibal Rage to show how his methods at conflict resolution could be considered as alternative models. The chapter contends that though conflicts are usual rather than unusual decimals in human existence, their occurrence should not be in perpetuity. Therefore, it can be deduced from the two selected plays by Femi Osofisan that a people can be
reunited at all times through the spirit of forgiveness, forgetfulness, accommodation, and a rejection of the overblown philosophy of predestination.

In literature, conflict is the struggle upon which the work is based. In other words Ashiko quotes Strauch (1974) to further explain that “it is the struggle which grows out of the interplay of opposing forces in a plot”. There is always basically one central conflict in a play but several others can always take their bearing from the central conflict. Conflict in literature may be of many kinds. First, human beings may be in conflict with one another (either as individuals or as a group). Secondly, an individual may be in conflict with his environment. The third type is an individual who may be in conflict with himself. Generally a literary work first develops the nature of the conflict upon which the plot is based, and then shows the various reactions of the characters to the situation in which they find themselves, and concludes by showing the consequences of the various conflicts. The outcome of the various conflicts in the work is what is known as the resolution. In other words, the way the writer ends the conflict (or solves the problem) is the resolution. Therefore, conflict is the gradual working out of the consequences of the action that leads to the climax.

The foregoing briefly establishes the meanings of the terms “conflict” and “resolution” to ensure appropriate literary examination of the two kinds of conflict in Femi Osofisan’s two plays Another Raft and Farewell to a Cannibal Rage. This exploration shows how the conflicts in the two plays, personal and group, are amicably and conclusively resolved using the proactive models of tolerance, forgiveness, accommodation, and the difficult but important reinterpretation of the relationship between the people and the gods to the delight of the different characters and the communities they hail from.

The essay confirms from the beginning that violent ethno-religious conflicts are a recurring decimal in Kaduna State. It also confirms that successive governments, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies, spirited individuals, and so on, have often made efforts to ensure that the conflicts are resolved. These efforts, the essay notes, have often failed because they have principally been institutional as opposed to targeting the very essence of man, namely the conscience of the human heart. The people in the state should be made to understand the need to agree in order to bring into practice the essence of true peaceful co-existence. Therefore, the essay argues that, the methods of conflict resolution in the selected plays can serve as models for achieving conflict resolution in the ethno-religious violent prone Kaduna State-Nigeria, as they are based on an understanding and appropriate interpretation of variables that include ethnicity and religion.

However, it may be pertinent to observe at this juncture that the root causes of conflicts in Kaduna State are historical and multidimensional in nature. From the pre-colonial through the colonial period and beyond, these various reasons have continued to make efforts at conflict resolution useless. For example, history
as taught in schools regarding communities in Kaduna State, usually states that Zazzau (Zaria), located in the northern part of the state and dominated by Muslim Hausa-Fulani, conquered and dominated the communities to its south, east, and south-west. This notion in history, though misinterpreted as in above, to justify the subjection of the many ethnic groups living south of Kaduna State the majority of who are Christians and who form the larger majority of the population of the state as per the last census figures in Nigeria in 2006, has been debunked by even the Kaduna State Government itself.

In addition, documents left behind in the National Archives Kaduna by the Colonial Government show that the authentic histories of these communities indicate that they had not been conquered hence that claim had remained submerged in emirate claims and fabrications. Other researchers have also concluded that History has it that it is a fact that there were sometimes hostile relations between Zazzau and her neighbors but just as a document left behind by the Colonial Government shows, these relations hardly involved conquest. Independent researchers say the above misrepresentation of facts even continued with the advent of colonialism so much so that the colonialists did all they could to ensure the perpetuation of this domination of the southern part of present day Kaduna State by Zazzau. For example, Bonnat suggests that “with the independence of Nigeria and up until the creation of Chiefdoms in 1995 which afforded communities in the southern part of the state the right to rule themselves, the southern part of Kaduna State had three types of traditional authorities: the independent chiefs as existed in Maro’a, Kagoro, and Kwoi; the dependent district heads appointed by the Fulani emirs of Zazzau and Jema’a as in Lere, Kagoma, Zangon Kataf, and Kachia (amongst many); and the traditional religious leaders, the actual custodians of the people’s traditions, who were suppressed by the emirs and colonialists.” Lugard and in many other colonial documents that are to be found in the National Archives in Kaduna confirm the above and suggest that “all through these periods, the people south of present day Kaduna State never saw either the appointees of the Emir of Zazzau or those of Jema’a as people that qualified to be called the traditional rulers of the people.” These imposed rulers, records indicate were, until 1995, the representatives of Islamic potentates and were the lords of non-Muslims wherever they were posted to rule. Bonnat and other contributors on the issue deduces from these facts that “the effect is that it is only the people south of Kaduna State in Nigeria who had (and still have) people who themselves were conquered and ruled by aliens, still claiming dominance over other peoples for allegedly having conquered them way back in another century; a claim that has been seen to have been debunked”. To him “the desire for dominance is further compounded by the desire of this group to see themselves as the real owners of the land they took from a passively accommodating people”.

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Consequent upon the above brief introduction and to discuss the focus of the essay, the chapter consists of four sections. Other than this first section which forms the introduction, the second section provides an overview of the conflict scenario in Kaduna State since its creation on August 27, 1987. It also discusses the causes, form, nature, scope, impact, and the various methods that have always been used to resolve the conflicts. Further, it shows why those methods have always failed or have been doomed to fail. The third section of the chapter undertakes an in-depth exploration of the selected plays by Femi Osofisan with a view to locating the various conflicts and methods used to resolve the conflicts in the plays. The chapter then proceeds to show how those methods, used successfully in the plays, could be adopted as models by Kaduna State to resolve its perennial violent ethno-religious conflicts. The final section, ties up the issues raised and concludes that for Kaduna State to finally curtail or end the incessant spades of conflicts that occur often in the state there is the need to apply by preaching the willful development and adoption of the spirits of forgiveness, forgetfulness, accommodation, reconciliation, and understanding of the fact that man has been endowed by God the spirit of knowing what constitutes good and evil hence they could determine their fates in the state.

AN OVERVIEW OF CONFLICTS IN KADUNA STATE

This essay revolves around the violent ethno-religious conflicts in Kaduna State and the various efforts that have been employed to resolve them. It notes that since its creation in 1987, through various leaderships, “Kaduna State has been striving towards achieving integration towards realizing the task of meaningful development”. However, while this process has been going on, a disintegrative force with age-long antecedents which manifests in incessant ethno-religious conflicts has remained pervasive. Ethnicity and religion, as a result of the polarization of the state into the predominantly Christian south and the Muslim north with accompanying identical cultures, are cultural phenomena which have played dominant roles in the socio-political organization of Kaduna State throughout its history. But more than ethnicity, the two contending religious institutions, Christianity and Islam, have served to meet certain needs in Kaduna State. Because different religions have varying orientations, Max Weber, cited in Rotgak (2004), says

…each major religion of the world has developed its distinctive orientation towards all aspects of social life...these differences have had profound consequences for the development of human society. All religious groups are continuously shaping and molding the personalities of their adherents who then as private individuals, staff the
The observation by Max Weber is the crux of the relationships between adherents of different religions and between the religions, state, and society. Religion has been neatly woven into the political, social, and economic facets of societies. Within this context, Makarfi’s opinion on this can be summarized to indicate that social reality and phenomena are always often interpreted in religious terms. Therefore, he exposes further that because religion can be a major disruptive force in society, it has, for example, “been employed to foment problems resulting in political and other upheavals in Kaduna State. Indeed, it has engendered not only fratricidal killings, wanton destruction of property, but created very sharp political cleavages within the state.”

Makarfi further exposes that in Kaduna State, “religion and ethnicity have been interwoven into every other facet of societal existence so much that every conflict between groups in the state tends to be simultaneously interpreted as always ethno-religious in nature”. Therefore, though “it is still possible to distinguish among conflicts that have their origin in religion, ethnicity, economy, politics,” the situation in Kaduna State shows that causes of conflicts always often dovetail to bear ethno-religious colorations.

The character of ethno-religious conflicts in Kaduna State is such that they most often end in violence. “They involve a threat or actual execution of acts which have the potential capacity to inflict physical, emotional, or psychological injury on a person, or group of persons.” Though the violent ethno-religious crises experienced by the polity in Kaduna State may only be symptoms of the multidimensional conflicts in the polity, this chapter posits that “every form of interaction among human beings and groups can generate conflict”. This is because “conflict is the spice of every society and everyday life. It tests the fragility or vulnerability of the state and creates the basis for future amelioration or adjustments”. However, ethno-religious motivated conflicts that “go beyond certain thresholds of human existence are detrimental to the very survival of the state, precisely because they threaten the consensual basis of the association”. The essay supports Elaigwu’s view when he also suggests that conflicts, for whatever reason, “which emanate from non-recognition of the claims of others to issues of conflict (for example, excluding others from sharing in crucial items of allocation) could be very dangerous for the system”. Such conflicts “mobilize total loyalties of the people and tend to defy all attempts at effecting desirable compromise”. On the other hand, he continues, “conflicts which result from the nature of distribution are less dangerous to the survival of the community”. Since the claims of others are recognized in this case, the only issue of “conflict is over the items of conflict such as how items worthy of allocation are shared or how compromise is struck between competing claims.”
One could borrow the idea expressed by Falola and Rotgak when they talk of Northern Nigeria in separate works but apply the same thinking to Kaduna State that conflicts are purely ethno-religious based. Though could still argue for the existence of some causes of conflicts other than the usual ethno-religious reasons in Kaduna State, it is true that in Kaduna State, it is ethnicity and religion more than any other factors that have become dangerously fused into the body polity of the state and have combined to become a major centrifugal force threatening the state. For example it shows, sadly, that out of all the socio-cultural and technological values bequeathed to Nigeria in general by Arab and western imperialisms, Gofwen posits that “only religion can be said to be upheld beyond the level of dependency” but adds that “both religions since their infusion have been indigenously institutionalized and revolutionized”. Thus, in Kaduna State today, there is a proliferation of churches and mosques which put together outnumber social amenities. Furthermore, he says that “religious groups have evolved from a relatively obscure position into a formidable and prominent one”. No wonder, ethno-religious conflicts have had far reaching implications for the building of a virile state. Specifically, Makarfi (2005) and Elaigwu’s (2005a and 2005b) positions on this shows that issues like those of security, economic, political, and social implications but the most fundamental implication being the inhibition of the development of a feeling and rights of citizenship with the attendant weak loyalty to the state and continuing strong ethnic and religious loyalties have been the effect of the effects of religious influence. However, Makarfi observes that a “pre-condition for stability and any form of harmonious existence is the maintenance of a relatively moderate tension and tolerance among contending forces”. Such moderation is facilitated by the resolution of the basic issues before new ones emerge. But he quickly admonishes that “this cannot be effectively accomplished within an environment characterized by the continuous heightening of tension along ethno-religious lines”.

Since its establishment, Kaduna State has experienced many violent conflicts. Makarfi’s very detailed discourse on this boils down to the fact that given her pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial experiences, the challenges to resolve these various conflicts have been daunting. Paradoxically, the welfare of composite ethno-religious groups within the state depends on the realization of the goal of building a unified state.

For the record, other than those potent conflicts that occurred before the present Kaduna State was excised from the old Kaduna State which comprised the whole of the present Katsina State in 1987, some of the major conflicts that have been witnessed since its rebirth, as compiled variously by Elaigwu include the February 1988 wave of religious riots, ostensibly among students in Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna, but which spread to other parts of the state. There was also Zangon–Kataf communal crisis in 1992 between the Atyap Christian community...
and Hausa-Fulani Moslem community over the so-called location and control of a market but which was a purely ethno-religious conflict as it manifested in the town and in other parts of the state. Then there was the ethno-religious crisis in Kafanchan in 1999 over the appointment of a Hausa-Fulani as an Emir to succeed his father in Jema’a; the large scale religious violent conflict in the state in 2000 over the planned introduction of the Sharia legal system in the state. In addition, there was the 2001 violent conflict by Muslims against Christians as a reaction to the ethno-religious conflict between Christians and Muslims in Plateau State which started initially as a reaction to the alleged lopsided nature of political appointments in political appointments in Jos North Local Government. Back to Kaduna State, there was the Gwantu conflict in 2001 which started as a reaction to the relocation of the Local Government Headquarters but which degenerated into an ethno-religious conflict. In the same year, Kaduna State suffered from the 2004 very violent religious conflict ostensibly over the hosting of the Miss World Beauty Contest Pageant in Abuja by Silverbird Promotions and the 2004 Makarfi religious conflict over the alleged desecration of the Qur’an by a Christian teenager. The above are only a few selected episodes that illustrate the violent conflicts from an uncountable number of other conflicts that have occurred in Kaduna State since its creation. Funny enough, some of the many conflicts have usually been over very minor or trivial issues that are often eventually over-blown to become out-flows of ethno-religious conflicts.

The question of conflict resolution is “embedded in the principle of peaceful co-existence in a place in which two or more groups live and respect each other’s differences and resolve their conflicts non-violently”. This idea includes “principles like non-aggression, respect for sovereignty and national independence, and noninterference in the internal affairs of other people.” Co-existence connotes to exist together (in time or place) and “to exist in mutual tolerance; to learn to recognize and live with differences; to have relationships between persons or groups in which none of the parties is trying to destroy the other”, (Rupersinghe, 1999, quoted in Dumoye 2005) and “to interact with a commitment to tolerance, mutual respect, and the agreement to settle conflicts without recourse to violence”. In the final analysis, the idea has a “tacit veneration of the concept of tolerance” (Kriesberg 2000 quoted in Dumoye 2005) Tolerance here is the awareness that individuals and groups differ in numerous ways including ethnicity, class, religion, gender, and political inclination yet they co-exist in peace because they are able to bear with one another. Indeed, “co-existence exists before and after violent conflicts.”

A major challenge at conflict resolution in Kaduna State that has continuously faced successive governments in Kaduna State is the broad method of establishing institutional, structural, and attitudinal arrangements that can mitigate the negative tendencies that include, among others, “identity politics engendered by
SECTION II: VISION, PORTRAYAL, AND POLITICS

ethnic diversity, religious bigotry, and social intolerance. However, the serious impediment to the success of the efforts of these successive governments and other spirited individuals does not lie in the dearth of ideas or the lack of the existence of measures to identify and deal with the situations. However, first, the problem has been in the “belief in the underlying assumption that the best route to peaceful co-existence is the homogenization of otherwise heterogeneous groups.” Secondly, because religion and ethnicity are seen as constituting anathema to integration and unity, attempts have often been made even in official policies to minimize or even deny group identity. Thirdly, the bottom line has been the lack of the personal will of especially worshippers of the two contending dominant religions, Christianity and Islam, to practice the very basic tenets of what they preach in each religion, that is, to really forgive by embracing one another after a conflict, accommodating or forgetting therefore never allowing the events of the past or present to influence reactions any time a potent conflict situation arises. The consequence of the failure to resolve conflicts have always been the exacerbation of conflicts. It assumes greater negative dimensions especially when a group, in this case an ethnic group, feels she is intentionally not favored by successive bad governments that have created economic poverty and a sense of exclusion and marginalization for that group. These situations could be averted if, in addition to the faithful adherence of the cardinal principles of forgiveness, forgetfulness, and accommodation, the Kaduna State Government accepts and respects the different ethnic, cultural, and religious diversities in existence. Further to the above, government should also put in place institutional mechanisms that will not only ensure the recognition of these differences but will also encourage cross fertilization of ideas and sharing of positive and integrative values between the various groups at all times and not necessarily only after a conflict. In addition to the models adduced from the exploration of the selected plays in question, is the important existentialist option of the people relying on the self and not on the benevolence of the gods or fighting each other in the name of a God that sits high upon the earth when people are considering options to resolve their conflicts.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE SELECTED PLAYS BY FEMI OSOFISAN

In Farewell to a Cannibal Rage, two young but independent-minded lovers, Olabisi and Akanbi, plan to get married. As custom demands, they decide to go to the village from Lagos to obtain their parents’ consent. In the process of asking for permission, a can of worms that threatens to scuttle their intention is opened. However, both of them are able to overcome the forces of tradition and retrogressive elements in the society to achieve their objective. Another Raft, on the other
hand is about a town called Aiyedaade. Because of the incessant flooding being experienced in this community, the Ifa priest is summoned and after his divination, he reveals that the floods are the result of the neglect of the ancient rite of collective cleansing. So, the old priest of Yemoja is “hastily rehabilitated because he alone can locate the shrine in the middle of the sea.” In the course of performing the cleansing rites, a lot of problems arise. It is by sheer hard work and cooperation that all the members of the expedition survive the rage of the sea.

The conflicts that issue from both plays are basically of two types: personal and group. The personal conflict in Farewell is primarily between Titi and Adigun. Adigun is Akanbi’s Uncle and Titi is Olabisi’s mother. Their personal conflict results from individual opinion or sense of duty. For example, Adigun says

…This family has lain upon my shoulders for so long,
A ponderous weight...And I stood up to it, squarely...
Now, poor old man, I hear the eternal boatman call for me... But who shall succeed me?

Adigun’s sense of duty is so strong that the thought of who shall succeed him haunts him. This may not have been a problem since Akanbi is now grown up enough to assume that responsibility, However, the problem is that he (Akanbi) has sworn to marry Olabisi whose father killed his (Akanbi’s) father. Even Akanbi’s explanation that Bisi is the one who rescued him from the precipice does not pacify Adigun who feels that Akanbi is a “mere bastard for even contemplating such a thing.” He says further that although Olabisi helped Akanbi in the town, yet, he (Adigun) will not have her as a daughter in his house. The simple reason for this line of action is “because our family/Rejects intimacy with serpents.../ Bisi is the daughter of Atanda/ [and] Atanda killed your father.” Just as much as Adigun does not want Akanbi to marry Olabisi, so also Titi does not want Olabisi to marry Akanbi. Although Titi hides under the umbrella of Ifa, and it is obvious that her reason for refusing Akanbi is personal. She says Olabisi’s father “was murdered/ By the wild beast over there/By one blood drinking hyena/Whom they mistakenly call Adigun.” In addition, Adigun wants to kill Olabisi too and that is why Titi sends her away to live in the city until his anger has cooled. It is clear then that the personal opinion about the sense of duty by Adigun and Titi is the highpoint of their conflict. Although Titi, after the death of her husband, howled and cried in her head for several years, she recovers; but Detoun, Akanbi’s mother, does not and her demented state keeps fanning the embers of Adigun’s anger. So, for both Adigun and Titi, the memory of Atanda and Detoun acts as the trigger on the memory that sustains their personal conflict.

There is also personal conflict between Folawe and Fatai. This conflict is also the result of individual perception of duty. Folawe is Fatai’s only wife however, when she meets a stranger who indoctrinates her; she becomes dissatisfied with
her husband and their old way of life. This indoctrination brings about the conflict between her and her husband. Fatai feels it is his duty to sing and entertain the rich because, according to him, he “inherited a skill from [his] ancestors/ A talent planted and nourished/ Down the generations/ I love my work, I am an artist.”

Thus, his duty has put a wedge between him and his wife. Though Fatai plays all night for Chief Owombe, the glamour is not there because his wife and lead singer is absent. On her own part, Folawe does not see it as a betrayal of trust or a shirking of responsibility to abandon Fatai at this critical moment. This is because she has become dissatisfied with her way of life. This dissatisfaction is the consequence of her romance with the stranger from the city who has turned her head. The beauty of one’s duty in her view is not in performing to one’s satisfaction inherited skill but

…the cities we build on justice
The food we put into hungry mouths
The hand we give the poor to lean on
The shoulders we give to the down trodden
To lift them up to their feet.

Through the use of this biblical allusion, it is obvious that the conflict which develops between Fatai and Folawe is inevitable in view of their different attitudes to perceived duties.

In Another Raft, there is also personal conflict. The principal sources of the conflict are Lanusen and Ekuroola. Lanusen, a Prince and Local Council Chairman trade accusations and counter accusations with Ekuroola the Abore and the Chief priest of rituals. Very early in the morning, these two eminent personalities start gnawing at each other’s heart because each feels the other has not been alive to his responsibility. It is Ekuroola’s duty (as the Abore) to lead in the worship of Yemoja but instead of staying in Aiyedaade to do this, he goes to Lagos, grows rich and abandons his responsibilities back home. Thus, according to Lanusen, it is because Ekuroola lives in far away Lagos on soft cushions and padded chairs, on safe grounds and solid roofs, that he does not hear the sound of the rain hence he has forgotten his duty to the people who gave him the responsibility of the Abore. It is this neglect by Abore and his likes that has incensed Yemoja who “overran her banks, roaring like a famished pack into /…streets and homes…with a vengeance. / Homesteads have been uprooted, fathers and children/ and wives carried away…mostly places washed away.”

If the above is true, then Lanusen has the right to be angry with Ekuroola for shirking his responsibility. However, Ekuroola has his own version of the cause of the flood disaster. In his counter accusation, Ekuroola says that Yemoja does not cause the floods. He says there are floods because Lanusen’s Local Government Council did not build a good drainage system. He also says though the money is
voted for and reported as spent, the drainage is still unconstructed. Lanusen counters that his council builds canals but Ekuroola quickly points out that it is not according to the approved plan but according to the size of Lanusen’s Council’s budget. When Lanusen accuses Ekuroola of being unnecessarily frightened of performing his duty, Ekuroola retorts “Don’t tell me about my duty! / It isn’t only by suffering and/Needlessly too that one/Fulfills his duty to his people.” Thus, in tossing accusations back and forth between each other, Ekuroola and Lanusen keep the embers of their personal conflict aglow till the end of the play.

Group conflict is also discernible in both plays. This can be illustrated in Farewell by dividing the characters in the play into two groups. While the first group is made up of the characters representing the old order: Detoun, Adigun, Titi, Fatai, and Baba Soye; the new order is made up of Akanbi, Olabisi, and Folawe. The conflict results from the struggle by the older generation to perpetuate their old-fashioned ideas and customs. For example, Adigun believes his word is law and considers it asinine of Akanbi to question him when he (Adigun) has given command: “Adigun: Listen to me. You cannot/Marry that girl. / Akanbi: Adigun! But why? / Adigun: Because I say so!” Adigun’s disposition of he-who-must-be-obeyed is reminiscent of what happens in Kaduna State today. Respective governments have always expected people to just obey all directives without complaints. The consequence of this is thus questioning of the right of the people who feel oppressed to even ask questions. The dramatic importance of this lies in the fact that it shows the reader or spectator that whenever this “you-must-obey-me-without-question” situation arises, there is bound to be a serious group conflict. When Akanbi expresses his doubts as to the fact that Bisi’s father killed his (Akanbi’s) father later on in the scene, Adigun immediately retorts “impossible? When Adigun has spoken it?”

Apart from allowing no dissension in this context by the older generation, the fact that the older generation has a long list of hate-filled memories to perpetuate is another cause of conflict. In the characterization of Adigun, Titi and Baba Soye, the playwright presents a situation where these people believe that their way of life is better than and superior to that of the new generation. For instance, these three characters in unison think that Akanbi and Bisi should not get married because it will terminate the line of hatred that has been drawn by Adigun and Titi. They (especially Baba Soye) even try to drag the gods into it. “Hate”, according to Adigun, “is the only death that can put an end to this”. Through the use of this irony the playwright shows why the group conflict in Farewell almost ends in a catastrophe. The children are not satisfied with this old way of life and are in need of a new lease of life. The new generation wants life, to love, to forget the ugly past and face the future hand in hand one with another irrespective of whose ancestors had done what in the past. Therefore, the obvious consequence of these different perspectives makes a head-on collision
(conflict) inevitable. Of particular interest in this exploration is the role played by Baba Soye, the Ifa priest, in perpetuating the culture of hatred in the play. Because of his closeness to the abode of the Orunmila that he represents, people take his words and pieces of advice seriously. However, he appears to have learnt to speak his own words and not those of Ifa. Instead of divining to find out what the position of Ifa on the issue at hand actually is, he comes with a long-winded story about “an impetuous maiden” who falls in love with a beast and ends up in its stomach. He says “When Ifa speaks to the young/He discards incantations. But/ Careful! The Voice of the oracle/Even in fable, is still a kernel / Of wisdom-seeded fruit”. The discerning reader or spectator doubts if indeed this is the position of Ifa on the issue because they know that Ifa is not an enemy to human love. Ifa does not love confusion or hatred. In fact, because the Yorubas refer to Ifa as “Elérìí ̀ipìn” (the impartial witness), this comment must be Baba Soye’s personal solution to the family problem.

The generation gap conflict in Another Raft is seen in Omitoogun on one hand and his son Gbebe on the other. Like in Farewell, the conflict results from different perceptions of the call of duty. Omitoogun wants Gbebe to take the title and office of the priest of Yemoja but he is angry because Gbebe has succumbed to the corruption of the city. However, Gbebe does not believe in this ancient myth of appeasing gods and goddesses, so he “spat at the shrine of his ancestors…(and) walked out of the homestead”. This amounts to rejecting the father when he says that his father

...was dead before I was born!...
He died the day he swore his life to
A powerless cult…let his
Goddess rescues him now. He gave
His life but that was not enough.
They wanted my life into the bargain,
He and his goddess.

Thus far, we have explored the various ways by which Femi Osofisan has created individual and group conflicts in the plot structures of Farewell to a Cannibal Rage and Another Raft. What follows is an examination of the methods the author adopts to resolve these conflicts. This exploration is intended to show their implications for achieving conflict resolution in Kaduna State. This essay discussed earlier that conflict is indispensable in the development of dramatic plot. It explored these conflicts in the selected plays. It also added that ethno-religious conflicts are at issue in Kaduna State and that these conflicts are similar to those in the selected plays. This is understandable because of the plurality of the cultural, religious, and political set-up in Kaduna State. Therefore, since the types of conflict experienced in Kaduna State have often been either personal or
group, verisimilitude to those in the selected plays, there is the need to discern
the lessons to be learned from the methods adopted by the playwright in the two
plays. In both *Farewell* and *Another Raft*, the manner of the resolution of the
conflicts are by the principles of forgiveness, accommodation, forgetting the past,
and above all, never allowing blind faith to the God of any religion to disallow a
people from using the wisdom endowed on them by those Gods to chart the path
of their peaceful existence. The two plays emphasize the need to forget the past
so that the wounds that result from past wrongs can be healed. As demonstrated
by the various characters, there must be the desire to forgive and help one another
so that collectively, issues that cause conflicts can be resolved. Akanbi first strikes
this note of reconciliation when he says “we shall heal the wound of war, / Erect
a future of peace / Go into the night/ Farewell to Iloto/ Farewell to hate. Welcome
love.” As a practical demonstration of this new chord of love and forgiveness,
Titi helps her long-time enemies Adigun and Detoun. Titi even goes as far as
asking forgiveness from her daughter for doing her wrong. At the end of the play,
all the characters agree with Akanbi that indeed there is the need to say farewell
to a cannibal rage.

Though it may not be a one-to-one parallel, this same reconciliation as resolu-
tion of conflict is seen in *Another Raft*. Waje is one of the oppressed characters in
the play yet he pleads for mercy for his oppressors. He says “for us / for those left
behind in Aiyedaade / for a future without bitterness/ both Orousi and Lanusen
should be forgiven.” And though all the characters are aware of the atrocities
Orousi and Lanusen have committed, they all agree that both should be forgiven.
In addition, both plays reject the gods and by implication, reject the overblown
philosophy of predestination. By demystifying the gods, the playwright then
resolves the conflicts in both plays. Perhaps the point being made by Ososifian is
that problems and conflicts are created by human beings; therefore, the solutions
lie with human beings and not with any gods. In *Farewell*, for example, Baba
Soye goes to a very great length to show that the gods do not favor the union of
Bisi and Akanbi. Yet at the end of the play, both rebels succeed in slaying the
monster that Baba Soye’s Orunmila has become and thereby show that even gods
bow to determined human beings. Perhaps, the rejection of the idea of benevolent
gods waiting somewhere up in the sky to solve human problems as a means of
resolving conflict is best illustrated using the sea goddesses in *Another Raft*.
Yemosa says “‘Gods and goddesses/ Breed in the minds of men / As hyacinths
in fertile water”. While Yemosa Two embellishes this further by saying “And
when we flower, / we embellish the landscape of/ your imagining/ so colorfully,
that man invest us / with all kinds of extraordinary powers” Yemosa Three sums
up the discourse when she says

...all such powers as we have
are made only by your will

---
our force is your fear…We for the use of man but only as long as you yourselves give the command.\textsuperscript{76}

The implication of this is obvious: Man must not wait for any supernatural being or beings to solve his problem otherwise he may end up waiting for the proverbial “godot”! Thus, Yemosa Two deals the final blow to man’s fantastical expectations when she says

...gods are a nuisance to men who abandon their will, but are always eager and fruitful servants to those who with determination harness their hyacinths with science which is the supreme will of man.\textsuperscript{77}

The two plays show that men who literarily “master their gods” are men who succeed. Men who open their mouths wide with their eyes closed waiting for the Biblical manna from heaven are men who starve to death. Thus, instead of waiting at the beck and call of so called “benevolent gods”,\textsuperscript{78} man must command the winds and the currents by the force of their own insight and “the music of their muscles.”\textsuperscript{79} Of course, the characters get “the drift” of the Yemosas’ and this makes Reore to exclaim “Yes! We make or unmake our destiny, we’re human beings; there’s no goddess but the strength of our / forces combined! Rowing together, working together.”\textsuperscript{80} It is significant to note that the moment the men of the raft revive their will, they find a way out and the raft turns from its immobile position.

The plays deal with personal and group predicament and tragedy that result in serious conflicts. And since conflict seems to have taken a firm root in the totality of human existence, man’s existence has become one huge tragedy. It is important to note that the dramatic significance of this is to make people to wake up from their slumber to re-discover their will. To achieve this, they must be ready to make personal sacrifices. This can only be achieved if each person is made to tolerate, forgive, accommodate, and reinterpret the meaning and relevance of the Gods in the process of resolving the differences/conflicts that exist between them. In \textit{Farewell}, Adigun realizes this need and he willingly surrenders to the force of change:

The time has come for me to answer the Boatman…Come…Wear this on your wrist (gives necklace)...(takes off his cap). Yours now the weary cap (puts it on Akanbi’s head).\textsuperscript{81}

All the items given to Akanbi are the symbols of Adigun’s previous authority. By giving them to Akanbi, Adigun demonstrates that he has relinquished headship of the family. This may also be seen in \textit{Another Raft}. Both Agunrin and Waje make
CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN OSOFISAN’S ANOTHER RAFT AND FAREWELL...

cOnflict rEsOluTiOn in Os OFisan’s aNothEr raFt and Farewell...

the supreme sacrifice by dying, trying to save Lanusen and Ekuroola. Though the four of them perish, the playwright succinctly makes the point that each person must be prepared to die to save his brother, sister or even his enemy.

CONCLUSION

Kaduna State is like a rainbow of vibrant diversity. It is a microcosm of Nigeria with about forty ethnic groups and made up of a predominantly Muslim and Christian population. Further to the foregoing, the position and role of Kaduna, the state capital, further accentuates the place of Kaduna State in the present discourse. A one page publication by the Kaduna State Government confirms that “Kaduna city is a colonial creation. It was established first as a military camp to facilitate easy conquest of the defunct emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate but later became the strategic capital of the old Northern Region. Though the area was originally inhabited by the Gbagyi it has grown to play host to a variety of interests from both the North and beyond. Indeed since its establishment, it has attracted a very wide range of immigrants from different parts of Nigeria and even beyond who rightly or wrongly believe that Kaduna is the place from which messages of whatever hue or cry in the country starts or ends or the town where strategic decisions are taken in the interest of either Northern politics or Islamic religion in the country. Indeed, it is in Kaduna that the typical exhibition of the characteristics of the nature of colonial settlements is most noticeable. While the affluent live in the Government Reserved Areas, the others live in the satellite areas that are terribly underdeveloped. Because of its historical, political, and economic status, Kaduna has become the hottest town where whoever is whoever not only in Northern Nigeria but in Nigeria with an enduring interest in Northern Nigeria and especially its politics and religion must settle. This has afforded such migrants the opportunity not only to control, but to also toy with the destiny of a state which they do not by ancestry belong. The transformation of the ethno-religious identity of Kaduna has therefore often necessitated the escalation of tension and conflicts at all times.

The plays that have been examined might have been inspired not only by the circumstances of the author but of the time the plays are set, people that they talk about, and events that have necessitated the writing of the plays. In other words, the playwright has taken the material for these plays from the circumstances of the society in which he lives in. Ethnicity and religion are global phenomena and potential sources of conflicts; yet, the ethno-religious conflicts that have occurred in Kaduna State cannot be rivaled by the ones that have occurred in any other state in Nigeria. This is equally so with all the efforts of government and all other proactive groups working to end the violent ethno-religious conflicts in the state. The plays do insinuate, for example, that it is not ordained that men will continue
to fight wars and conflicts on behalf of their God. Further, the plays discountenance the idea that only a segment of the society will continue to insist on having its way at all times. Finally, the idea that only a segment of the society can get the very best attention in terms of development while others are virtually left to rot and die, is abused in the plays. By creating conflicts and resolving them amicably in these plays, the playwright has been able to pass the message that amicable settlement of conflicts can only be better achieved through the acceptance of the spirit of forgiveness, forgetfulness, accommodation, and a pragmatic interpretation of the place of the Gods in the lives of adherents. Hence the essay posits that Kaduna State can learn a lot from the models of conflict resolution in the two plays by Femi Osofisan: *Another Raft* and *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*.

**Notes**

4. This is used as in the Biblical teaching of the story of the prodigal son. Though on his return his father remembered the son’s recalcitrant behavior, he did not allow that to generate any negative effect on the reception accorded the prodigal son on his return.
7. Ashiko “The Usefulness of Literature in Contemporary Society” 46.
8. Ibid., 46
9. Ibid., 47
10. Ibid., 47
11. Ibid., 47
12. Bitiyong S. Billy et al., “Memorandum Submitted to the Administrative Committee of Investigation into the March 1987 Crisis in Kaduna State by a Group of Nerzit (Southern Zaria)”

16. National Archives Kaduna, Zaria Province File 2554, 34.


18. Bonat “Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Zaria Province 1902–1945” 155–156; and in the Zaria Province File 2089, National Archives, Kaduna.

19. See Frederick D. Lugard, *Northern Nigerian Annual Report*, 700; and the following documents that are located in the National Archives, Kaduna: SNP 8/1 and 201P/1914, 52, Telegram dated June 15, 1915; and Zaria Province File 2089, 102.


30. This view is expressed variously in Jonah “The Root Causes of Conflicts in Contemporary Nigeria” 1 and Jonah “Crises and Conflict Management in Nigeria Since 1980” (2005b) 29 1 and respectively.


33. Ibid., 6.
34. Ibid., 6.
38. Ibid., 79-86.
43. Ibid., 3.
44. Ibid., 3.
45. Ibid., 3.
46. Ibid., 3.
47. Ibid., 3.
48. Ibid. 3.
49. Ibid., 4.
50. Ibid., 4.
52. Bitiyong eta al Memorandum 1
53. Osofisan, Another Raft, 1.
54. Osofisan, Farewell, 6.
55. Ibid., 12.
56. Ibid., 13.
57. Ibid., 13.
58. Ibid., 51.
59. Ibid., 29.
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The major pivot around which the art of literary creativity revolves is life. A work of art can neither exist in a vacuum nor can it be divorced from the myriad of socio-political factors or social realities that negatively or positively influence the worldview of man. These factors can either be political, historical, biographical, or sociological. What this entails is that literature derives its main essence from life, as the creative writer is provoked to present the losses and gains, the ills and virtues, of a society with a view to highlighting or sensitizing the people to the solutions of these problems. A work of art also entertains as it educates. This confers on literature the ability to influence human beings psychologically, spiritually, and physically depending on the sensitivity and/or the world-view of the writer. According to E. Babatunde Omobowale:

Two things at least are indispensable to the creation of a veritable work of art. The first is that it is a re-presentation of life whose creation is propelled by a host of other factors. Second, it is created to serve a pragmatic purpose, which is usually didactic in nature (3).

In literature, human beings are afforded the opportunity to learn from the past to improve the present so as to better the future. One may then be justified to say that literature serves as a means through which the links between the past, the present, and the future are highlighted as a way of facilitating a positivist oriented growth of society. According to Chinua Achebe:
Literature, whether handed down by word of mouth or in print gives us a second handle on reality; This enabling dimensions of make– belief gives the same threats to integrity that may assail the psyche in real life; and at the same time providing through the self-discovery which it imparts a veritable weapon for coping with these threats whether they are found within problematic and incoherent selves or in the world around us. (17)

Inferentially, this definition views literature as a multi-faceted field of research whose dynamic nature derives from the fact that literature, as an imitation of life, actually reflects life. In the words of Omobowale, “literary creativity confers on the writer the ability to undertake a labyrinthal exploration of different spheres of human endeavor in order to bring life into existence from multiplicity of angles” (3). Literature as a reflection or refraction of society confers on the creative writer the roles of a chronicler, a social critic, and visioner. Thus, in the present reality, literature is being restored to its pristine position as a central cognitive recourse in society, as well as its most faithful and comprehensive interpreter.

African drama is essentially representational. It is a body of work through which one can understand the twists and turns in African development. It is always eager to present the vivid picture of the African condition in a socio-political terrain. Furthermore, apart from revealing the lines and contradictions in the present African societies, the modern African drama is a potent means of recording African experiences in its numerous dimensions. Therefore, it has always been a realistic medium of expression of the different developmental stages of the African social consciousness. The modern African drama therefore could be seen as a realistic literature.

Essentially, African drama today is mostly politically. As a matter of fact, the second generation of African playwrights are conscious of the economic, social, and political crisis that plague African nations, espousing in various dimensions the evil in the dehumanizing conditions of hunger, poverty, insecurity, unemployment, diseases and squalor, mis-management of public fund, etc., that African nations currently wallow in. Committed playwrights have variously made this the focus of their artistic creation with a view of tracing the causes and providing solutions to the problems.

The major concern of this chapter therefore, is to explore how Femi Osofisan sees politics as a tool of social organization in his dramaturgy. For instance, Osofisan in A Restless Run of Locusts, view politics as a mindless machine that is ruthless in its operation and which is unrelenting in its demands. He presents the evils of fraud, thuggery, intimidation, and murder as the hall-mark of political realities in African nations, and to be specific Nigeria. Osofisan presents Sanda as an idealistic young man who decides to avenge a wrong doing but who finally gets consumed in the process:
Sanda:

Listen, Iyabo, it was not my fault. From the moment I took my brother’s place as candidate, I lost my freedom. I became an instrument to be used and tossed around by the party. (45)

He laments further:

What could I do? Look, try to understand. There is no room for the individual conscience in politics. There is only the Party, the collective grab and greed. The hundreds of hungry rapacious hands fighting like jackals...they make the decisions, and they’ll stop at nothing to get what they want… (45)

Sanda finds himself a captive of the party’s ideologies as individual will is highly ineffectual in the face of the collective will which is most anti-people. A captive and a prisoner of the party, but it is obvious that he is a willing prisoner. He doesn’t have the slighted idea of what the party stands for, yet uses its services. His major motive for going into politics is to revenge his brother’s death. But he later finds this mission not as easy as he feels. Driven by this mission, Sanda changes from the idealistic young man, who has won the love and devotion of Iyabo, to a reckless, blood thirsty, savage politician. Chief Kuti describes the relationship between the Party and the Politician thus:

The Party! Who is the Party but a group of swindlers and bankrupts like me, all fighting to grab something for themselves! Do you think the Party mints money? (16)

Chief Kuti, in the foregoing, gives a vivid account of what Nigerian politicians in the world of Osofisan were and are up till the present moment. The major drive which they vigorously pursue is how well to loot the public treasury and stack in bank accounts abroad the common wealth of the masses. Revelations at the various anti-graft bodies in Nigeria: Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), are all pointers to this unfortunate development that Osofisan has written off since 1975.

In line with dastardly act of corruption is killing at will. Politicians shed the blood of innocents for rituals, and some wasted just to get opponents out of their way. Life means nothing to them all because of money and power. Osofisan sees the politician as nothing but a merchant of death and destruction. This is summed up by First Elder in A Restless Run of Locusts as follows:

Everyday of your campaigns have brought fresh woes and new wounds, has brought another grave to another home. The palace is flooded with the tears of the stricken…no place is safe again from
your thugs; no market, no road, no home. You ride the town like pestilence, like a run of... locusts (30)

Above are the words of agony for one of the emissaries of the Oba to Sanda. It explains the unfortunate corner the ruled has been boxed into by the rulers.

While thuggery and killing take the center stage in *A Restless Run of Locusts*, rigging is the main evil condemned by Osofisan in *The Mid-Night Hotel*. The gubernatorial candidate of the Nigeria for Paradise Party, Headmaster Alatise, is defeated through massive rigging. The electioneering process witnesses a great level of fraud and violence so much so that it is described by Petronaira Bend as, “this war you call election which is coming fast like a huge conflagration” (7).

Furthermore, the level of corruption that goes on in the name of politics is highlighted by Hon. Mrs. Ashibong, popularly known as Awero, in *Mid-Night Hotel*. She lures Pastor Suuru, her husband’s friend to Mid-Night Hotel for sexual favors so as to win certain contracts. According to her, that act of corruption is a regular practice, as such she educates the reluctant Pastor Suuru:

> For Christ sake, what’s wrong with you? I’m telling you it is regular practice in Parliament. All the male MP’s are doing it, even to their nieces and cousins! Everyone in our Contract Awards Committee is taking members of the opposite sex somewhere or the other before jobs are given out. They call it sampling the goods. (21-22)

The most ridiculous of behaviors, according to Awero is a regular practice in Parliament. In all the political characters presented by Osofisan, none can be said to have redeeming feature because the Nigerian political landscape is so dominated by crooked and deceitful politicians, which Osofisan believes must change if his country is to experience any form of development. Hence, his exposing these bad traits is to foster a level of change, and value appreciation of political leaders. Nigeria did not hide her disgust in the crop of politicians she has, which is not limited to any particular political party, but which cut across all parties, as it stands out as the major feature of all the political parties in the country.

Osofisan has an incisive vision which he deploys to the service of oppressed humanity. His central themes in most of his plays border on the fact that the machine of oppression in human life is created by human beings and can only be demolished by human beings. The problem of the masses has been a major thrust in all the plays of Osofisan. His commitment to the theatre is primary because, through drama, he is able to associate himself with the exploited and the underprivileged so as to achieve social revolution.

Osofisan lives in Nigeria, a country where two broad classes exist, the rich and the poor. The economy of the country is controlled by the bourgeois who equally control the super-structure of the society. In this context, the wealth of
the land is the exclusive preserve of the ruling class as they determine who gets what and more often than not, the wealth finds its way in the pocket of the rulers and their immediate families at the expense of the ruled and poor masses. The teeming masses live in penury and wallow in poverty while the ruling class steal and stack abroad the wealth of the land.

Most often, the government forces the oppressed masses down the abyss of distress and lack, the interest of the masses is of no concern to the rulers. This vulnerable condition of the poor is usually exploited by the rich who sees the poor as tools to be manipulated to achieve their selfish ends. Osofisan abhors this type of system with passion. He believes in equal distribution of wealth without which no society can make progress. In most of his plays, Osofisan carefully weave his themes around that of class system, corruption, and crime, the result of which ends in violence. He always set his characters in a struggle against the ruling class to demand for their rights. This form of struggle that is readily branded ‘anti-government’ always meet with stiff resistance from the rulers.

In Morountodun, poor citizens do not have rights over their legitimate properties. The case of Titus and the Sanitary Inspector is a case in reference. This is seen in the play-acting between Mama Kayode and Molade below:

Mama Kayode: …where are you going?
Molade: To Mama Laide, sah.
Mama Kayode: In this rain?
Molade: It’s my wife. She’s in labour
       She needs help …
Mama Kayode: What’s that in your hand self?
Molade: You mean this umbrella, sah?
Mama Kayode: Hen-Hen that’s what you call it, this
       Dirty, smoky, cab-infested jagbajantis.
       I bet it’s got lice in it too.
Molade: But it’s brand new! Alabi just sent it to me from the city last week –
Mama Kayode: Well, it’s under arrest. You’re lucky. I can’t ask you to detach your mouth, which is exhibit one, Queen versus Baba Alabi, alias Titus, nineteen gbongbonongbon. But I will certainly not allow this umbrella to go on soiling the rain, which is a public property under the bye-law… (63)

Mama Kayode assumes the role of the Sanitary Inspector while Molade acts the part of Titus in this play-acting. Titus is a representative of the oppressed class while the Sanitary Inspector belongs to the ruling class. Titus revolts against this injustice but ends up in jail for refusing to give out his umbrella which is accused of “soiling the rain” (63). The property of the masses belongs to the public, and
Section II: Vision, Portrayal, and Politics

any form of resistance by the masses is effrontery against the ruling class which ultimately lands the victim in prison with hard labor.

To protest against this type of absurd social order, the masses write several petitions to the government which are never acknowledged. This is evidenced in Baba’s speech to the governor in Morountodun (65). It is when this type of peaceful protest fails that, the masses result into violent revolution. This form of revolution by the oppressed is what Superintendent Salami, in his conversation with Alhaja in Morountodun, express thus: “Allah is always on the side of those who do more than just fold their arms and watch” (25). In this statement, Osofisan solicits revolution in solving political quagmire, contraption, and oppression instead of relying on divine intervention. He believes that the masses are and must remain agents of change and revolution in the society. The collective resolve of the oppressed masses in Morountodun turns the tide in favor of the oppressed class. In The Chattering and the Song, through Latoye, Osofisan canvasses collective will power as the needed oil for the wheel of revolution as against individual struggle. Latoye speaks sense into the Guards that are supposed to be agents of the ruling class and converts them into the struggle. The Guards join the revolution:

Guards: Freedom!
Latoye: Freedom! The King has called you to eat.
Eat him. (45).

Osofisan in The Chattering and The Song, projects his determination to re-interpret heroism and signify economic relation between the rulers and the ruled as what must be re-addressed through revolution against feudal impositions. The play is crafted in the history of the peaceful reign of Alaafin Abiodun after the fall of Basorun Gaa. Gaa, a very ruthless leader, influences the enthronement of five kings in his life time and he’s also connected to the death of four of them. Alaafin and his chiefs represent the ruling class while Latoye symbolizes the poor masses. Hence, we see the poor masses in the following excerpt confronting the ruling class:

Latoye: …but in your reign Abiodun, the elephant eats, and nothing remains for the antelope. The buffalo drinks and there is drought in the land! (45)

In the play, Alaafin Abiodun becomes power-drunk. The masses suffer a great deal and decide to fight back, this they do through the formation of Farmer’s Movement. The masses rise up against the reign of Alaafin and the leader, Sontri is arrested. However, it is too late to stop the revolution as Sontri proclaims as he is led away in chains:
There is nothing you can do to stop birds from singing. Mokan, the revolution is already on wing, you cannot halt it. (47)

In the same vein, Leje, as he tries to make a convert of Funlola, says:

Once a movement begins, in the search for justice, it will run its course, with or without those who serve to spark it off (53)

Osofisan seems to start the notional consciousness of Farmer’s Movement in *The Chattering* and *The Song* and brings it to a full swing in *Morountodun*. The seed of the peasants’ revolution that erupts and consumes the ruling class in *Morountodun* is indeed planted in *The Chattering* and *The Song*. Osofisan, in these two plays addresses a period in history when resistance was the only solution. However, much as Osofisan advocates revolution as a means out of oppression, Marshal lost his life to the war for his refusal to sit at a round table negotiation with the government. He chooses the part of violence as against peace and has to pay with his dear life.

Osofisan sees money as playing a dominant role in politics, whereby political offices have become cash-and-carry. In Nigeria today, the politics of “god-father-ism” has taken the centre stage. Unless a politician has a successful gladiator backing and bank-rolling his expenses, he’s as good as a loser. Politicians loot treasury everyday because they know they can buy their ways back into offices. In *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Osofisan requests whether it is right to kill a group of defaulters when those that sit in judgment to determine their fates are worse, stealing in millions in their official positions, yet pronouncing death sentence on those that steal peanuts. He sees crime and armed robbery as a product of bad leadership. The robbers are produced by the politicians as they equip them with sophisticated weapons and use them as tools to rig their way into power. These thugs are immediately disowned after election. These armed thugs immediately graduate into armed robbers as soon as they win or lose elections because they would no longer be relevant. In pursuit of their own brand of politics, the robbers take up arms against the government in *Once Upon Four Robbers*. Politicians in *Who Is Afraid of Solarin?* and the robbers in *Once Upon Four Robbers* are virtually the same with very little modifications. While the robbers rob with arms and ammunitions, the politicians do their own robbing with their pens.

Femi Osofisan is a playwright with a unique concern for the plight of the poor and the down trodden in his society. He believes that the bane of people’s freedom is bad leadership. He also believes that Nigeria and Africa at large has more bad leaders (who are indeed worse than armed robbers) than good ones. Osofisan sees the masses as the root of the society, the earth to be tended and not to be devastated. He believes that any government that maltreats the masses has devastated the earth upon which his existence is hinged and thus must be made to
pay dearly for it. The poor forms the basis of the existence of rich rulers, hence the poor masses should be ready to rise up to fight injustice and bad governance whenever it manifests. An overview of Osofisan’s plays show that the masses are indeed more powerful than the rich because God has given them numerical strength over the rich. The poor need to know this; they should also be bold to call their leaders to question whenever the need arises.

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Chapter 8

RE-ORDERING HUMANITY:
FEMI OSOFISAN’S BACKWARD
GLANCE IN ONE LEGEND, MANY
SEASONS

Henri Oripeloye

One Legend, Many Seasons is an adaptation of Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol (1843). Like all works of adaptation, Osofisan’s story in terms of themes, characterization and plot structure imitates its pretext. The play in many ways is an act of social change, a concept bound up with Osofisan’s belief that positive consciousness is attained through spiritual purgation. The entire play centers on Alowolodu’s personality whose social being is constructed around his material life, and this directs his thinking and associations. Alowolodu is presented as a miserly man in spite of his wealth. While everyone is busy preparing for the Christmas celebration, he is busy counting money in his office; he considers those that celebrate Christmas as mad people. To him there is nothing to be happy about; he chastises his employee for coming late to the office because he (the employee) is in a mood to celebrate. Christmas cards, hampers, clothes, and drinks are frivolities that Alowolodu would not spend his money on. Rotimi, his nephew, tries to make him see the essence of Christmas celebration:

For one day at least in the year, you can afford to relax! That’s all that Christmas is, just a good and pleasant time to be happy. To love, forgive, and be kind. A day when everybody can think of themselves as friends, and not as strangers … (6)

He turns Rotimi’s invitation for lunch down in spite of the latter’s importunity. Alowolodu is not a family man, having neither wife nor children, he faults Rotimi for having a wife. Everything is associated with money and happiness is constructed around wealth. But Osofisan believes that no man is an island, and through theatrical means he brings Alowolodu to realize his purpose in the world.
His transformational voyages involve a spiritual cleansing through the subversion of reality.

Osofisan, having exploited all human angles in his revelation of evils in society, has made recourse to the supernatural in this play. As an African writer, he knows the importance that is attached to those invisible elements within the African cosmology. The message of the play is realized through extraordinary means, but the reality of the play in spite of the presence of supernatural characters rests on the philosophy of culture. The Yoruba (African) believes in life after death, and the world of the spirit intersperses with the world of the living. This philosophical understanding supplies the missing link that enables readers to arrive at the contemporaneity of the play. Abiola Irele has observed that

the most remarkable feature of the evolution of Yoruba culture over the past century or so has been the way in which it has been able to afford a stable institutional and spiritual groundwork for the transformation of collective life and feeling for the individual within the culture at the critical moment when Western civilizations introduced an element of tensions into African societies (175).

*One Legend, Many Seasons* brings the problem of re-ordering of societal norms in terms of social and economic relations to a new awareness. The playwright thus reveals the existentialist predicament of social relations through the presentation of the materialistic perspective of his main character; and to use literature as a social force as well as ideological weapon for social change. Osofisan points at socio-economic problems in Nigeria in this play. The philanthropists, in their attempt to persuade Alowolodu to give money for the upkeep of the poor, explain the sorry economic condition of the masses:

Conditions have worsened recently, as you know, sir, for the common people. Several workers have lost their jobs. Armies of school leavers roam the street, unemployed. Refuse dumps have become the only source of feeding for many. Children, unfed, unclothed and homeless, fill the city like litter (8).

Unfortunately, those who are in a position to assist the poor do nothing about their plight. In response to the philanthropists’ demand for a donation to assist the needy, Alowolodu bluntly refuses and goes on to blame the government for failing in her duties:

But we have government, don’t we? ... We have governors, ministers, regional commissioners, council officials, lots and lots of other men and women in government offices! What exactly are they being
He also blames the churches, mosques, and charity homes for not living up to expectations when it comes to providing for the poor. But what Alowolodu fails to realize is that he is part of this humanity and his position as a man of wealth could be used to help the masses out of problems.

Osofisan’s experimentation with form like this in the play *One Legend, Many Seasons* deserves attention. Alowolodu is an extraordinary character in his treatment of the common folk. His non-association with the people could be seen as psychological problem: a man needs people to achieve fulfillment in life. He is in sharp contrast to Dedeke, Rotimi, and Pa Olasore in this respect. He fails to rationalize the purpose of their happiness because they are poor. But Osofisan provides a means of revelation where he discovers himself as part of these poor creatures. The philanthropists could not make him to be conscious of this necessity since they are just as human as Alowolodu. He needs the intervention of a spirit or ghost to rise to this consciousness. Osofisan, in the words of Patricia Yaeger, provides “ordinary access to extraordinary thinking” (284) through Alowolodu’s encounter with the extraordinary characters. Chinua Achebe also experiments with this motif in *Things Fall Apart* where masquerades are used to settle feuds among the people. This is a pointer to the acceptability of this traditional institution where there are no courts of justice as we have in modern society. What these writers achieve is the propagation of African philosophy and sensibilities. The use of the supernatural element by Osofisan in *One Legend, Many Seasons* is not cosmetics; rather it is used “as dynamic material for the reinterpretation of history and projection into the future” (Ukala, 31).

Makon, Alowolodu’s business partner, became a wandering ghost because of the life he lived on earth. Makon’s ghost, in terms of physical appearance, reflects his concerns while on earth. His body is decorated with business paraphernalia – sheaves of bank receipts, ledger sheets, check books, contract papers, and financial reports. About the chains he is wearing, Makon explains:

> That’s what still binds me to the earth. It’s the chain I made for myself when I was alive. The chain of not-caring. Of loving only oneself. It is a chain that comes when you think that making money is more important than caring about other people. But you never know this when you’re alive, that you’re making a chain for yourself which you will carry after you’re dead (13-14).

The padlocks and chains show the punishment he is suffering during the years of his penance. As a former associate of Alowolodu, who knows that his friend is living a dangerous life, he decides to visit him in order to save him from the
punishment that results from such a life. Alowolodu must go through spiritual purgation that is enabled by the ancestral spirits. The purpose of this is revealed by Makon’s spirit:

You see, each person while alive must walk among other people, and travel far and wide. If a person does not do this his ghost will have to do it after he has died. It will travel around the world, looking at things it can no longer enjoy – things which other people can have on earth, and which make them happy! (13).

Makon does not want his friend to experience this spiritual wandering that forecloses the idea of rest and peace. He tells him of the coming of the ancestral spirits that will help to change the course of his life. The first spirit, Osetura, who is the Spirit of Christmas-Past arrives and takes him on voyage where there is graphic revelation of Alowolodu’s disdain for friendship and family association. Osetura takes him on a voyage to his village, a place he has forgotten. There he sees familiar faces – happy people in the mood of Christmas celebration. He now longs to meet them, the people he never associated with in the past. The encounter between Alowolodu and his sister – Rotimi’s mother – reveals the kindhearted nature of the sister. She is now dead but Alowolodu had refused to help the children left by his sister. The Christmas party he visits with the spirit at the house of Pa Olasore is meant to show Alowolodu that it does not cost a fortune to be happy. These revelations are to make Alowolodu think about his past. Osetura, the Spirit of Christmas-Past informs him:

Ah, these are shadows of things in your past, my friend. I am showing you because you have not thought of them for a long time. But they are part of you, and will always be. It is not good to kill the past of you that makes you human (25).

Through Orekelewa, The Spirit of Christmas-Present, he comes to the present realization of his forgotten past – his acts of unkindness to people are revisited. The revelation at the home of Bode Dedeke whose child is afflicted with an unnamed disease, but with no one to assist the family, shows Alowolodu’s failings. Orekelewa shows him the power of interaction with people. The importance of celebration is brought closer when the Spirit makes him to see peasants and laborers who are in joyful mood in spite of their status. Within the story of the animals who decide to make a drum for the purpose of celebration is engrained the fact that happiness is an essential human need. Through this story, Osofisan seems to be asking: if the animals could understand the essence of celebration, why not human beings? Ijapa (the Tortoise) in spite of his inability to meet the demands of the other animals is able to make the animals happy through his art of
drumming. Orekelewa told this story in order to accentuate the place of celebration and the happiness it brings.

The third Spirit, the Spirit of Christmas-Yet-to-Come, reveals the future. There is a flash-forward to see what becomes of Alowolodu after his death. The conversation between the inheritors in the beginning of Part Four, Scene 2, is an indirect way of telling Alowolodu what becomes of his wealth after his death. Those whom he denied assistance while alive used the opportunity of his death to help themselves with his property. The message in this conversation is that wealth, power, and authority are alien to the dead. Baba Joju’s statement bears eloquent testimony to this fact:

Oh someone had put it [his shirt] on him, and he was going to be buried in it. Can you imagine! But I took it off him, and replaced it with an old one. Where he’s going, I’m sure he won’t be worrying about elegance there! (53).

The Alowolodu that is introduced at the beginning of the play is an estranged personality. Capitalist tendencies make him to see wealth as the only means of achieving happiness. He seems to deride people for celebrating Christmas because they are poor:

The world is going mad! I pay this stupid clerk of mine less than a hundred naira per week. Hardly enough to feed himself and his family. And yet there he is saying ‘A happy Christmas! That’s why I blame government! It doesn’t starve the citizens enough! All this SAP nonsense! What we really need instead is GRIEF and SUFFERING! SORROW, TEARS AND BLOOD … May be then we’ll all learn to be sober! (7).

But his encounter with the Spirit of Christmas-Yet-to-Come changes this position. The spirit involves him in an introspection of his future. This mystical experience surges an awareness of his nothingness, and this terrifies him. Through dramatic ironies he rationalizes that his mode of existence ultimately leads to the way of sorrow and loneliness. This revelation brings him to the road of reformation. Alowolodu grows from an unresponsive man at the start of the play to a joyous and fun-loving personality. He now celebrates Christmas, attends church services, visits people, and he becomes a philanthropist:

I am no longer the man I was! I swear to you. I’ve changed, I can change! Spirit! You know I can live a new life! I tell you now, I shall love Christmas and look forward to it, and try to think of it all the year long! And every time people are rejoicing, and there is a celebra-
tion, I shall join my fellowmen, and try to be happy with them! I will live in the past, the present and the future (54).

The play reflects the temper and sensibility of a society where there is a gulf of separation between the rich and the poor. Through his exposé, Osofisan reveals the reality of existence in the contemporary world where avarice, unbridled lust for wealth and power, and class discrimination is prevalent. Osofisan’s intention is to reform society and, in his pursuit of anti-capitalist ideology, he comes to terms with cosmic forces in his search for a conducive society for humanity. He tries to work on both individual and collective activities in order to create a saner society where everyone lives in happiness, in sharing, and love. In the words of Bamidele, “the play shows the potentials of drama to reshape a society, if not in a Marxian activist way, at best in an analytic, gradualist method, which strives towards the ideal of human perfection” (85).

In terms of form and meaning making, this play takes after the oral narrative, a concept that is not alien to African audiences. Folklore provides the form through which Osofisan shows his critique of societal inequalities. Muyiwa Awodiya confirms that “Osofisan’s greatest contribution to African theatre is his extraordinary theatrical fertility of forms. As part of his artistic revolution, he has been exploring new forms, searching for new ways of conveying his message …” (103). Osofisan deserves credit for his deep insight into human affairs and this confirms that he is a master craftsman. His deployment of Alowolodu’s transformation demonstrates this. Alowolodu needs a complete redemption but before this takes place, he must be made to realize the need for a relationship with people, especially his family members and acquaintances. This reformation is carefully planned through forms of persuasions and revelations so that in the end, Alowolodu becomes a better man than he is at the beginning.

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Central to the challenges of postcolonial disorientations is the seemingly unrelenting corruption that has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian nation-state. Like the celebrations of the flora and fauna as well as the bemoaning of the perfidy of other manifestations that have been done, writers have made frantic efforts to subject these to close scrutiny. Analogous to the strife for space between the biblical tars and the good seed, Femi Osofisan recreates and situates a fledging iconoclast within the stultifying bestiality of an old order, which is repugnanty repressive and finds the desire for change repulsive, in the play Birthdays Are Not for Dying. This chapter examines the spatiality and temporality of the agent of change, configured in the protagonist in the play, and the probability or otherwise of his actions towards precipitating the desirable but elusive new order of probity, accountability, and dutifulness. Using the prescriptions of Michel Foucault’s proposition on power as being present everywhere, it is argued that the game significantly represents that of number, even as the overwhelming percolation of the detestable evil is seen as condemnable. Further, it is made obvious that the forces of evil would always seek an extermination of those of good, thereby leaving us with a constant dialectical opposition between the two binaries. But in this case the power from “above” appears to threaten and submerge that which is “below”. It could however be concluded that feelers in contemporary Nigeria are indicative of the transient existence of the forces of evil as those of positive change are potently alive.

That the human condition is not devoid of certain imperfections is as ineluctable as the desire and drive to ensure a change of the status quo. In furtherance of his commitment to making his existence a worthwhile endeavor, man has stopped
at nothing, not only to find answers to the many “plagues” that threaten him, but also to see the end of his precariousness. In an analogous way and manner, actors in the humanities have lost sleep in collaborating with other stakeholders at fostering an existence, which is ideal, desirable, and commendable. As if jolted by these realities, therefore, artists have copiously engaged and interrogated socio-cultural realities around them, depending on the favors of their imagination. Bemoaning the attempt made by people to relegate literature and arts to the background in the categorization of the players in African development where we have others like economics, mining, health, etc., Eustace Palmer argues that literature offers a formidable impact on how people’s lives could be enhanced in imaginative, subtle, and invisible ways (37-8). This goes to explain the minimal paraphrase of life (Ato Quayson, 46) that theater and drama achieve on the stage. By so doing, characters are constructed to encase and portray certain ideals, positions, and beliefs. Therefore, it is not outlandish for drama, right from preliterate Africa and even elsewhere, to open up an era, development, and trend to excruciating interrogations. As a result, drama becomes a mirror that is held up to life through which the latter is reflected. The foregoing, therefore, positions the socio-temporary mien of a people in the annals of the caricature and representation done by drama. This is further supported by Friedrich Hebbel who posits that:

Drama, as the highest of all arts, should illustrate the condition of the world and of humanity at any given time in its relation to the idea, i.e. to the moral center governing everything which we must assume [to exist] in the universal organism, if only for its own preservation (71-2)

Citing an undeniable variation in the intentions of playwrights in the creation of their works, Judith Ackroyd, cited in Helen Nicholson, submits that they include an attempt “to inform, to cleanse, to unify, to instruct, to raise awareness” (3). However, an art work could combine more than one of these elements. For instance, a work might inform in order to raise an awareness and instruct, thereby leading to the project of cleansing or unification. Starting with the fact that writers are unique within a larger community, Jane I. Guyer holds that writers are “privileged witnesses” in spite of their deprivation and, therefore, “they are voices warning against the downward spirals they can already see, … they are also heralds of the future, raising a rallying cry in search of new directions” (ix). Harry G. Carlson, reviewing the position of Emma Goldman, who is referred to as “a tireless humanist,” writes that the latter believes in the “consciousness-raising” ability of drama as against social relevance (xii). Even though it could be argued that they are saying the same thing in different ways, it is better conceived that drama plays important roles in the process of human existence. Specifically, Goldman, according to Carlson, is said to have argued
against the idea of “art for art sake” based on the fact that “art was too impor-
tant, life was too important, for trivial games.” Therefore, “modern drama, as all modern literature, mirrors the complex struggle of life, the struggle which … ever has its roots in the depth of human nature and social environment, and hence is, to that extent, universal.” For the avoidance of any complication, the seemingly present correlation between the actual world and its dramatic counterpart is neither an attempt at self-dependency or effort at dual substituting capability. The evolution of the dramatic world is geared by the creative ability of the artist who is also a product of a given society where s/he forms his/her beliefs, conjures an identity, and negotiates for inscription. Although no intention is made to replace the actual or lived experiences of the people with those of the actors and performers in a dark box, the manifestations of the actors and performers are far from being an abstraction. Keir Elam has made a good stride to investigate the process of performance and the correlation it offers for the social real order. In spite of the believability that drama strives to achieve through mimesis, Elam claims that the possible world in drama is a mere “virtual rather than real entity, however genuinely taken aback the audience may be” (110). Following the identification of the dual, actual and dramatic, worlds, Elam submits that the dramatic worlds “are presented to the spectator as ‘hypothetical actual’ constructs, since they are ‘seen’ in progress ‘here and now’ without narratorial mediation” (111). Added to the direct imitation that drama uses, the audience’s interpretation of the dramatic piece is made possible by the familiar tropes of actions and stories, coupled with other stage objects, which make actions to be “seen in their intentional and teleological purity” (134). Therefore, if not in linear conformity, the drama text or its performance would deploy a fictive strategy to interrogate or negotiate the factual. The hypothetical world in Osofisan’s drama text, Birthdays Are Not for Dying, could then be accessible to the reader/audience based on the familiar affairs therein. This familiarity of affairs is made possible by the connotative attributes that are inhered in theatrical signifiers which, in the view of Elam, “acquires secondary meanings for the audience (reader), relating it to the social, moral and ideological values operative in the community of which performers and spectators (characters and readers) are part” (10), [emphasis mine].

Conversely, the multifariousness of the experience(s) a people undergo in the course of engaging with their world is often reflected in the mirroring literature, or better still, in what drama seeks to achieve. Taking a dramatic departure from the mythical-fabulous evolution in preliterate African society and through the engagement of biblical stories during the transitional trend toward modernization, theater in Africa is today seemingly and closely synonymous with certain manifestations of real life. This could have offered an explanation for the tendency, for instance, for theater in apartheid South Africa to be read analogously to struggle, protest and war against apartheid. Characteristic of this misleading
conception, some have wondered whether theater in post-apartheid South Africa could retain its steam, potency, and relevance. However, drama in post-apartheid South Africa has rewardingly maintained its firm interrogation of the socio-political and economic life of the people and land of South Africa in conformity with a sense of wider and deeper level of responsibility and signification (Eldred D. Jones, 7). The South African experience of theater under apartheid correlates with the attempts made to deploy theater in a country like Nigeria to mobilize against colonial domination, however passive this might appear when the latter is juxtaposed with the former. As a result, therefore, theater has the potential for transcendentalism across periods, events and players. Jenkeri Z. Okwori achieves a reflection of the role of theater by investigating the interdependence of society and performance as well as the shaping of the latter by the conventions of the former (94). It is later concluded, quoting Margaret Thompson Drewal that performance is “a means by which people reflect on their current conditions, define and/or reinvest themselves and their social world, and either reinforce, resist, or subvert prevailing social orders” (2).

Given the expositions done so far, it is imperative to clarify the apparent concentration that appears to be given to drama as performance. The first thing that should be made known is that this paper gives equal standing to theater as performance and drama as a written text. Further, the examination to be done of Osofisan’s literary material would be carried out with focus given to issues raised, and the context that would have produced it. This is not to say, however, that the idea of choice-making in this regard is devoid of polemics. Scholars are profoundly variegated in their views on the acceptability or otherwise of reading the play-text as a representation of the drama piece whose actualization is on the stage. The scholars that fall under this classificatory knowing are those with inclinations in semiotics. This is more so as drama is believed to be meant for the theater, with every object on stage representing one idea or person, or event. Reading the drama text as against viewing it on stage confers more responsibility on the textual materiality of the written words which make up for other modes of communication, verbal and non-verbal, which Herbert Grabes calls “iconic signs” such as “the stance, gesture, mien, intonation of the speaking actors as well as by the spatial arrangement, lighting and sound effects” (96). More particularly, textual materials are allocated to individuals, from characters to the Stage Manager. Of germane relevance are the various stage directions which in the words of Grabes help “the reader to make up at least in part for what can be seen and heard in a performance” (96). The foregoing also assigns an engaging responsibility to the reader. However, this responsibility should not be seen as a herculean one since the reader would still be expected to make such an effort even as a member of the viewing audience. Although the reader is not confronted with a concrete scenery, such could be conjured in his imagination and by so doing embark on what Grabes
calls an endeavor “to stage a play in the theatre of the mind” (96). Therefore, the present reading of this play-text is done in continuation of Bernard Shaw’s effort, who E. A. Levenston believes “first realized the need to make plays readable and changed the face of the printed play” (214).

As a playwright and theater practitioner, Femi Osofisan has demonstrated, in an unequivocal manner, his revulsion for the worse form of colonialism, perpetuated by the indigenous ruling class, which the Nigerian people found themselves in after laboring hard to be free from the hold of Western colonialism. Central to this disenchantment is the virulent criticism of the successive military detractors who plunged the nation into a deeper abyss. Little wonder, then, that the dramatic pieces of Osofisan, like those of Soyinka and Ola Rotimi, have at several points interrogated the precariousness of the life of the people even as efforts were made to mobilize the people towards realizing this dodgy situation and acting accordingly. Soyinka, one of the committed dramatists and playwrights in Nigeria, has traditionally fashioned for himself the creation of singular protagonists in his plays who are left to wrestle with and challenge the excesses of the state, a system, or an order. This trait could be seen from The Strong Breed to Death and the King’s Horseman and many others. However, Femi Osofisan has severally disapproved of this, subscribing to the involvement of the mass of the people in the questioning of the state, system, or order which is conceived to be inimical to the existence of the people. Using the mechanism of classification to the older and younger generations,4 where Soyinka and Clark fall under the older and Femi Osofisan and others to the younger, David Kerr tries to justify the application of the European leftists’ “self-conscious pandering to a proletarian illusion” description to Femi Osofisan and others in his group (123). Kerr goes on to submit that while Soyinka believes that mythical-cultural elements and factors play a significant role in the theater of a people, “the other radical authors base their theory of popular theatre on a materialist interpretation of African society” (123). Although it can not be said that these views represented by the two groups are explicitly instructive in the interpretations of their works, considering the possibilities overlaps. Therefore, Osofisan, cited in Kerr above, has offered that “to create an alternative tradition...from a materialist perspective...[we] look at literature as a social force, an indigenous weapon.” The attendant consequences of the two different attempts are huge, and promise some profundity.

There appears to be a common consensus on the tenability of a lack of good leadership as the bane of the Nigerian nation, and by extension of most postcolonial African nation-states. The foregoing underpins the wholesomeness of the development envisaged and desired for the continent of Africa before and during the movements for independence and self-rule across the continent. This quest for development forms part of the “development information” (Ogundipe-Leslie, 27)5 provided by both creative writers and literary critics. Although successive
socio-political temporalities in Nigerian drama were indicative of the dearth of good leadership for the people, the perfidy of post-independent disillusionment and military autocracy made the quest for good governance and leadership more poignant. Even as notable efforts were made to interrogate the socio-cultural and political milieu of the Nigerian nation through the instrumentality of drama, and what Peter Ukpokodu refers to as an attempt to “harangue” none was spared in bemoaning the avidit (43). The foregoing disdainful disorientation and commitment secures the attention of Femi Osofisan when he enthuses that the concerns of the playwright include the vocation of combating “the spreading philistinism of the ruling class, the infectious military-civilian bourgeoisie, now totally enmeshed in the reification process so celebrated in capitalist development” (The Nostalgic Drum, 44). Little wonder, therefore, that playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotoso, Bode Sowande, Zulu Sofola, and others, have painstakingly examined and concentrated on the quest for good leadership, thereby culminating in what Ukpokodu deems “near obsession” (70). Furthermore, the submission by Femi Osofisan below typifies the engagement that drama usually makes of tyrannical rulers, both civilian and military. In his words, plays were written and performed, thereby making:

the thieving soldiers the target of attack, either by direct denunciation, or through indirect surreptitious tactics. The stage was turned into a part of the resistance, into an active space of struggle, with the dramatists contributing their own talents to the demands for freedom, and for the ousting of the uniformed oppressors (“Theatrical Life After the Generals” 2).

The view expressed by Osofisan above captures one of the many commitments of theater, and drama in most nations of the world. As incredible and wholesome as these commitments sound, such can not be extended to the effectiveness of the approach in concrete terms.

*Birthdays Are Not for Dying* is written with great simplicity and could be put on stage using few props. This is representative of a category of Osofisan’s plays that are accessible to audiences and readers who do not have the temerity for coping with sophisticated theatrical devices. The plot is about a young man, Kunle Aremo, who is set to assume control of his late father’s business, against his mother’s advice, after he turns thirty, the year prescribed in his father’s will for this to happen. This intention puts him in confrontation with his father’s old compatriots who do not consider him to be consequential in his newly found status. Kunle Aremo, as the new board chairman, is determined to exert the belief in courage and vengeance his late father reposed in him by challenging members of the board, which include Chief Samuel Seminiyi, Retired Major Peter Ajala, Councilor Lekan Bamgbade, Honourable O.O. Fakunle, and Alhaji
Nassir Koworola. On the day of his thirtieth birthday and his initiation as the board chairman, Kunle Aremo confronts the board members with his determination to effect a change, and, like Femi Osofisan puts it in the blurb, exercise “his power, his much-nourished and envisioned ideal that of exterminating the corruption, hypocrisy, and sycophancy that have become endemic in his late father’s estate.” Both the use of personal names and social as well as religious designations in the play help to achieve what Elaine Aston and George Savona call “the informational function of character” (45).

More significantly, the plot assumes a worrisome dimension when the news of the sickness of Segun, the first son of Kunle Aremo, is broken. It reaches a pitiable height when he dies on the way to the hospital. This, however, leads to more controversial revelations and insinuation about the paternity of the dead child and suspicion towards Bosede, Kunle’s wife. In the ecstasy of his birthday celebration, Kunle Aremo is seized by a headache which could not be mitigated by medication, leading to his death. However, a little complexity is introduced to the scene of his death through the interaction one of the board members, Councilor, has with him when presenting a birthday gift to the deceased. The excerpt below shows this:

Councilor: Good! I brought you a gift, you courageous man! Let’s test the strength of your galloping mouth. Take! (He brings out his present, rips off the wrappings and thrusts it violently at Kunle. His back is to the audience so that we don’t see what it is. Note, it is important that the audience does NOT see. Kunle is seen to leap backward with a scream his eyes filled with terror). (48)

No doubt, the statement credited to Councilor above is replete with satirical irony. Expectedly, he brings Kunle a birthday gift. But this contrasts with the encounter that follows where he insultingly invites him to a duel over the audacity Kunle had displayed earlier on the need to sanitize his father’s business empire. Although the gift brought by the Councilor is concealed from both the viewing and reading audiences, the stage description shows that it is a dreadful object that should not pass for the purpose of gifting. This possibility of strangeness and awe is reinforced by the dramatic withdrawal of Kunle who is bent on avoiding the danger posed by the “gift” and the offensive action of the giver. Put in a nutshell, it is an object of terror.

Apparently, on the surface, this play offers a good simple reading. But it, more importantly, presents a noble characteristic of an art work with multiple readings. This trait of ambiguity will help situate the explication of the play-text within the manifestations of cultural materialism, with direct concentration given to the preoccupation specified in the title. Whether seen as a miniature representation of a business empire or a microcosm of a state, the nuanced polarity
evidenced in the play, with Kunle Aremo on the one side and the board members on the other, certainly leaves us with a good platform for polemics. If taken as a representation of the Nigerian nation-state, and by extension other wobbling postcolonial nations in search of democratic stability, it becomes obvious that Marxist dialectical materialism is still rife in the negotiations that are ongoing in the socio-political and economic life of such analogous nations. As a result, characters on the two sides of the divide tend to pass for a representation of active players in the outside real world whose antics are being reflected on.

Driven by the prognoses of New Historicism, this work tends to interrogate the dramatic social networks established in the text. New Historicism prescribes the reading of a work of art based on the context and the situation that gave rise to it. It is conceived that such a work is nuanced by the material realities of the creator and the experiences of the people that shape the imaginative process of its creation. Kevin A. Eaton reiterates the view of New Historicism to the effect that “the societal concern of the author, of the historical time evidenced in the work, and other cultural elements exhibited in the text” must be taken into consideration “before we can devise a valid interpretation” (131). Any attempt at separating artistic expression from other forms of social and cultural interaction would drain literature and culture of any political and social importance (Simon Malpas, 60).

As hinted at earlier, no work of art attempts to equate the “real” or the “actual”, if at all such a “real” is obtainable at all. No doubt, the position maintained by New Historicism as enunciated above underpins the significance of a society in the making of the “self” that of the author as well as the reader. Copious arguments are rife on the fact that the individual is not just shaped and nurtured by the genes of the parents but by the genius of the environment. This is to mean that what a writer does cannot be severed from the experiences that mold his/her personality in the course of negotiating locus and voice. However, although, no attempt is made in this study to reduce the text under examination to a biographical documentation of an individual or an event, the probability and possibility, as well as the “as if” inhered in it are indicative of the established link between the actual and the dramatic worlds. It is not outlandish, therefore, to read Osofisan’s *Birthdays Are Not for Dying* using the dynamics of Nigeria as a nation-state, or any other nations with such characteristics on the globe. Any identifiable correlations in tropes between these countries point to a trend that is humanistic.

More particularly, this chapter situates the reading of this play-text within the notion of power as conceived by Michel Foucault whose work is of tremendous influence on the practice of New Historicism. Foucault is unambiguous on his position and postulations about the omnipresence and immanence of “power”. Starting with the complexities of what “power” is not, Michel Foucault holds that:

> Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate.
and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, straightens, or reverses them; as the support which this force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies (92-3).

Apparently, the propositions above seek to further inscribe the position of Foucault that the force relation of power should not be typified into any binary, having proposed that “power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (94). Foucault is stringently opposed to the confining of power to the superstructure, where it assumes purely the role of an instrument of oppression, but believes that the analysis of power must be done with requisite consideration given to its “mechanics and concrete nature” (58). Continuing his argument that power should not just be conceived as a “state apparatus” deployed towards repression, Foucault has further argued that power “doesn’t only weigh on us…but it traverses and produces things…” (57) and therefore “it needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression” (61). It should be acknowledged that the position maintained by Foucault above tends to negate the notion of Marxism which expressly traces power to the state, which the state in turn uses to hold the masses in perpetual subjugation. However, the fact that Foucault believes power resides everywhere underscores the fact that it could be used by the state. However and in turn, certain individuals galvanize the instrumentalities of the state. The only exception to this, in the view of Marxism, is that power is only deployed by the state against the unfortunate, helpless mass of the people. The reading of the play-text in this chapter shall be done based on the proposition that power is indeed residual everywhere and could be harnessed to achieve one aim or the other. In this wise, it shall be made bare that apart from the added values gained by an individual through external forces ─ social, economic or political ─ the individual self gets expressed and by so doing exerts power, however minute the bit, when subjected to scrutiny. Rather than further extend the polemics that surround the negotiation of human relationships using power, the effort being made in this study will attempt an amalgamation of the two views represented by both Foucault and Marxism on the issue of power.

To aver that Birthdays Are Not for Dying is a reflection and an interrogation of a social process is stating the obvious. Both as a configuration of an entity which passes for a business empire, as encapsulated in the play, or of a nation-
state society the play expressly typifies how power is expended and negotiated, and thereby confirming the position of Foucault that, “power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted ‘above’ society as a supplementary structure whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of.”9 Although the play opens with the scene which could be interpreted as the making or transfer-ence of power from the late father of Kunle Aremo, the chairman of the “signify-ing” company, a hint is given referentially on the facilitation of power done by the late chairman by marginalizing the place and contribution of the mother of Kunle Aremo, his wife, in the writing of the will which confers a greater lease of power on Kunle. An indication of the sublime, subservient, and endangered place given to women, not just by the late father of Kunle, but other men in that community, is aired in the precarious negotiation Kunle’s mother embarks on to dissuade him from taking over the running of the company:

MOTHER: Of course, women don’t mean much to you men. We’re only good to nurse you, feed you and wash your clothes. Never to be trusted. One would have thought that after so many years together, after so many things we have been through, side by side, he would come and seek my opinion on such a delicate thing. After all, it’s my son too. But not him!... (8)

The above is demonstrative of the deployment of power based on patriarchy. Sex, rather than age or experience, determines the volubility of one’s voice and the gravity of the influence it wields. Women, according to the excerpt above, are seen as inconsequential when certain decisions are to be taken. This means that they are bereft of social and political power and left with arrogated domestic and culinary responsibilities. Paradoxically, however, these defined responsibilities are considered by Kunle’s mother to be a generator of power and an ascription of relevance needed for the negotiated movement of power within the socio-political networks of the community. The attempt by Kunle’s mother to negate the excluding actions of her late husband and justify her being given a place of relevance arrogates more influence to her as a co-traveler with the husband through the thick and thin. It should be noted that the argument that is inhered in the statement above is not just based on products of physicality but emotive and psychological identifications. This means that although the woman was denied the opportunity of being heard at a time in the past, she now has the undeniable right of venting both her opinions and dissentions, even when her relevance is yet to be negotiated. The flow of dynamics in this connection is particularly determined by the fact that Kunle’s father, who made it impossible for his wife to be heard and involved in the process of decision making, is no more. As a result, it is evident that while the late chairman deploys patriarchy in his paternalistic misdemeanor, this is made transient by the power of mutability and mortality.
Discussions on the precariousness of the womenfolk in Africa are countless and volubly beyond gainsaying. Mention should be made, very quickly, of the great impetus the trend secured from the activities of women-liberating groups all over the world, most especially the United States of America. Attempts at branding, using vignettes such as African feminism, womanhood, etc., were calculated at evolving an African version of feminism which would not infringe, or attenuate the peculiar heritage the continent is blessed with. This was considered more desirable as a result of the “excesses” perceived in the way and manner the concept is otherwise practiced. While such thinking canvases for the institutionalization of respect for the woman, it does not subscribe to the priggish quest for equality with men. It could be argued that this is most true because of the identifiable roles “prescribed” for both the man and the woman which are expected to be discharged devoid of traits or attempts at subservience. Belaboring the foregoing based on the premises established by both the radical and liberal thinkers in the application of feminism in Africa would be less germane in this work as against the reflections left after the social negotiations between Kunle’s late father and mother, on the one hand, and Kunle and his mother, on the other, when read against the backdrop of respect and valuable locale desired for women. The statement of Kunle’s mother cited above touches on one of the strong reasons that have been atavistically adduced for the exclusion of women in some societies in Africa. Kunle’s mother bemoans the fact that she could not be trusted even though she has been battered by the “pains” and “pangs” of raising children. In most primordial African societies, women were considered not having the capacity and ability to keep secrets. Therefore, they were excluded from participating in rituals and festivals that derived their awesomeness from secrecy and ghoulishness. By so doing, the woman, thus, turns out to be a victim of the deployment of power, which is generated through the ascription of garrulousness as a characteristic trait. Even though the suspicion of compromise on a supposedly “sensitive” issue is rife towards the woman, the probability that this is shrouded in insulates her from culpability. Unfortunately enough, the woman, who is Kunle’s mother, is only mapped out of the writing of the will, but not protected against the consequences of its operation. Her sense of responsibility toward her son, Kunle, would not allow her to hold her peace.

Kunle’s perpetuation of the headiness of his late father in the despicable way he relates to his mother further seeks to extend the issuance of patriarchal power and the pains of the unprotected woman. As noted earlier, even when the process of imagining what the role of the woman could have been with the secret of the written will poses a difficulty, her contribution to and engagement with Kunle before he meets his premature death vindicates and confers some values on her. She speaks more like someone who has hindsight-knowledge of the nefariousness of the actions of members of the company. She particularly dreads becoming a
mourner following the fear she has for the life of Kunle. While Kunle’s mother depends on her past knowledge of members of the company to warn her son, Kunle, the vulnerable son is beclouded by his desire to avenge his late father. Although Kunle tries to paint the impression that the quest for vengeance is borne out of what his father wants, as enshrined in his will, this is far from being the truth as we could read between the lines when Kunle acknowledges that, “I’ve read his diary. It is not precise, but I think I know what he wants” (11).

No matter the effort made by Kunle to justify his confrontation with his father’s old “diabolical” compatriots, such venture is nothing more than what his mother calls “a dying man’s unthinking gesture” (11). Apparently, Kunle is not oblivious of the dangers that are inherent in his actions but is irresistibly propelled by a greater force, that which seeks the fulfillment of his personality and the inscription and ascription of a place in the socio-political and economic locus in his society. Recognizing his familiar world as that of “cannibals,” Kunle sees the ongoing skirmishes as “A chance to prove myself, that I am really his son. Without fear. Like in a rite of initiation…” (12). Going by the foregoing, it is not arguable that Kunle is particularly concerned with the need to effect a change in the detestable status quo, but tends more to rid himself of perceived fear just like Achebe’s Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. It is, therefore, a clash between a fledging power and an old order, which is not prepared to lose its grip and relevance.

One obvious entanglement that Kunle desires to free himself from is the legalistic manner by which his late father and his friend, Chief, impose the choice of marrying the latter’s daughter on him. Kunle sees Chief, Bosede’s father (Bosede is Kunle’s estranged wife), as a profiteer who is bent on using the relationship between him and Bosede to achieve material aggrandizements. Although the despicable relegation of the “sacred” and fundamental marital conviviality is implicit in several statements made by Kunle, he comes out more poignantly when he retorts that, “How many others, since you met me? Since our fathers promised us to each other to cement their friendship and we agreed to be engaged?” (18). This statement is reminiscent of the visceral ways by which most things, however significant they are, are sacrificed on the altar of materiality. It also represents the almost absolute control parents exert on issues that border on their wards. Although inherently atavistic in nature, it is expected that substantial erosion should have been made into it on the face of the interaction that the people have made with modernity. For the purpose of avoiding the polemics of contemporaneous juxtaposition, it should be made clear that this is no longer the popular practice as some levels of independence has been given to individuals in deciding who to marry. However, though, the case of Kunle and Bosede illustrates those of wealthy families who are unrepentantly committed to seeing an unbroken connect in their social status. By so doing, they more or less legislate who their children
are to marry, and this is done based on the central consideration that is given to indices like social and financial status. The deployment of power is achieved in this stead through the mapping of place which in turn creates the binary of exclusion and inclusion. People are advantageously mapped into opportunities and shut out to vulnerability. Other than the underprivileged individuals who are put at a disadvantage, the parental relationships shared by Kunle and Bosede with their parents, respectively, reduce them to mere commodities that could be used in negotiating for a better socio-economic locus. These commoditized categories of people are precariously endangered and are more often than not liable to total stultification. For instance, it is obvious that Kunle and Bosede are not in any way compatible to raise a family but are “cemented” to build a bridge with which their parents could get to their material destination. Little wonder that the marriage collapses at the end of the day. Unfortunately enough, the negative cyclic trend consumes Segun, the only child that the disputable relationship between Kunle and Bosede produces. This process reminds one of women-objectification in Sembene Ousmane’s *Xala* and some other literary work.

We should be reminded, however, that the culture of imposition is seemingly tantamount to the characteristic of man. This has been demonstrated since the invasions of places and locations in the quest of material viability and, by extension, political rulership. The twentieth century quest for self rule has led to it snowballing into ethnic bickering and political brouhahas, unabatedly. At the other side of it is the spate of neocolonialism that taints the relationship between the North and the South in postcolonial delineation. This imposition has led to different eras of socio-political repressions within nations and infiltration from external influence, directly or indirectly, when such repressive violations attain the level of pogrom, annihilation or, in tandem with the cliché, enormous violation of the fundamental human rights of the people. Facts of this matter range from the experiences from Nigeria to Liberia, Congo to Rwanda, South Africa to Zimbabwe, etc. Instances of these external “intrusions” were at one point or another made indispensable in the histories of these nations, most especially when they gravitated towards a full-blown war, or enmeshed in one. Conversely, one aspect of these interventions that is polemically intrusive is the guardian-of-human-rights toga that the United States of America has adorned. Without any attempt made at auditing its activities in this direction all over the world, the case of Iraq would be relatively instructive. It is apparent that the war that the United States is waging in Iraq is no longer the idea and belief of the United Nations on whose platform the decision to go to war was taken. The fact that some other great nations differed with the US on Iraq is not as obvious as the fact that the British government, which provided the companionship needed by the US, is nursing a dwindling commitment to the war in Iraq at the moment. It, therefore, appears that the US is only trying to plough a lonely furrow in Iraq going by
the human and material resources it loses in prosecuting the war. By the time the fifth anniversary of the war was “celebrated” in March, 2008, an average of $10 to $12 billion was said to be spent on the war each month. This is outside the thousands of soldiers who have died in the war (about 4,500 as at end of August 2008). Some of these soldiers are, however, believed to be foreigners, like Nigerians, who were enslaved through the Green Card program, a modern and self-approved slavery.

The cardinal reasons for fighting this war, in the words of President Bush, are the need to ensure liberation and the promotion of the rights of cowed Iraqis and the security of the people and nation of the United States. Without any attempt to digress beyond the point of recall, one is wont to guess that the deployment of the huge resources spent on fighting this senseless war in the area of poverty eradication and a conscientiously-conceived and implemented educational program would give people all over the world a sense of freedom, determination for self assertion, and commitment to rights protection. One thing the notion and principles of globalization have achieved today is the perpetuation of economic inequality and the widening bifurcation of socio-political inscriptions into the polarity of the North and the South. It could be provocatively argued that the precipitation of this utopian era might put the need and quest for cheap labor in great jeopardy. As this is not far from true, it is believed that other means and methods should be involved in the process of economic engineering. The instructive connection drawn between the society in *Birthdays Are Not for Dying* and the larger contemporaneous world is driven by the dints of materiality, possession drives achieved through dispossession, and the deployment of the possession for oppression.

One other way by which power has been deployed in this text is the avidity and avarice shown towards material acquisition. The Nigerian nation that provides an immediate correlation for the play, in context and tone, has been gripped in the jugular by corruption of different nature and magnitude. Although corruption cannot be said to be strange to most nations, that of the Nigerian State assumed an alarming proportion in the dark days of military rule, when money accruable to the country from crude oil sales was diverted to private accounts in some European countries. The windfall recorded under what was tagged the “maradonic” rulership of the self confessed “evil genius”, Ibrahim Babangida during the Gulf War, and the revelations that greeted the death of the maximum ruler, Sani Abacha, are good cases in point. Efforts made by the human rights crusader, Gani Fawehinmi, to publish the details of the money that the duo, mentioned above, were stashing away in foreign accounts were greeted more by pessimism. The reasons for such pessimistic receptions were traceable to the unbelievable enormity of such accounting details. The general consensus, then, appeared to be that those sums were beyond what the nation could own. It is not just that these revelations have
ceased to be mere speculations, but it is more worrisome to know that countries whose banks supported the looting are now occupying the place of legislators on how money to be repatriated to the Nigerian government be spent. Such thinking, more reasonably, tends more towards recklessness than sincerity. It is thinkable that these countries and their financial agencies should have been blacklisted and castigated for their complicity in the treasury looting, with due compensation paid to the hungry and violated masses through the government of the day. Regrettably enough, such priggish behavior and shamelessness are reminiscent of the ongoing neocolonial suppressions and dispossession that underdeveloped and developing nations are subjected to through Western multinationals. The best illustrations of this is found in the activities of countries like the US and China in the Nigerian Niger-Delta region.

Without any attempt to categorize this despicable development as an exclusive preserve of the Nigerian nation, or better still, Africa, as most permutations would want to suggest, recent discoveries made by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission ICPC, through their investigation and the arrest of state executives by the Interpol have revealed that access to power by most people entrusted with it is synonymous with corruption. The avidity with which people appropriate what should ordinarily be meant to cater to the teeming populace is worrisome and condemnable. A few unpatriotic players in both private and public life have cornered the apparatuses of the Nigerian State. By this act, individuals who are privileged by their access to power use the same to hold down the masses in perpetual dispossession and denial of social amenities. The bites and stings of this recklessness are made more prominent in the microscopic configuration Ola Rotimi made of the Nigerian nation-state in *If: A Tragedy of the Ruled*. The inherently inseparable connection that we see between political and economic relations in the play-text is remarkably indicative of that which pervades the interactions between the political and economic classes. Access to one is viewed as a pathway to the other. Therefore, as the political and economic classes sustain their hold on the material reality of the nation, the underprivileged helpless mass of the people are left to bear the brunt of corruption and misappropriation. Although the acoustic imaginary of the under-quoted altercations might produce some amusement, that would be impossible of the semantics:

HONOURABLE: Fraud! Fraud! What is fraud, tell me! Is it what everybody does or not? Every bloody rich man in this country got his wealth by what you call fraud! And you know it! So what have I done wrong? (36)

KUNLE: …It’s just that you stole your way up, all the way, and cannot stop stealing. You, Alhaji . (37)
The statement above by Honorable speaks the mind of the corrupt class where corruption is seen as the norm and the rule. Apart from this, the statement also casts some aspersions and culpability on several people who have attained a height through one dubious means or the other. This regrettably makes obvious the degeneration of a once morally viable nation which has digressed to an era of impunity for condemnable acts. Major, one of the characters in the play, exemplifies this in his remarks:

MAJOR: You can’t do this, you know. We built this company with your father. We employed all kinds of means. It is the age we live in, we can’t change the rules. Everyone plunders, whether from friends or strangers or the government! It’s all in the game. The winner takes the loot; the loser goes to the gutter, or into the asylum. We played the game and won. Your father was no different. He had his teeth out just like any other— .(38)

Kunle’s emergence as a catalyst in this age of looters is analogous to the biblical presence of the seed within the thorns. A reversion to an age of “no business as usual” is indeed daunting and onerous. If the human substance of the text is situated within contemporary realities in the Nigerian State, part of which must have nurtured the imagination of the playwright, it becomes understandable that the stringent efforts being made by some to stultify the EFCC, being the most vociferous of all anti-corruption agencies, is worthwhile after all, as that would guarantee the tradition of business as usual.

Although Birthdays Are Not for Dying does not parade a complex scenery, plot, structure, and props it raises issues that are fundamentally convoluted in connectivity and meaning. The submersion of the hero, Kunle, seems to de-emphasize the particularization of the regeneration of the society for development as personified in the individual character heroes often created by Wole Soyinka in his plays. Even though the play was written at a time when corruption was being consolidated as a norm, with only pockets of resistance shown at the level of the individual, it prophetically presages an era that is finding a correlation in contemporaneous Nigeria. Just as the revolutionist in Kunle is choked up by the strange act of the fraudsters, people who have designed that to assuage their avarice and gluttony would resist any movement towards a change in the negative status quo of corruption. The battle should only be taken above the level of the individual, either in person or agency, to that of all and sundry, when eclecticism is expected to demonstrate unification against the despicable. A look at the past in Osofisan’s Birthdays Are Not for Dying would move us forward both in the present and future.
NOTES

1. Quoted from the foreword of Emma Goldman (1987:3).
2. Peter Ukpokodu (1992:ix) identifies the theater of late Hubert Ogunde as occupying the front burner of the struggle for Nigerian independence from British colonialism even as he locates Wole Soyinka’s literary theater as “a veritable platform for the intelligentsia to hear the varied voices of artistic realism and vision proffered to actually shape events in society.”
3. He has earlier used a quotation to introduce his writing where he reiterates the position of Alan Bolt on the use of theater as a gun which is potent and efficient towards liberation from imperialism.
4. This classification is subject to a review in view of the emergence of new playwrights. We should also be wary of the politics of canonization.
5. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie gives a brief on the encounter she had with some United Nations agencies who probed to know how relevant literary discourses are to the idea of African development. She submits that their views were however colored by a tilt towards information and communication as agents for development. Ogundipe-Leslie then argued that “creative writing and literary practice” are major forms of communication.
6. Ukpokodu relives the efforts made by Adunni Oluwol to mobilize and persuade the people not to rush into any form of self-rule, coupled with the commitment she showed towards participating in real politicking in order to checkmate the politicians’ pursuance of self-interest and the despoliation of the nation. Like the protagonist in Birthdays Are Not for Dying, she did not live long enough to realize her intentions.
7. Readership and accessibility emerged as a profound problematic area in Nigerian literature at a time when certain writers attempted to define who their reading audiences were. The development was a fall-out of the so-called obscuritism.
8. Yvette Hutchison (2000:44) posits that apart from the fact that Osofisan uses “history to challenge past systems and interpretations”, thereby seeking societal transformation by deploring “Marxist Materialism” for a change in the Nigerian economic structure.
10. The phrase was peculiarly used in 2007 by South African president Thabo Mbeki, in his State of the Nation address to foreground the need to eschew corruption and concentrate on the provision of basic social amenities to the people as part of the realization of the transformation and reconstruction drive targeted at blacks who were previously disadvantaged.
11. George Lamming, quoted by Anne V. Adams and Janis A. Mayes (1998:1), opines that the reading done by a scholar of a piece of art work should transcend the boundaries of the classroom to include “the collective consciousness of a continuing social reality which nurtures the individual imagination of the writers.”
12. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission was established by the past Nigerian Head of State, Olusegun Obasanjo, in 2003, but backed with an act in 2004. The agency is saddled with the responsibility of curbing the menace of corruption which
has been a bane of progress in the country. Several of its activities were suspected to have been shrouded in immense political intrigues. Even though the spokesperson for the agency has reiterated the commitment of the commission times without number, some pessimists think otherwise. However, the commission is believed to have enjoyed more leeway and freedom under President Umaru Yar’adua who is known for his avowed commitment to the rule of law, as against President Obasanjo who was believed to have used the commission as a witch-hunting bull dog. The recent directive by the Inspector General of Police Mike Okiro that the pioneer chairman of the commission, Nuru Ribadu, should undergo a professional course at the Nigerian National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, attracted profound acerbic attacks from many Nigerians who saw the development as an attempt to “kill” the agency. It is suspected that “powerful” corrupt politicians and individuals are interested in seeing the demise of the crime fighting agency. So far, and following the appointment of Mrs. Farida Mzamber Waziri as the new executive chairman of the commission, nothing has shown a diminishing trend in the activities of the agency as she and members of her team have initiated new cases of corruption and sustained old ones. Although one cannot rule out modicums of compromise in the dealings of the agency, considering the fallibility of man, only time will tell if the suspicions and anxieties expressed by certain individuals in the country are not unfounded after all. More information on the commission is available at www.efccnigeria.org.

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This chapter is premised on Janet Wolff’s thesis that, “The reader, viewer, or audience is actively involved in the construction of the work of art, and without the art of reception/consumption, the cultural product is not complete” (46). There is every need to investigate the audiencehip (if not constituency) of Femi Osofisan in the twenty-first century, at least, if you like, to test the waters and ascertain the popularity of his audience and even the audience of his popularity. The conceptual interpretation of audience in this chapter encompasses both the people who read as well as watch a play. In other words, we are referring to the recipients and/or consumers. Used in this sense, there is really no need to separate the two terms with regard to their epistemology as well as specifics pertaining to this chapter.

The survey for this research was carried out in 2002. In the first place, questionnaires were administered on respondents in the University of Jos (Plateau State in central Nigeria) and the University of Ibadan (Oyo State in southwest Nigeria). The choice of these two universities is instructive, the idea being that they would provide a somewhat balanced representation of Osofisan’s audience in Nigeria. In the second place, the primary aim of the survey was to gauge the popularity of Femi Osofisan’s plays and, in turn, how popular he is on university campuses in Nigeria in relation to other Nigerian playwrights.

A total of three hundred (300) questionnaires (150 for each campus) were administered through random sampling. Out of these, two hundred and twenty-
five (225) were returned valid—one hundred and twenty-nine (129) from Jos and ninety-six (96) from Ibadan. The implication here is that a total of seventy-five (75) questionnaires were missing—twenty-one (21) from Jos and fifty-four (54) from Ibadan. Nevertheless, the responses showed a success rate of 74.6 percent upon which analyses were made. On the basis of (demographic) data gathered, we can reach a couple of generalizations as we discuss and analyze the data. We shall begin with a demographic analysis because of the manner in which, as Hybels et al argue, it “reveals data about the characteristics of a group of people” (303).

AGE DISTRIBUTION

Using a pie chart to give us a diagrammatic analysis of the age characteristics of Osofisan’s audience on the two university campuses under survey, we can see that the bulk of his audience is aged 15-35. When we combine the two age groups it gives us 313⁰, out of 360⁰. These age brackets correspond to that of students expected to be in the university.

Diagram 1: Age Distribution

Osofisan has made the point severally that his plays are directed and targeted to the educated class and particularly to the student class since they are still “ideologically pliant and not yet frozen with the theology of any particular camp or cult” (22). Arguably, we find this thesis quite disputable because it is presented as a given fact. This seeming (and that is actually what it is) ideological pliant character of the students should not presuppose a neutral and unfrozen ideological status. Everybody (and this includes students) come from a certain ideological milieu.

Therefore, to say that at the age of 15-35 (the age bracket of students in Nigerian universities) a person is still ideologically pliant is arguable. The African is a tripartite being, living a tripartite life: because he or she is a product of (and is affected by) religion, education, and tradition. These are facets of ideology—belief systems. Beyond this however, the question is how does an audience approach a work of art? According to Umberto Eco, “…the reader approaches
a text from a personal ideological perspective, even when his ideological bias is only a highly simplified system of axiological oppositions” (22).

Without doubt, Osofisan’s texts and performances are more often than not couched in Marxist praxis, even though the writer has variously explained this as commonsense persuasions. His plays and performances are structured to unmask the contradictions and ideological smoke screen in contemporary Nigerian society. Contradictions such as the widening and worsening gap between the rich and poor amidst oil boom, fake electioneering promises, and wanton corruption, injustice, and oppression in a land (and regimes after regimes), which professes to uphold the law of the land. We see these in plays such as *Morountodun* and his classic *Once Upon Four Robbers*. Reading plays such as these and sitting through their performances, the effect on the audience can be quite tremendous. The audiences’ ideological background plays a key role in reconciling the deconstruction that the play unfolds before his or her very presence. As Eco puts it,

> not only the outline of textual ideological structure is governed by the ideological bias of the reader, but also…a given ideological background can help one to discover or ignore textual ideological structures (22).

It is understood that the university students are one of the most vibrant and militiant factions of Nigerian society. Their education exposes them to certain general knowledge about social and political issues, even though they may not know all the precise details. Given this situation therefore, it is not difficult to suppose that the university campus audience will discover the textual ideological structures in Osofisan’s texts and performances, at least within the context of their contact with the work.

Narrowing down Osofisan’s thematic preoccupations “to the three principles which his plays promote: knowledge, justice, and compassion” (140), we can begin to appreciate the organic linkages between his plays and the university audience. Osofisan wants to imbue his audience with knowledge, so he educates them in the political economy of their nation. Osofisan wants to raise the consciousness of his audience on the meaning of justice, so he revolves his plays (thematically—through language and semiotics) around the injustices of man to man, which often masquerades as religion. He also wants to reinvest his audience with the virtue of compassion, so he re-enacts scenarios to show that the human virtue of compassion is still necessary in our generation despite its gradual erosion by the exegesis of greed and hatred. We can see all these themes vividly portrayed from *A Restless Run of Locusts* to *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, and from *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* to *Many Colors Make the Thunder King*. In these plays, Osofisan’s recurring subject matter of violence, the dehumanization of man by man, wanton corruption, oppression, and exploitation.
of the many by the few continue to mediate the Nigerian context which students
can relate to without much ado.

Furthermore, Osofisan’s texts do not spoon-feed their audience with solu-
tions; rather, they invite the audience to reason out solutions especially in the
manner in which he involves the audience in the final production of solution.
Thus, as he puts it, he reaches out to the audience in dialogic climaxes; moments
when at the propulsion of the performance the audience can commence a discus-
sion with themselves and the play on the road to a dynamic relationship with the
conflicts of the play (140-1).

THE YORUBA FACTOR

Significantly, some of the dramatic/theatrical strategies he uses to capture
audience cooperation include, dance, music, proverbs, myths, and legends—all
these draw from the rich Yoruba tradition of South Western Nigeria. Does this
account for the overwhelming Yoruba respondents in the data? What can we
make of this? Using a pie chart to give us a pictorial representation of the data,
we can opine that he is more often than not influenced by the changing Yoruba
membership of his audience.

Diagram 2: Ethnic nationalities

This diagram shows that Osofisan is very popular among the Yoruba axis. We can
also analyze the diagram to mean that Osofisan’s main constituency is the Yoruba
even though his audience is a mixed one, and this shows that his works are not
only for the Yoruba audience but for all ethnic nationalities and races partly
because of its universal application. These universal applications are evident from
the thematic strands that run through his plays. Even though an overwhelming
Yoruba audience receives Osofisan’s plays, he is not mindful of their delicate sen-
sibilities. He is tactful and humorous in his surreptitious and subversive treatment
of Yoruba traditional materials and motifs. What this means is that, thematically,
Osofisan’s plays have made the statement that in the words of Alberto Gonzalez,
Marsha Houston, and Victoria Chan, “there is not one style of any particular
group any more than there is one style of Anglo-American communication” (xv).
This translates into the fact that writers (of all sorts) need to be sensitive and responsive to a diverse audience. In relation to Osofisan’s works, our data show that he does cater to diverse audiences outside the Yoruba circle.

Furthermore, if we can say that understanding and interpreting his plays would not be difficult for the Yoruba audience, surely we cannot say the same for other ethnic nationalities. This subjects Osofisan’s plays to diverse interpretation. So that even as Osofisan envisions a level of understanding to emerge from the audience engagement with the texts or performances, there is a high possibility (especially with other members of the audience far removed from the Yoruba culture) that their understanding would be clouded in ambiguity. As Peggy Phelan observes, “the meaning of a word/symptom is not and cannot be singular or stable, the meaning changes according to the context in which it appears and speaks”. What Phelan is suggesting is a plurality of meaning occasioned and defined by varying contexts. This plurality of meaning has wider implications for diverse audiences, especially audiences far removed from the immediate context of the writer.

THE GENDER FACTOR

While it matters a great deal if the gender characteristics of Osofisan’s audiences indicate a marked difference, our data show that the difference is only marginal. Diagram 3 below shows that 202° of respondents are males while 158° of respondents are female. Taken from 219 valid respondents, we can analyze this data to mean that Osofisan’s female audience on the university campuses are close to that of their male counterparts. We can also argue that Osofisan is very mindful of the female characteristics of his campus audience—if not female the world over. This is actually in the manner in which his plays celebrate the valuable position of women to the development of societies. We see these in plays, such as Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest, Morountodun, and Many Colors Make the Thunder-king.

The image of the female gender in his plays does not portray Osofisan as a sexist or his themes as inappropriate to the realities of our times. Rather, the treatment of the female question in his plays shows that he is sensitive and responsive to the male gender as well as the female—seeing them as partners in the struggle to free mankind from the shackles of oppression, corruption, and injustice by the rulers on the ruled.
Diag Ram 3: Female/Male character of audience

THE INCOME VERSUS AFFORDABILITY DIALECTIC

A further analysis of the data on the income level of respondents—especially of the student category is significant.

Diag Ram 4: Students Income Level

This diagram shows the income level (pocket-money per month) of 100 valid respondents. The fact that this leaves out 125 respondents has wider implications for a conclusive analysis. Nevertheless, what this data show is that the bulk of Osofisan’s campus audience (202) live on a monthly income of between 500-3000 naira. The analysis is that the material condition of Nigerian students is worsening at least from the standpoint of the minimum wage currently put at 5,500-7,500 naira.

Hamisu Jumarre captures the picture when he observes that the percentage of Nigerians living below the poverty line of less than a dollar a day (equivalent of about 120 naira a day) has increased from 15 percent in 1960 to above 66.8 percent in 1996. This represents about 65.8 percent of Nigerians (Ilori, 51). Significantly, what this diagram shows also is the fact that there is a higher chance
that the bulk of Osofisan’s audience would not have extra cash to spend on goods and services after taking care of their essential needs—food and books. Even when we add the degrees of those who earn between 3,100-10,000 naira, what we get is 158\(^0\), still less than half. The analysis again is that it would be difficult (though not impossible) for those who earn below 3,100 naira per month to afford any luxury like owning cars or cell phones. When they are able to watch the production, it is partly because they are part of it and/or the fees for students are moderately lower.

The analysis (above) parallels the data in Diagrams 5 and 6 (below), which shows that a higher majority of respondents read and watch Osofisan’s plays because they had something to do with their academic work. Let us use three diagrams to further analyze and demonstrate the nature of Osofisan’s audience and dimensions of popularity.

**Diagram 5: Represents reason why respondent read his plays**

Firstly, Diagram 5 shows that even if we add up the degrees of respondents who read Osofisan’s plays for reasons other than their academic work, the result (102\(^0\)) would still be less than the degree of respondents who read his plays for purely academic reasons. This is interesting because it throws more light on the fact that (i) fewer respondents read his plays for leisure (40\(^0\)), (ii) even fewer respondents read his plays because they like his ideas (27\(^0\)). This last fact is noteworthy, because Osofisan writes in simple and clear terms. While Diagram 6 shows that 199\(^0\) of respondents have watched Osofisan’s plays purely for aca-
demic reasons, it is interesting to note that 62⁰ and 87⁰ of respondents watched his plays because they are full of ideas and because they are entertaining. Nevertheless, when we add the degrees of respondents who watched the plays for reasons other than for purposes of academic work, the result (161⁰) is still below the degree of respondents who watched his plays for academic reasons.

What these data suggest is that Osofisan’s popularity is based largely on curriculum influence. This raises the question: why is Osofisan prominent in the curriculum of Arts Department in Nigerian universities? First, an obvious answer is one given by Osofisan himself in an interview with Victor S. Dugga, where he states that, “It is a contemporary, burning issue that provokes me to write…plays that are really easy to do”. (114). What this suggests is that most of Osofisan’s plays demand low budgets for productions. This is in terms of costumes, stage props, and design. Since Osofisan makes use of symbols in his plays, it is easy with minimal effort (cost) to suggest and bring out his ideas and themes. Invariably, because the universities are grossly under-funded they would not be likely to include a play in the curriculum that would be difficult and costly to produce. Secondly, turning to our data in Diagram 7 below, we are faced with some interesting facts as to what make Osofisan’s plays distinct compared to other plays by different writers.

**Diagram 7: What makes Osofisan’s plays distinct compared with others?**

This diagram shows in almost equal degrees that Osofisan’s plays are distinct because they are inspiring, entertaining, and easy to read or stage. This is interesting because, given these facts, it stands to reason that no dull and/or difficult play would entertain an audience. Difficult in the sense that staging may require a higher budget in terms of elaborate stage designs, expensive costumes etc. This is so because, in the final analysis, plays are received and appreciated more if and when they are inspiring, entertaining, and easy to read or stage.

Another reason why Osofisan’s plays are prominent in the curriculum of university art departments stems from the fact that the universities have been known to have “fanned the embers of socialist ideology as a definite direction in the development of Nigerian society” (Dugga, 114). The point is that Osofisan’s plays lend themselves readily to these pursuits owing to their Marxist leaning.
Though Osofisan has often explained his Marxist politics in his drama as mere commonsensical persuasions and tendencies, it is hardly convincing. However, the fact still remains that, in his earlier plays, beginning with *A Restless Run of Locusts, The Chattering, Once Upon Four Robbers, Oriki, Morountodun*, up to *Aringindin*, Osofisan has vehemently argued from a Marxist standpoint, masqueraded in various characters in his dramaturgy.

Osofisan’s reaction constantly shifting paradigms, as he experiments with form in a bid to actualize his social vision of an egalitarian society, has caused him now to adopt subtle arguments and persuasions. The effect is that it has further endeared him to the university audience as his plays continue to be relevant in raising and defining issues that bear organic linkages to the immediate materiality of the educated class on the university campuses. Osofisan’s plays, therefore, at least within the university, do not suffer from a language barrier. However, the challenges facing Osofisan’s plays are of a semiotic nature.

**SEMIOTICS AS A LANGUAGE IN OSOFISAN’S PLAYS**

Semiotics as a language in Osofisan’s plays has become one of his characteristics. His use of symbols, metaphors, and (traditional) images all converge and translate into a semiotic essence, becoming another level of language expressing his themes. We see this virtually in his plays. From the cover page and titles of Osofisan’s plays the reader encounters semiotics as it plays itself out at varying levels of symbol, icon, index, image, and metaphor. Titles of plays such as *Morountodun, Birthdays Are Not for Dying, Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels, Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen, Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*, to mention just a few, suggest definite and varying meaning to his audiences. This has written implication for the degree of access the audience would have into the plays when they cannot access the language. However, this plays itself out more at the level of the texts and less at the level of the performance. As Victor S. Dugga puts it, “People in Nigeria access a play better when it is staged, for the obvious low level of literacy and the even more paranoiac emphasis on reading for immediate relevance, such as examinations and professional competence” (116). While the low level of literacy does not parallel our research data, the paranoiac emphasis on reading for immediate relevance does parallel our research data.

The point is that the Yoruba (cultural) influence on Osofisan is so extensive that it has become his technique, especially in the “subtle naming of characters as a way of revealing their characteristic[s]” (Dugga, 106). In *Morountodun*, we see Titubi (meaning naivety and/or instability) transform into Morountodun (“I have found a sweet thing”). In *Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen* we see Mr. Gbegunde (bringer of masquerade or something frightful), also known as Aring-
indin, playing himself out in the unfolding story to be a masquerade bringing violence and subjugation in the guise of security and protection. Victor S. Dugga captures the semiotic essence of Osofisan’s subtle naming of his characters, when he observes that,

Relating names as symbols in communication to the art of the theatre, an allusion to hidden messages is made to the writer’s search for appropriate means of expression. Names in African and particularly Yoruba society, are important signifiers especially, because it is believed that names can ‘express a sense of personal aspiration for the bearers’ and ‘that some names influence the characters of their bearers’ (106).

It is in this light that Osofisan’s dramaturgy is replete with names such as Erenyi Eson, Aduke, Alhaja Olowoseun, Mother, Kunle Aremo, Asibong, Abiodun, Altine, Ahmed, Chinwe, Okoro, Ibokun and so forth all relating to their characterization. It is interesting to note that Osofisan also uses other names from other cultures. The point we are making, however, is that a large number of the symbols and metaphors in his plays are drawn from the Yoruba culture. Michael Etherton captures the implication when he notes that,

the very style (or nature) of a performance is a shorthand of actual meaning which has been established jointly by composers and performers and their audience over a period of time (36).

Thus, for the Yoruba audience deriving meaning(s) closest to Osofisan’s authorial intentions will not be difficult. This is because the audience is familiar with most of the codes employed—for example, Yoruba aesthetics in terms of the music, dance, and songs in the plays, not to mention the proverbs, costumes, and gestures which all add up to make Osofisan’s semiotics double as a language that illuminate themes and ideas in the plays.

However, in a different context (say in Jos), the audience watching a performance of his plays would surely give it a different interpretation, especially if the audience is not so familiar with Yoruba language, culture, and aesthetics. What is at issue here is whether Osofisan has been able to manage this semiotic challenge both at the level of text and performance. While we can argue that he has not successfully managed to appeal to a wider audience, we can on the other hand argue that, in consideration of the open nature of his works, and his themes, he has been able to negotiate other audiences (from other cultures) into a better understanding of his plays. This is evident in the manner in which he seeks the cooperation of the audience in the production of the texts and in the unfolding actions of the performance. A classic example is the play Once Upon Four Robbers. The play opens with the narrator’s voice ringing out the word “Àààló-o!” This is
the traditional opening formula of the Yoruba raconteur. If this play was being staged in Ibadan most of the audience would almost enthusiastically, give out the response “Àààlò!” They could even join in the various Yoruba songs effortlessly as the play progresses. Nevertheless, this cannot be said to be the same for the Jos audience. Especially, if only a couple members of the audience were Yoruba. What this translates into is the fact that different reactions could be expected.

At another level, we can argue that Osofisan does not (really) caution that the audiences must draw the exact meaning which he intended in his plays. This explains partly why most of his plays are open-ended, full of symbols, suggestive, and open especially in the manner in which Eco talks about “open” and “closed text.” In this sense, Osofisan’s texts and performances are not finished works as he always carves out a role for his audiences. Eco captures the point: “You cannot use the text as you want but only as the text wants you to use it. An open text, however ‘open’ it be, cannot afford whatever interpretation” (9). This means that the text has a life of its own governed as it were by the prevailing codes and conventions of the genre. What this translates into is that only educated audiences such as the ones in the university can engage the text at its various levels of interpretation.

This not withstanding, we can further argue that even though an overwhelming aggregate of respondents (175° see Diagram 2) are outside the Yoruba language circle and culture, intertextual knowledge can be a helpful advantage (or disadvantage?) in the process of interpretation or meaning instantiations. Does this mean that there is no balance or equalization between the reactions of the two audiences, Jos and Ibadan? Obviously there is no balance or equalizations between these two audiences. The overwhelming Yoruba audience does suggest that they are taken from the Ibadan respondents. When we exclude respondents from Igbo, Edo, and Delta ethnic nationalities, it becomes obvious that the rest (134°) of the respondents are from Jos—in other words far removed from the Yoruba axis. Nevertheless, where can we place the Igbo, Delta, and Edo respondents? The obvious fact is that they make up 82° of the total. Even if we divide that equally among the two survey areas, Jos and Ibadan, the fact is that Ibadan would have more Yoruba-speaking (and Yoruba-friendly) audiences. Surely this data does not suggest that just because one is in Jos, he/she is removed from the Yoruba “axis.” What is clear is that the Yoruba dominance of the respondents points to their dominance in the educational sector. Thus, there is a certain advantage and disadvantage for both audiences. This is where intertextual knowledge can be of help. According to Eco, “No text is read independent of the reader’s experience of other text” (21), and we can argue likewise for performances. The fact is, as the audience comes into contact with Osofisan’s works, knowledge of the works of Osofisan’s contemporaries will possibly influence the audience’s interpretation.
Combining Diagrams 5 and 6, a further analysis will show that (i) Osofisan is more popular within the arts faculties of Nigerian universities, and (ii) economic factors are crucial as they influence the reception of his works. These raise the question of how? First, the fact is that accessing and or consuming Osofisan’s plays demand a certain level of income. Second, even watching his performance is not free. Unlike projects such as Theatre for Development (TFD) and Community Theatre, there is a higher likelihood that Osofisan’s plays within the university campuses would be received more if adequate publicity is mounted before every performance and if suitable times are fixed.

However, the deciding question as to Osofisan’s popularity or otherwise on the campuses can be gleaned diagrammatically using a pie chart to show the top three and others.

Diagram 8: Favorite Nigerian Playwrights

The glaring fact in this diagram is that Femi Osofisan is the third favorite of respondents on university campuses. Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi clinched the first and second favorite positions, while Osofisan comes third. However, it is noteworthy that Osofisan is ranked third among these two pioneering playwrights. Beating all his contemporaries to the third position, it goes to show that Osofisan is indeed popular. In other words, he is the most popular second-generation playwright in Nigeria. However, this raises many questions such as: what factors played against Osofisan? How and why are Soyinka and Rotimi favorites over Osofisan?

One possible factor that played against Osofisan is the fact that his plays are not part of the recommended texts in secondary schools and colleges of education. This is tied to the larger politics of curriculum texts in our higher educational system. What this translates into is the fact that a greater majority of students are not familiar with his works until they find themselves in the university. It is only recently that one of his texts, *Morountodun*, was listed/recommended for literature in the English curriculum for University Matriculation Examinations.
(U.M.E). On the other hand, Soyinka and Rotimi’s works have for decades been used by secondary schools and colleges of education students.

Another factor, which played against Osofisan’s popularity, is the harsh Marxist dialectics that his early plays—from the late sixties to the early eighties—projected. The fact that he often tried to explain it away as commonsensical arguments does not hold water. Plays such as *A Restless, Oriki, Aringindin, Red is the Freedom Road, No More* and even his classic, *Once Upon Four Robbers*, are all plays whose arguments are hinged on Marxist dogma, seeking to reposition the balance and control of political and economic power from the status quo. It was therefore doubtful that these plays would be appealing to educational policy makers. Most, if not all, of Soyinka and Rotimi’s plays are not replete with Marxist praxis, at least prior to the left about-turn of Rotimi in *If… and Soyinka in The Beatification*.

In fact, where the matter is, is really the fact that Soyinka and Rotimi have been writers whose plays are homologous with the general ideology of successive regimes following their emergence into the literary dramatic scene of Nigerian literature. For instance, *The Lion and the Jewel, The Trials of Brother Jero, The Gods are not to Blame*, and *Kurunmi* are plays whose ideological currents support the status quo, having been written in a light satirically humorous manner. Thus, it stands to reason that the plays of Soyinka and Rotimi readily appeal to the status quo while Osofisan’s plays do not. Does this mean that Soyinka and Rotimi’s popularity are residual? Whether their popularity is residual or not will depend largely on how the plays have been and possibly will continue to be relevant in the organic materiality of the perceived or target audience.

**THE PLACE OF THE AUDIENCE IN OSOFISAN’S CRAFTSMANSHIP: POSSIBLE INFLUENCES**

Cultural: The audience plays a significant role in influencing Osifisan’s craftsmanship. His craftsmanship is improved upon by his ingenious and dexterous manipulation of the art of the theater. He wraps his content in a spectacle filled form that seeks to entertain the audience while at the same time instructing them and inviting them to yield themselves to a positive change. As Victor S. Dugga puts it,

Osofisan’s technique of grafting cultural information into his plays are varied. He inflates the festival motif in a wholesome and recurrent manner, represented by activities at the market place…weddings or other social celebrations and actual ritual or communal ceremonies. These transplant the sense of communality and involvement with
the accompanying festive articles of song, music and dance. Using these scenes, the playwright wittingly incorporates and transforms the audience from passive observers of the action into participants in the events of the play (105-106).

Osofisan’s background and close intimacy with Yoruba culture and traditions has rubbed off on him. Having been raised amidst lack and poverty and spending a major part of his adolescent and youth in the western region of Nigeria, it is not any wonder that it is to the same background, culture, and people that he turned not only for inspiration but as a constituency for his writings. Muyiwa Awodiya places his hand on the core of Osofisan’s possible influences when he observes that, “the Yoruba culture provides the social and cultural context for most of Osofisan’s plays” (97).

Artistic: Borrowing immensely from the Yoruba oral tradition and the Western forms, such as the plays of Brecht, Osofisan blends his drama and theater in an artistic model that is not totally loyal to both cultures. The effect is that his works privilege both the audience from within the Yoruba culture and the audience outside the Yoruba culture—yet are familiar with the code and conventions of the Western aesthetics. The degree to which they are able to privilege this or that audience depends also on the ingenuity of the director, and actors as well. Osofisan ensures that this flexibility is available from his not-too-insistent authorial position prefacing most of his published plays.

Another artistic quality of his plays is the fact that Osofisan in most cases directs his plays’ premieres—before they are published. The advantage is that the audience reaction is a gauge, and this helps him to tinker with the dramaturgical framework. As Awodiya puts it,

Osofisan is a consummate man of the theatre...The plays are structured to accommodate images, metaphors, songs and allusions that are already familiar with his audience (97).

Osofisan has also constantly experimented with form, informed in part by a desire to improve his dramaturgy and further negotiate a better vantage point for the audience. Even though his drama and theater is modeled on what he calls the “Opon-Iifa” paradigm, he has, play after play, subverted the myth, legend, and history of the Yoruba in order to assert his vision of always considering the organic wellbeing of the mass of society.

Ideology and Economy: Whether Osofisan is a Marxist writer or not is not an issue; what is clear is that his argument in most of his early plays up until recently is from a Marxist standpoint. Nevertheless, even when he tones down the ideological fervency, it does not make his argument less Marxist. A close link is evident between his Marxist leanings and the economy of his dramaturgy. Apart
from a few of his plays that have a large cast—*Yungba-Yungba*, *Esu*, *Morountodun*, *Aringindin*, and *Once Upon Four Robbers*—most of the plays have a small cast which makes for easy production. Costumes, props, and acting space are not so elaborate or flashy, but symbolic and suggestive of the theme. Most of his plays are also staged on university campuses, especially those universities that have an arts or theater department.

**POSSIBLE INFLUENCE OF OSOFISAN ON HIS AUDIENCE**

From the foregoing, Osofisan’s craftsmanship is evident in the manner in which he orchestrates the story and the actions of the plays to express his themes. With close reference to our data, we can interpret Osofisan’s possible influence on the campus audience to be tremendous.

**Diagram 9: Can society be changed through his plays?**

**Diagram 10: Have you been influenced by his plays?**

*Representing Table B16*
Both diagrams show that about two thirds of campus audiences affirm that Osofisan’s plays have the potential of changing society, and indeed they have been influenced by his plays. Thus, we can interpret these data to mean that Osofisan through his plays / performances has been able to wield tremendous influence on his audience.

One possible dimension of influence is in the manner in which, through his plays, most of his audience has engendered discourse on Nigeria’s political economy and manifested in the dialectic of corruption, exploitation, and oppression. His plays have also educated the audience on the basic fact that good leadership is necessary for a better society. Thus a fair distribution of wealth amongst people in the society is essential, and that the dividing line between his characters is on the basis of their conflict—that is, their class status.

**CONCLUSION**

Through the major thematic strands in Osofisan’s plays, and his masterly use of entertainment and suspense, he has engaged the attention of the audience. Osofisan’s plays are also “sender-oriented” in the manner in which Sonesson has used the phrase. The point is that, since he expects the cooperation of the audience in the reception of his works, he crafts them in a way that would empower them to arrive at a conclusion. For instance, in *Aringindin* at the end of the final page, Osofisan writes—“End of Play, For Now…” In *Esu* on the last page he writes, “The actors join the audience. The theatre empties. Life resumes.” In most of his other plays the action just comes to an abrupt end – BLACKOUT. Umberto Eco’s observation about Brecht’s plays can also be applied to Osofisan’s:

> Brecht’s plays do not in the strict sense devise solutions at all. It is up to the audience to draw its own conclusions from what it has seen on stage. Brecht’s plays also end in a situation of ambiguity…the specific concreteness of an ambiguity in social intercourse, a conflict of unresolved problems taxing the ingenuity of playwright, actors, and audience alike (43).

So Osofisan’s plays tax him as he exploits new ways to experiment with form. His plays demand from the actors all the ingenuity and dexterity they can summon. The audiences are expected to accommodate and assimilate both the entertainment value of the plays as well as the instructional value. The question remains, if Osofisan found an audience with the university campus audience, has he also found a constituency? The pulls between audience and constituency have always been the bane of writers. The “myth” and reality about Osofisan’s popularity is that, because of his prolificacy and the stageability of his plays on campus, he is seen as a very popular playwright. However, as this research has shown, he is...
not only one of the popular Nigerian playwrights at the dawn of the millennium, but undoubtedly the most popular post-war generation playwright on Nigerian university campuses today.

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RELIGION, CORRUPTION, AND DEMOCRATIC NIGERIA IN FEMI OSOFISAN’S DRAMA

Victoria O. Adeniyi

INTRODUCTION

Religion is regarded as an integrative force that preaches social, political, and economic morality. As a phenomenon that cuts across every society in the world, it prohibits spiritual and moral decadence in the society. Religion has, however, is gradually losing its values in the contemporary Nigerian society. It is no longer used to advance development. Instead, it has become an instrument in the hands of the religious leaders and personages to perpetrate corruption in society. This chapter, therefore, attempts to bring to the fore Femi Osofisan’s condemnation of the corruption perpetrated through the use of religion in a supposed democratic Nigerian society as exemplified in his drama. Using four plays, Who Is Afraid of Solarin, Once Upon Four Robbers, Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels and Midnight Hotel, as illustration, this chapter contends that Nigerians seem to be highly religious, but that religious charlatans have cashed in on this religiousness to perpetrate corruption in society.

There is no society that is devoid of religion and religious activities. This is because religion is part of the culture of any society. It is a phenomenon that is equated with morality as evidenced in Durkheim’s and Kant’s arguments cited in Aderibigbe (3, 6). This fact is attested to by the three major religions which are practiced in Nigeria: African Religion (AFREL), Islam, and Christianity. The three religions preach integrity and sound morals as essential qualities of their adherents. Their tenets are built on the principles of perseverance, discipline, equality, and justice. Even the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria confirms this (1). It is, however, unfortunate that Nigeria is as engulfed in social and moral decadence as it is religiously inclined. Religion has lost its values in the supposed democratic Nigerian society. It has become an instrument in the hands of religious leaders to perpetrate corruption in Nigeria.
Corruption is a deadly virus that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society. It is a phenomenon that can be found in every sector of national life, ranging from social, religious, and economic, to political. Its most predisposing factor is wanton greediness. The desire of the people to own more than is necessary is a major factor in corrupt practices in all their ramifications in Nigeria. Corruption is an all embracing word that covers institutional, moral, and personal decadence. It is defined by J. J. Senturia, as the “misuse of public power for private gain” (702). It is a deliberate deviation from the accepted norms for personal gratification. By extension, it could be seen as a violation of a person’s integrity.

Corruption has become a household word in Nigeria. It has tarnished the image of the country at the international level. A survey of fifty-four countries that engaged most in international business activities, conducted by Transparency International, an anti-corruption watchdog organization with its headquarters in Berlin, Germany, found Nigeria to be the most corrupt nation in the world (Walter Carrington, 6-7). In 1997, another survey which was conducted by the same organization revealed Nigeria as the most corrupt. However, in 1999, Cameroon took the place of Nigeria’s position in the perpetration of corruption by leading as the worst corrupt nation, while Nigeria assumed the second position. The 2004 survey by the same source declares Nigeria to be in the third position of most corrupt nations. The 2008 survey by the same organisation shows Somalia to be the most corrupt nation with 1.0 ranking, out of the 180 countries covered while Denmark is declared as the least corrupt nation with 9.3 ranking. A higher score shows that the country is less corrupt. With the 2008 results, Nigeria seems to have improved from being the most corrupt country to being a less corrupt country with 2.7 ranking. This is so as she was ranked 1.6 in 2002, 1.4 in 2003, 1.6 in 2004, 1.9 in 2005, 2.2 in 2006, 2.2 in 2007, and 2.7 in 2008. However, there is still much room for improvement.

James Gire shows that there are seven types of corruption. They include autogenic corruption, in which the perpetrator buys a large amount of stock based on a given piece of information so as to inflate price in future; extortive corruption, in which the person in authority demands a compensation in exchange for services; nepotistic corruption, in which accepted guidelines are violated for friends or relations; defensive corruption, in which a person needing a critical service is compelled to bribe before receiving the needed service; investive corruption, in which goods or services are offered in anticipation of future favor; transactive corruption, in which two parties involved are willing participants in the corrupt practice because of the gains they both stand to get; and supportive corruption, which does not involve money, but one in which actions are taken to protect the existing trends of corruption.
All these types of corruption involve one form of bribery or another. This is because wherever there is a “bribe giver” there is always a “bribe taker.” All these forms of corruption also involve the loss of integrity and morals on the part of perpetrator. Out of the seven types of corruption identified by Gire, all but autogenic corruption are applicable to the perpetration of corruption by religious leaders and personages in Femi Osofisan’s drama. We shall now instantiate the use of religion in perpetrating corruption in a supposed democratic Nigerian society using Femi Osofisan’s *Who Is Afraid of Solarin, Once Upon Four Robbers, Midnight Hotel,* and *Esu and The Vagabond Minstrels.* Although these plays were written before democracy was introduced into the Nigerian society, they are still very relevant in this democratic dispensation.

**RELIGION AND CORRUPTION IN FEMI OSOFISAN’S SELECTED PLAYS**

Femi Osofisan uses traditional materials such as history, myth, ritual, magic, and religion from the subversive materialist perspective to make them serve his own egalitarian purposes. In the above-named plays, religion is revealed as an instrument in the hands of religious leaders to perpetrate corruption. Corruption is, therefore, a major theme in the plays under study. In *Excursions in Drama and Literature,* Osofisan says that:

> Corruption, injustice and oppression, do not come from heaven but from the man-made god on earth. It is not a divine order that some people should suffer or enjoy forever. Although our leaders tell us that it has been ordained like that by fate or by God so that we can accept what is happening around us as destiny…We ourselves are also responsible for whatever our society may become. What we have in the society is what we have ourselves created. (139-140)

Osofisan, therefore, condemns such persons as religious charlatans who see their religious positions as an opportunity to deceive and cheat on those they come across. For instance, Femi Osofisan’s *Who’s Afraid of Solarin,* which is an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol’s *The Inspector General,* centrally embodies a theme of corruption. The play focuses on a charlatan, Isola Oriebora (Ghommid’s head), a city-dwelling rascal who puts a corrupt council chairman and his cabinet in a state of panic by impersonating the character of Solarin. The rumored arrival of Solarin, an anti-corruption crusader and Public Complaints’ Commissioner in a remote local government headquarters, makes the council chairman and his councillors gullibly take Oriebora for Solarin. The corrupt officials decide to use every means, including divination and bribery, to escape the wrath of Solarin.
Oriebora, a rogue who has jumped bail in Lagos, uses his proposed engagement with Pastor Nebuchadnezzar Ifagbemi’s daughter as bait to extort money from the council officials.

Baba Fawomi pretends to have expert knowledge of the Ifa divination process. He exploits the people’s belief in Orunmila to extort money and other material goods from them. He offers the councillors’ sacrifice to Orunmila as the only option to prevent the Public Complaints’ Commissioner from detecting their criminal acts of corruption, even though he lacks an in-depth knowledge of Ifa rituals. He charges higher fees than the normal professional charges and steals household items in Pastor Ifagbemi’s house. As the pastor invites him to cast a spell that would prevent Solarin from discovering the issue of the church’s missing funds, he dupes the pastor and says that Solarin has brought along with him terrible spirits that have to be bribed.

It is not only Baba Fawomi who is guilty of this religious charlatanism. Pastor Ifagbemi is also guilty of this corruption. He too steals church funds, shifts his guilt onto an innocent person, keeps love letters of married women, and consults oracles. Though a professed Christian priest, he still identifies himself with traditional religion as exemplified in his name: Pastor Nebuchadnezzar Ifagbemi. He is a materialistic, corrupt Christian pastor who wears charms around his waist. He bribes Oriebora by giving his daughter’s hand in marriage to him so as to save him from punishment for the missing church funds.

The Price Control Officer is also guilty of this crime. She claims a false spiritual purity and protests when Baba Fawomi sends for her to come and administer an oath. She says:

I am a staunch Christian. I belong to the ranks of the First Apostolic Movement of the Lagos Bar Beach. My Bible bought in London, was blessed ten years ago…I pay my dues also every Sunday to the First CMS Cathedral…If he thinks he can intimidate me…by bringing an Ifa Priest here, he’s only deceiving himself. I don’t believe in Juju.

But later in the play, she is seen in the same light as her other colleagues by seizing first-choice goods from hoarders, bribing the Ifa Priest, and bribing Isola with twenty envelopes full of money. Another character guilty of the crime of religious charlatanism is the chairman of the council himself. He claims to be a church leader, yet he consults the oracle, bribes the Ifa Priest, bribes Oriebora, and embezzles the public funds. He is not only involved in the practice of corruption, but encourages others to do it.

*Once Upon Four robbers* tells the story of four robbers, Alhaja, Angola, Hasan, and Major, who are engaged in the act of robbery because of their inability to get employment. The play opens as the leader of the group, Alhaja’s
husband, faces a firing squad. The gang is more desperate to avenge the death of their leader as they become more desperate at robbing people at the market place. As they plan how to do it, an Aafa comes on stage, singing and preparing to start his prayer. As Angola and Hasan raise their hands to grab him, he shouts without interrupting his ablutions:

Haba! Will you lay your hand upon the servant of Allah? Walahu hairu hafizan, wauwa arihamu rohimin! (In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful!). (7)

He commands them to sit down and pray for the noble prophet. This makes Angola and Hasan, taking praying postures, “knock their foreheads on the mat in a slowly growing rhythm” (7). He also commands the remaining two robbers to come out of their hideout and join them in the prayers.

Both Alhaja and her husband, killed as the play opens, are professed Moslems, yet they are involved in the armed robbery. It is also important to note that Hassan, one of the robbers, is a Moslem (37). Alhaja wants to prove to Aafa that they are innocent people and so she speaks in Arabic to Aafa: “Sallu ala nabiyyi karim! (God grant him blessings and peace!)” (7). She, however, only ends up revealing herself as Aafa tells her:

Alhaja! Yes, I recognise you. At the war-front, when you traded across the lines, selling to both sides, it was convenient then, wasn’t it, to call yourself Alhaja? But your longest pilgrimage as we all know was to the officers’ beds, not to Mecca! (7).

The robbers continue to give excuses why they rob and whom they rob. They claim that it is hunger that drives them to it. They say they cannot get jobs because the rich won’t allow them. The rich are everywhere, they are powerful, and they own everything, including servants. Since they are the ones depriving them of good jobs, they steal only from the rich. Aafa, infected by their mirth, smiles and says: “Alright, I’ll help you” (10). Before helping them, however, he tells them never to rob the poor, to rob only the public places, and never to take a human life. They all promise to abide by Aafa’s injunctions; thereafter, he gives them the power to rob without being caught. He gives them each a seed, tells them to swallow it, and says:

Yes, sing and dance. It is an irresistible power. Once you begin to sing, anyone within hearing distance stops whatever he is doing and joins. He will sing and dance and then head for his home to sleep. And he won’t wake till the next morning. (12)
Section II: Vision, Portrayal, and Politics

He teaches them the opening formula, and teaches each of the robbers his own part of the song that must be sung before the formula can work. He tells them to always work together; otherwise the formula would not work. The robbers try the formula on market traders and clients, and it works. As the robbers sing and dance, the market people dance away, leaving the robbers who assemble the abandoned market items and pack them away.

Aafa, like some religious leaders in Nigeria, uses his religious gift to perpetrate corruption in the society. He is also guilty of religious charlatanism. Though a professed Islamic leader, he still identifies himself with traditional religion as he uses an òpèlè (divination chain used by priests of Ifa) to chant a verse which the robbers repeat after him in an antiphonal style.

Alhaja is full of deceits. She too uses her religion as a cover-up to perpetrate corruption everywhere. For instance, she disguises as a corn seller so as to know the secret plan that the government has in executing judgement over Major when the latter is caught. She uses intrigue to convince the soldiers to release Major (30-31). They are, however, caught and told to also face the firing squad, one after the other, like Major (35).

It is not only Islam that is satirized in the play, but also the Christian religion since both Major and Angola are Christians. As Major reveals: “Listen, we were all brought up in the church and what did you learn there apart from how to break the Ten Commandments?” (21). When he is about to face the firing squad, Major is asked to confess his sin and let a priest pray for him. To this he responds: “I’ve said it Serg, I want no odours around me” (35). This also points to some religious leaders whose morality is questionable, as Major sees the priest as a bundle of filth.

In Midnight Hotel, Osofisan again satirizes political and religious corruption in Nigerian society. The play tells the story of Mrs. Awero Asibong, a Member of Parliament and a supposed devoted Moslem who goes to the Midnight Hotel with a Christian pastor, Pastor Kunle Suuru, to have fun. Their meeting place, the hotel, is described as “a house of sin” (6) where “sex is business” (10). Thus, Pastor Suuru, a religious leader, and Mrs. Asibong, also a religious person, are portrayed as a disgrace to the religious institution. Pastor Suuru is materialistic and corrupt. He betrays his friend’s trust as he agrees to have an extramarital affair with Mrs. Asibong, his friend’s wife, at the Midnight Hotel. Mr. Alatishe reveals the fact that Pastor Suuru and Mrs. Asibong’s husband are friends:

I mean that Pastor Suuru, for instance, whom you introduced to me in your house. He seemed very intimate with your husband, and looked quite a responsible man too. Unlike these other pastors we see around these days, who are only after money. Pastor Suuru is a close friend of your husband, isn’t he? (56)
But unfortunately, appearance can be deceptive. Pastor Suuru is described as looking responsible, but in reality he is not. He agrees to have an extramarital affair with Mrs. Asibong, his friend’s wife, at the Midnight Hotel because the latter has promised to give him a contract. His love for material gains is further revealed when he says, “Well, why not? After all, all the big Alhajis are emergency contractors also. Even our Bishop! Is religion against profiteering?” (20). He becomes intoxicated with the idea of winning the contract and says, “Awero, I want…ah, that contract, all my hopes are on it! I’ll die for it!” (33).

Pastor Suuru also smokes, as illustrated in the following stage directions: “The Pastor has a cigar in his mouth” (29) and “Coming slowly to her, cigar still in his mouth, takes her clumsily” (32). He also drinks, as illustrated in Mrs. Asibong’s dialogue: “You are drunk Kunle! All that whisky you drank at the restaurant, against my warning. I’m sure it’s soaked into your brain!” (33). He also lies. For example, when Alatishe, the Headmaster, meets him unexpectedly in his singlet at the Midnight Hotel and asks for the reason, he says:

Oh yes! Funny, isn’t it! Ha ha ha! Headmaster, this is Lagos, you know! We holy men in the city, the temptations we run through in the course of tending the Lord’s sheep! Headmaster, if I should begin now to tell you the story of how I lost my agbada!...When I escaped, I told myself, why not just say hello to Mrs Asibong before she goes to bed? She may be in need of prayers for all you know. So here I am! (58)

He also tells lies to cover up the truth when Mr. Achibong finally catches the two of them (himself and Mrs. Asibong) together inside a room at the hotel. As he tells him:

Ah you see, that is the point. I didn’t believe it. I told your wife. I said, you were surely up to some shady business, which we should find out. I said it was our duty to save you from sin. I persuaded her to follow me here. (83)

Thus he is corruption incarnate.

Mrs. Asibong, a professed devout Moslem, is also corrupt. She tells Pastor Suuru that contracts are not awarded by prayers, but by “sampling the goods.” As she puts it:

I’m giving you a big chance by bringing you here. As the only female member of the Capital Projects Committee in the House of Assembly, I’m giving you an unfair advantage over other competitors to prove your competence...Everyone in our Contracts and Awards Commit-
Pastor Suuru tells her that he appreciates her help, but that he is afraid that they might be seen by her husband if they should come to that hotel. This shows that Pastor Suuru fears man, but does not fear God. He is only particular about being seen by man, but he is not bothered about being seen by God.

Mrs. Asibong, a professed devout Moslem, also lacks fear of God. She decides to cheat on her husband when the latter tells her that he is going to inspect a construction project that he did at one hotel. She assumes that his inspection at an hotel for that matter means that he is going to have fun with another lady. She believes that if he thinks he can cheat on her, she can also cheat on him. This is demonstrated in her dialogue with Pastor Suuru, who fears being seen by anyone they know. She says:

"God, are you so naïve? No wonder you’re not a successful prophet. Secrecy, of course. Absolute discretion, just what we need! The man who recommended this place, colleague of mine on the Committee, is a great expert in these things. He is so thoroughly rotten that you can take his word for it, when it comes to finding the most shady corners in town. This place was top on his list. So, relax, man. We’ll not run into anyone we know here." (23)

Her speech also brings to the fore the fact some religious leaders in Nigeria are successful through dubious means. For such successful religious leaders, it is the end that justifies the means. Mrs. Asibong is also corruption incarnate. She has extra-marital affairs, she is materialistic, and she lies. For example, she tells lies to Alatishe, the Headmaster, when he asks about her husband, that she left her husband at home when they had a little quarrel, and that in anger she walked out on him. However, the truth of the matter is revealed through Pastor Suuru’s speech to her:

"What! Were you not the one always complaining of being left alone in the house, while your husband goes away every night on business? Ah I see now! All you wanted was to use me to revenge yourself on him…" (66)

There are some religious leaders and religious persons in Nigeria who are held in high esteem because of their religion, but who are only religious charlatans. They do nothing to exemplify the practice of their religion. For example, the Midnight Hotel is a hide-out for many religious leaders to perpetrate moral and spiritual corruption. This is illustrated in Jimoh’s, one of the Hotel attendants, speech:
The room is upstairs, and it’s the favourite of Alhaji Jay Jay’s youngest wife, when she wants to really—you know what I mean! Your woman may scream all her head off in there, and no one will disturb… (26)

It is also revealed by Alatishe’s, a Christian, a one-time headmaster, and a defeated gubernatorial candidate—defeated through vote-rigging, who has come to lodge at the hotel with his four girls: “Alhaji Teru himself recommended this place,” and then Agnes, one of his daughters, adds, “Ah that crook!” Their father then corroborates it by saying: “Exactly, if a crook says a place is safe, then you can bet that it is!” (41). This shows that religious leaders are not always as virtuous as they are supposed to be. Alatishe himself, who calls himself a Christian, also smokes. For example, when he sees cigar inside Mr. Asibong’s load he takes it, and smokes it:

And cigar! How do they break even, my God…Let me try one of them...(Lights cigar, with candle). Hmmmmmm! Delightful! (Puffs). But-ah, the girls! I’d forgotten. The smoke will disturb them. I’d better go out into the lobby… (63)

This also reveals Mr. Asibong, a professed devout Moslem, more as a person who smokes because it is in his load that the cigar is found.

This play makes jest of religious leaders who want to serve God and mammon at the same time. This is illustrated in Mr. Asibong and Pastor Suuru’s dialogue respectively when Mrs. Asibong challenges her husband in the following words:

I ask no forgiveness! Let him explain to me first what he, a devout Moslem, has to do with a place like this! I mean, the place is hardly better than a brothel! (84)

Mr. Asibong replies:

Well…Awero, I understand your feelings. But you know how it is. Allah enjoins us all to be devout. But without money nowadays, how can we be? Unfortunately we are only human beings in a cruel country, and the way to paradise, for many of us, is often lined with brothels! Yes, brothels! (84)

Pastor Suuru then adds, “And contracts, sir! I understand you only too well. After all I am a Pastor myself. And I am in business!” (84).

In *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, Osofisan lampoons religious leaders who use their spiritual gifts to oppress their clients and followers and to enrich themselves at the expense of their clients and followers. The play tells the story of five minstrels, three men and two women, who are looking for ways to better
their lot. They have not eaten for the past three days and are desperate to eat anything edible that comes their way. As they wait at a crossroad to eat the sacrifice brought to Ésù by his worshippers, they meet an old man who tells them:

Esu loves to help men, but only when they show that they can live happily among other human beings. For human beings are greedy ...Esu does not see into the hearts of men, only their actions. Are you ready to help those among you, who are in distress? To bring redress to the wronged? And justice to the exploited? (32)

They promise to do whatever the Old Man expects them to do and, thereafter, the Old Man agrees to give them a chance to prove their sincerity. He gives them power to cure man’s problems, irrespective of their age and size. He tells them:

Take these seeds, one for each of you. Eat it. Swallow it. Done? Now, let each one find a suffering man, someone unhappy, and sing to him. Sing to him your favourite song, and make him dance with you. That’s all…As you dance, whatever his suffering, it will end! If he is thirsty, he will be satisfied. If crippled, he will walk. Whatever his agony, you will relieve it. Your dance will bear it all away… (33)

Unfortunately, these minstrels begin to use their power to exploit and to enrich themselves at the expense of the clients. For example, Epo Oyinbo, one of the minstrels tells his client, “Yes, I can. But what are you ready to offer?” (39). When the man who is desperate to be cured of his impotence says anything, Epo Oyinbo replies him, “Talk, man! Anything is not definite enough!” (39). The man then promises him all his property and, thereafter, Epo Oyinbo sings and dances with the man, accompanied by his other minstrels. As they sing and dance, “(The Old Man’s retinue, apparently unseen by the Minstrels and the Impotent Man, return to dance along. They gradually involve the Impotent man in a kind of ritual and then dance away. As soon as they disappear, the man, as if awakening from a trance, shouts in surprise): Soponna O! My God, it’s working! I’m coming alive!” (41). To soothe himself, he runs after Sinsin and Jigi, two female minstrels, who flee.

This is how all the minstrels, except Omele, treat their clients before curing them, always making their clients promise them something before they provide the solution to their problems. Epo Oyinbo, Redio, Sinsin, and Jigi select their clients by first looking at the client to see whether he is rich or not. Any client who is not rich or who seems too poor to offer anything to them in return is left untreated. For example, when a heavily pregnant woman, who looks wretched, enters and begins to pray to be delivered of her baby, all the minstrels, except Omele, decline to help, claiming that there is no reward they can get from her. As Sinsin puts it, “just look at the woman. Look at her condition! What kind of...
reward do you think this one will be able to offer?” (43). To this, however, Omele replies, “We can’t let her go like this! Look at her! She’s in torment…money is not the only road to happiness. I cannot let her go like this” (43). The woman is surprised at Omele who offers to help her. She quickly reminds Omele of her wretchedness, “I have nothing. I won’t be able to pay you!” Omele is, however, unmoved by her wretchedness, says: “Will you be able, at least, to say ‘thank you’?” The woman adds that she would be a slave forever to Omele if she is delivered of her baby. Omele then replies to her, “A small ‘thank you,’ is all I’ll need. Now are you ready?” (44). As they sing and dance, the chorus of Esu followers appears as usual, as Omele leads the woman in a slow dance. Suddenly, the woman screams that the baby is moving and he’s coming down. She thanks Omele, describes her house to him, and even asks Omele to give her something to hang on the child when he comes. To this Omele says: “Oh yes, of course! Here’s my chain, take it!”(47). She thanks Omele again and quickly goes away. Omele is happy that he has made somebody happy; but his colleagues make jest of him, calling him a fool who has even put his chain into the bargain.

After each of them has been given a chance each to use his power, a Male Leper and Female Leper enter, looking for someone to cure them of their leprosy. The Male Leper tells them that whoever that wants to help them will have to embrace them to effect a cure. All but Omele decline to help. Redio even adds, “Not on your life, sir! Not for all the riches in the world” (71). Omele agrees to help them. When the Male Leper tells him that his friends have fled and that he is alone, and he is young, that he should leave them alone, Omele replies them:

It’s no use now. If I let you go, I’ll never grow old. For I’ll never know happiness again! I’ll be thinking only of this single moment of cowardice, when I turned away some human beings in need …. (He embraces the Male Leper). And you, dear lady, like this! I’ll hold both of you together now, while I sing and dance with you. See if you can sing with me! (73)

As they sing and dance, the changes begin. The limbs of the lepers begin to stretch out again, while Omele collapses in great pain, with his limbs retracting, and spots all over him. The other minstrels make jest of Omele again for proving stubborn and foolish. They then drive him away from them.

The Old Man later appears and asks how they have helped to reduce suffering in the world. All except Omele praise themselves for using the power given them to enrich themselves. The Old Man then says, “All is set then! The hour has come for your reward, all of you. Then he said to his followers, “reveal yourselves, my children” (81). The hoods fall off, one by one, to reveal the same characters who had been helped by the musicians, all except the Pregnant Woman and the lepers. The musicians jump with shock. They are shocked because they then realize that
the Old Man was only testing them to know if they would use whatever talents and opportunities they have to enrich themselves or to help mankind. The Old Man gives his verdict by saying:

Let the disease go to those who have won it, those who seek to be rich without labour. Who have put their selfish greed first before anything, including humanity, I mean you, my dear fellows! Take your reward!
(The minstrels cringe in terror). Obaluaye, it’s your turn now. They’re yours! (90)

As Omele is cured by Obaluaye, the god of smallpox, his comrades writhe in agony as they are caught by the dreadful god, and are gradually covered in spots.

Thus, in this play, Osofisan condemns religious leaders who use their spiritual powers to amass wealth. He condemns the use of religious powers for selfish greed, instead of for helping humanity. He is totally disgusted at the use of religion in perpetrating corruption in all walks of life, instead of using it to advance the course of man.

In the selected plays discussed in this study, Osofisan uses traditional setting as a base from which he treats national concerns from a religious perspective. For example, in *Once Upon Four Robbers*, it is the market square, while in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, it is the crossroad. These settings are important and spiritual places within the context of African worldview.

These plays address the need for social and religious transformation in democratic Nigerian society where there is presently rampant materialism and corruption. In the plays discussed, the religious charlatans deliberately misinterpret their religious positions to mean an opportunity to deceive and cheat their clients or followers by extorting money or materials from them. They exploit their followers’ belief in their positions and their god as they swindle and defraud them whenever they come for spiritual help. Such people are ready to do anything to have their desires fulfilled. However, Osofisan makes their nemesis catches up with them as they are also duped, and their corruption is exposed. He seems to be saying that the religious charlatans are produced in society by its very structure. Thus there is a need to change the structure of democratic Nigerian society so as to rid her of all her social ills.

Religious leaders are expected to be morally above board, but in the selected plays, their behavior reveals them as worshippers of their stomachs and of their selfish gains, rather than of God. They are unpatriotic as they use their supposed sacred titles to cheat and deceive their subjects, and as a means of amassing wealth at the expense of their followers and clients who are citizens of Nigeria, and by extension are not concerned about the destiny of Nigeria. They are “religious bad eggs” who, as Awodiya (1995) describes them:
smuggle commodity items like gold, trinkets, drugs, shoes, bags, clothing materials, and wrist-watches. Thus, “Pastor”, “Alhaji”, “Alhaja”, “Aafa” etc, are fast becoming social rather than religious titles as the wearers of such titles are religious fakes… (130)

Osofisan’s drama is geared towards social change. Thus, in the selected plays, he condemns the tragic use of religion by religious leaders who suppress truth, deceive their followers and betray their belief in their god. He portrays religion as a “smoke-screen” behind which the religious leaders and perpetrate social ideology of exploitation. He seems to be saying that if religion is properly adopted and practiced in its true sense, it will help the democratic Nigerian society transform from her retrogressive state to a progressive one. Nigerian society must rid itself of corruption if she wants to thrive in her practice of democracy.

He has portrayed religious leaders in the fictive realm of the play as negative and retrogressive characters because they are true representations of some religious leaders in the democratic Nigerian society. He condemns them and wants to engage members of the audience in a thought-provoking debate outside the fictional world of the play. Thus Osofisan (1985) himself says:

a good play should not please but only disturb…Perhaps the work of art looses its grip with reality when it provokes applause, and not debate, and not unease. (9)

Osofisan portrays religious leaders and personages as such so as to provoke the audience and let them discuss the plays after their performance. This is deliberate as Osofisan explains in an interview with Richards:

I want an ending which tells them (the audience) that the theatre doesn’t solve anything…because it is a fictional world. The problem has to be solved in the society…But it won’t be solved if we simply don’t discuss it. We must discuss the thing and work towards solutions.

Osofisan strongly believes that democracy cannot thrive in a nation where religious leaders who are expected to be at the vanguard of moral and social crusaders are found morally wanting. He, therefore, impresses it upon the people to expose the religious charlatans to ridicule and excommunication. Such people are not fit to be called with their spiritual titles. They should, therefore, be disrobed of their titles, and in that way Nigeria will become socially more integrated.

By portraying religious leaders, Osofisan seems to be saying that their behavioral characteristics go a long way in determining the condition of their followers and clients. The religious institution, which is a microcosm of the Nigerian society, needs to be jealously guarded against vices such as corruption, greed, selfishness,
and charlatanism, otherwise the vices will eventually destroy the administration of the religious institutions in Nigeria and the followers and clients of each of the religions practiced in Nigeria. Conversely, if the religious leaders have honesty, prudence, and selflessness, then there would be peace, stability, and progress in the religious institutions and, by extension, in democratic Nigerian society.

CONCLUSION

The discussion above has paid special attention to the theme of corruption as a moral, spiritual, and political evil in Femi Osofisan’s selected plays. It has shown that the religious institution that ought to lead the vanguard in the fight against corruption is, very unfortunately, also deeply involved in it. It has also focused its attention on the dramatic and comic devices that Osofisan employs in the plays in his attempt to reveal the theme of corruption perpetrated through the use of religion. Government efforts are not enough in the fight against corruption—there is the need to add a religious dimension. This is because corruption has a spiritual dimension which only religion can effectively tackle. It is, therefore, recommended that religion should be put to its rightful role of spiritual leadership against corruption. There is a need to find a solution to the kind of religious leadership and followership we have now in Nigeria.

It is, therefore, recommended that religious leaders and personages should preach, embrace, and practice the tenets of their religions. They should provide emulative models for all those around them. This would go a long way in improving the social life of the Nigerian society; moral development would be uplifted in Nigeria as religious leaders uphold moral integrity as taught by their respective religions. They should follow strictly all the tenets of their religions. It is also recommended that erring religious leaders should be disciplined by the body of the religion concerned so as to serve as deterrents to others.

REFERENCES


Section III

GENDER AND SEXUALITY
ANGER, WOMEN, AND THE DRAMA OF FEMI OSOFISAN: A STUDY OF ALTINE’S WRATH

Bose F. Afolayan

INTRODUCTION

A woman is like a snail that must crawl over thorns and rock with a smooth and lubricated tongue. This is the only way the snail can survive or its tongue will be torn into shreds as it journeys on tough terrains.

(Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo in The Children of The Eagle, 277).

This chapter is an attempt to investigate women’s anger in Osofisan’s drama with particular reference to Altine’s Wrath. We will also explore how power and decision-making are shared between the characters. References are made to other plays since Osofisan has made the cause of women an abiding concern in most of his plays. The chapter focuses on how patriarchy and its structures have militated against women’s expression in society. There are societal institutions that have conspired to relegate women’s emotions to the background. Anger in a woman is usually seen as an aberration because it does not go with societal expectations of her. Finally this chapter argues that women’s anger is real because, in any relationship, she is usually in greater emotional pain and hurt. The subject of her anger is not imagined and is thus worth exploring. Some of the questions this chapter seeks to explore are: Is a woman’s anger a sign of weakness or inferiority? Does she use anger to define or assert herself? Is it a tool for blackmail? Does it challenge the status quo, or is it mere hysterics?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Central to our study is the concept of feminism since it offers a perspective on women’s experiences in our selected play especially the issues of exploitation,
subjugation, self-identity, and domestic violence. Thus, to discuss the issues in this chapter, we have drawn on the principles and general ideas of feminist theory and criticism. They have aided us in classifying the representation of the female characters in *Altine’s Wrath*, their reactions to ‘angry events’ and what they consider hindrances to the actualization of their dreams and the attainment of their full potentials as individuals.

Feminism is devoted to redressing the oppression of women in society. Its main focus is the issue of the question of women. Lois Tyson defines feminism broadly as the criticism which “examines the ways literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women” (81). Feminist criticism’s main agenda, according to Greene and Kahn, is to “deconstruct predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstruct a female perspective and experience in an effort to change the tradition that has silenced and marginalized us [women]” (1).

Although there are many varieties of feminism, our concern in this study is with the wider framework of feminism since we are studying a male-authored text. Feminist criticism helps us to interrogate gender issues in *Altine’s Wrath* as they relate to the status of women in a patriarchal society. Women are seen as “the other” or “second-class”. They are oppressed by the male characters in the play, and these women try to assert themselves through anger, although certain emotions like anger are not allowed in women while they are admired in men. Men are believed to be strong and to have channelled their “weak” emotions into achievement-oriented goals. Men must not be seen crying, showing pain or fear. Tyson remarks:

> It is not surprising…that anger and other violent emotions are the only emotions permitted, even encouraged, in men, for anger is a very effective means of blocking out fear and pain, which are not permitted, and anger usually produces the kind of aggressive behaviours associated with manhood. (86)

Women, on the other hand show love, are caring, and are less likely to aggress. Firestone says, “Women are said to live for love and men for work” (127). Firestone goes on to state that “love, perhaps even more than child bearing is the pivot of women’s oppression today (126). These are stereotypes that women have grown with. When women faced with frustration get angry, they are seen as ‘deviant’, ‘irrational’, and ‘emotional’ (Donelson, 301). Therefore, women’s anger tends to be indirect or covert. In fact, studies have shown that females “report less anger than male[s]” (Donelson, 307). The physical expressions of anger like “hitting, kicking, punching and yelling” are prominent among men, according to Donelson, while women tend to “suck and pout,” talk with the person with whom they were angry, get away from the situation, or try to distract themselves (304). She concludes that men experience more “anger-out” than women.
Furthermore, the social construct of “feminity is frailty, modesty and
timidity” (Tyson, 87). Shakespeare’s Hamlet confirms this idea when he states
that “frailty thy name is woman” and Tyson enjoins women to endure “familial
abuse, wait patiently to be rescued by a man and view marriage as the only desir-
able reward for ‘right’ conduct” (87). These attributes are what we encounter
in the character of Altine in Ososifan’s Altine’s Wrath. She is self-sacrificing,
unassuming, labors for her husband, and has no need of her own. Until she is
faced with the man’s infidelity, she tries to assert her individuality by acquiring
an education and getting revenge.

When women express anger against men, they are seen as strident, unfemi-
nine and sexually unattractive (as well as dangerous); but anger is allowed in
a woman’s life if she uses it to defend her children or in the service of society
(Donelson, 305). Donelson concludes that the display of anger in a woman is a
controversial topic; despite the fact that women have so much to be angry about.
Their marginalized status is one of such reasons. Women of colour express anger
because of racial and sexual discrimination. Women are, however, not “permitted
to be angry and when they do, they are ‘man-hating feminists’ or ‘they are just
too sensitive” (627). Donelson adds that when men are angry on account of the
oppression of women, society questions their sanity or sexuality. In the use of
language, angry women are seen as “shrews,” “witches,” “bitches,” and “hags”;
a witch is a negative term but a “wizard” connotes exploits. Despite the cultural
inhibitions to the expressions of anger by women, women express anger in dif-
ferent ways in Altine’s Wrath. To these women, anger is neither destructive nor
constructive; it is an essential element in “prosocial or antisocial” circumstances
(Donelson, 268). For instance, Lawal’s anger is directed at Altine, his wife, so
that she suffers domestic violence. She feels hurt, abandoned, and alone and so
fights back angrily. To Altine, anger is the voice of self-respect. Thus, as Kelsch-
ner submits, “anger is like fertilizer—it may not smell very good but it promotes
growth” (quoted in Donelson, 635). Anger in women may not be pleasant, it
may even go against societal expectations of them, but it can be “life-affirming”
and a tool to challenge patriarchy if well utilized. When one fails to get angry
at frustrating situations, it means that one is not being aware of the world or not
being engaged in it and, as Wole Soyinka puts it, “the man [or woman] dies in
all who keep silent in the face of tyranny” [13]. There is no tyranny as great as
that against the womenfolk.

DEFINITION OF TERM

An important term germane to this study is “anger.” A review of this is
necessary to the full understanding of our work since “anger” is a much maligned
emotion, usually seen as destructive, unpleasant, and offensive. Despite these cul-
tural connotations, anger is a natural human reaction that is endemic in all human relationship. Thus it is worth exploring. Medical views of anger are negative just as is its religious perspective. Although we know that anger has a positive essence. Proffering ways of overcoming anger, Deffenbacher opines,

The goal of intervention should be ‘anger management’, not anger elimination. It is idealistic to believe that anger will or can ever be eliminated. Frustration, pain, injustice, and disagreement will continue. People become ill, jobs are lost, relationships end, others are inconsiderate and obnoxious. Even when anger regarding these events is well managed, a realistic residue of mild anger (e.g. frustration, disappointment, annoyance, irritation) remains and difficult choices remain to be made and unimplemented…(267)

Anger is, according to Baker Encyclopaedia of Psychology,

an intense emotional reaction sometimes directly expressed in overt behaviour and emotional reaction sometimes remaining a largely unexpressed feeling…being angry is an emotional readiness to aggress. (David G. Bennered, 58-59)

In a book on the exploration of women’s anger entitled A Dance of Anger, Harriet Goldhor-Lerner gives an insightful definition that illuminates our study:

Anger is a signal…It maybe a message that we are being hurt, that our rights are being violated; that our needs or wants are not being adequately met or simply that something is not right (1).

Carol Tavris also posits that, “anger is not a disease with a single cause; it is a process, a transaction, a way of communicating…” (162). In other words, anger is a product of social interaction and as such is a useful response to frustration. Jerry Deffenbacher corroborates our notion of anger. He states that,

Anger is often a ‘moral’ emotion that results from a sense of violation or trespass on the person’s domain…or on his/her rules for living…That is, anger rises when values are compromised, promises and expectations are broken, rules of conduct are violated, and personally defined freedoms and rights are abridged. Anger escalates further if the source is seen as intentional, preventable, unjustified, and/or something to be blamed and punished. (Siegman and Smith, 242-243) [Emphasis mine.]

It is in the light of this that we explore women’s anger in Osofisan’s drama. If anger is natural and a social act, why is it then that a woman is denied the right to
freely express herself without being given a tag? Why is she labelled as frustrated, bitter, unfeminine, and angry? What these women feel is strong emotion against wrong and insults, against cruelty, wickedness, insincerity, and injustice. Anger has enabled them to resist and challenge patriarchy and all institutions against womanhood. Women’s anger is a reaction to how they are treated in society. We must recognize that such reaction is tied to the issues of power and justice in society. The usual trend is to gloss over, ignore, ridicule, trivialize, or totally write-off women’s anger as inconsequential or demeaning. But we know that nations have been wiped off the face of the earth because of the fury of a woman. When a woman is angry she is seen as foolish, rash, even capable of murder. These are the same adjectives that describe Altine when she adorns the robe and cosmetics of her rival. Her anger seems out of proportion, even “grotesque.”

When anger is examined, it is usually in respect of anger against political and economic injustices in society. The anger of women is never accounted for in this way. Or, as earlier stated, it is seen as baseless and illogical—mere hysterics.

In this chapter, our critical searchlight is beamed on the reasons why women get angry. The study posits that anger in a woman is an emotion worth exploring. Our aim is to show that anger in a woman is also a natural, common, and human emotional response to issues of injustices, unfairness, insecurity, pain, or betrayal. Considering the traditional stereotypes in which women have been cast, “(w)omen are thought to be passive when compared to men who assume the initiative in sex, in business, and in politics…” (Ferguson, 1). It is no wonder that when she speaks passionately about an issue, she is trivialized—there goes the angry young lady, or that’s the frustrated lioness in our midst. These comments are society’s way of putting a woman in her place since she has dared to threaten/challenge a patriarchy. But women are individuals in their own right, a group of people with their own destiny and stories.

Altine’s Wrath is one of the five short plays in a collection that Osofisan titled: Seasons of Wrath. The other plays in the collection are The Engagement, The Inspector and the Hero, Flood, and Fire Burn and Die Hard. Why the title Seasons of Wrath? Is wrath a common, unifying theme in these plays? This is a topic worth investigating in another paper. Ezeigbo relates a lack in the writings of Africans:

In the thinking of many people on the continent, the most disturbing problems facing Africa and militating against its demonstration and development are ethnicity, corruption, poverty and religious intolerance. Few people give thought to the fact that sexism or gender oppression ranks as one of the most insidious problems plaguing the continent and slowing down its pace of growth and development.

(174)
Gender issues to some writers are trivial, of no consequence, to be ignored, and ridiculed and laughed at. They are not serious issues that threaten anyone.

Although there is an overwhelming depiction of political issues in this play, the all-pervading theme, tone, and image in Altine’s Wrath that we are called to witness is the depravity of Lawal, not so much as the super-corrupt Permanent Secretary, but as Altine’s husband. The play’s moral questions are overwhelming far above its political dimension. We are faced with the issue of injustice and our sympathy is with the woman who suffers, not on the one who causes the injury. The title of the play underscores the central idea explored by Osofisan in this play. The play is an exploration of the anger, fury, righteous indignation, and wrath of Altine. Altine dominates the play in terms of theme and presence.

“Wrath” is defined as, “rage or indignation usually also implying a grievance and a desire to revenge or punish in return” (Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, 82). It seems that “rage” is a better word to describe Altine’s anger. What she feels in Mariam’s presence is, “a total loss of control, of usually strong outward display presumably reflecting an intense, inner frustration, revengefulness or temporary derangement” (Webster’s, 82), or what could describe her irrational reaction when she goes into the room and puts on Marian’s dress and make-up (28). This is an extreme case of fury and rage which confirms William Congreve’s statement in The Mourning Bride: “Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turn’d/ nor Hell a fury like a woman scorn’d” [Act 3 Scene 2]. It is not so very surprising that Osofisan, who presents a wide vision in his perspective of struggle towards a just world in the midst of corruption, abuse of power, and poverty in his plays, should also give us a view of gender issues (even if it is subsumed under politics again).

CRITICS AND OSOFISAN’S PRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN HIS WORKS

More than any other playwright in Nigeria, Osofisan gives us a significant view of women’s experiences in his plays, and this is one of the enduring qualities we admire in him. In this play Osofisan has once again brought to “public attention, areas of injustices, of gathering anger in the land” (Osofisan, “Playing Dangerously” Insidious Treasons 136). Much of the panoply of women’s experiences represented in Osofisan’s plays show advancement over the status of women in older writers like Soyinka and J. P. Clark. His female characters are not just fictional beings but also historical and symbolic. Osofisan in many of his works has given insight into women’s experiences. His female characters are not subservient or docile; rather they confront issues and institutions with the power in their hands. They are sometimes angry, bold, and daring. He has a whole array of them—the rich, the poor, the wise, the foolish, the corrupt, the brave, and the angry. In an
interview with this writer in December 2006, Osofisan posits that he does not foist these bold presentations on society, rather these bold and courageous women exist in our society just as do the corrupt and wicked ones. All he has done is to exploit existing materials. In Morountodun, we see the legendary Moremi in a moment of anger against the formidable force represented by the Igbo raiders. In defiance of the gods and the priests who make unending sacrifices to avert the terror that the Igbo represents, she left the comfort of her splendor, the palatial home where she lives with the King and her only son. She allows herself to be captured in order to save her people. Her anger is an assertive type even if she has used it to serve the state. Moremi’s anger is a galvanising force that propels her to save her race. Moremi defies the gods, the King, and her personal safety. Her anger provokes her to challenge what stands in the way of her security. Working within the Moremi myth, Titubi in that same play at first responded angrily to the actors’ attempt to mirror what goes on in society. She comes on stage with her mob, disrupts the play in process, and harasses the Director. It is this outrage that leads to her conscription for the search party against Marshal, the rebel leader of the farmers. This anger takes her on a journey of self-development. The sufferings and pains of the poor farmers become her teacher. She is thoroughly bought over by the daily problems of these peasants, and she eventually supports their fight against the rich class. It is her perception of injustice, whether legitimate or not, that has motivated her into this action. At the end, her initial emotional outburst is channelled and redirected into life-saving acts.

In The Chattering and the Song, Osofisan presents a group of friends who are working secretly against the corruption in the society. This group consists of men and women equally contributing their quota to subverting the corruption of the ruling class. It is this basic disenchantment with socio-political issues in society that informs and guides their action. In revealing these, Osofisan adopts the play-within-a-play technique and shows us the corrupt rule of King Abiodun in the Old Oyo Empire. This presentation is an overt criticism of the rule of Abiodun. The female characters, Yajin, Funlola, and the others contribute to the criticism. In the historical play-within-a-play, the Olori, and Ayaba are traditional women who support the system against rebels like Latoye. In all, despite the fact that they are women, Osofisan shows them as partners in the business of transforming the society. Leje invites the artist Funlola to join the group and asserts,

Leje:  …we need anger to start a revolution, even a great anger, but once it has started it will get rid of us, unless we meet it with cunning and compassion…(51)

Also, Leje becomes Osofisan’s mouthpiece when he states that:
What is a single man in a revolution? Once a movement begins, in search of justice, it will run its course, with or without those who serve to spark it off... (53)

This goes to reiterate Osofisan’s idea of collectivism where both men and women are equal partners. It is an affirmation of what Osofisan says:

Seasons change, oppression and injustice resurface in new forms, and new weapons have to be devised to eliminate them (54).

In Once upon Four Robbers, Alhaja, a female character we naturally should detest, is presented sympathetically. For a robber, she displays positive attributes, and as such she can be compared to Woman in Ngugi and Mugo’s The trial of Dedan Kimathi. Alhaja is sensitive, kind, and loyal—attributes not normally associated with criminals. She is seen weeping openly at the public execution of her husband. She makes conscious efforts to unite the gang when discord sets in; and, most of all, her activities towards releasing the arrested Major are commendable. Despite these bold portraits, critics are however of the opinion that they are not far-reaching. Omofolabo Ajayi, in her work “Gender and the Revolutionary Ethos of Class in Morountodun,” is conscious of the centrality of Moremi to the success of the revolution. She however questions the revolutionary acts of Moremi and Titubi by implication. She agrees that Moremi is:

daring all right but her qualification for the job emphasises not her intelligence but her personality as a sexual object, an objectification which Titubi does not question... (95)

In this play, as in others, Osofisan has given voice to the “voiceless,” the silent, behind-the-scenes roles of women in national development.

Ajayi, in her critique of the significance of women in this play, zeroes in on the “naming scene” where, in recognition of her bravery, kindness, and good work, Marshall gives Titubi a new name, “Morountodun.” It is Marshall who does the naming and he proclaims, “(n)ow I am a man again. Morountodun, I have clothed you in a name of honour. My fists to a superb woman” (78). According to Ajayi, in naming her, Marshall is able to assert his manhood and thus diminishes the significant role of Titubi in the revolution as he marches off to war without a thought to her:

Ajayi opines:

By depriving Titubi of the power of speech and the authority to name herself, Marshall severely undermines the revolutionary concept within the context of the play. (98)
Victor Ukaegbu’s contribution to this debate is contained in a paper titled “Mythological and Patriarchal Constraints: The Tale of Osofisan’s Revolutionary Women.” Ukaegbu believes, like other critics, that Femi Osofisan “avoids character simplism and tokenistic presentation of women, creating instead, strong, complex women who command ideological and intellectual stature as men” (Ukaegbu, 180). Like Ajayi, he queries the “naming scene” in Morountodun. To him, Osofisan has presented marriage as a disadvantage to women because “Titubi’s significant role as an ideological comrade and co-revolutionary” is subordinated and trivialized. It diminishes her heroism (182). Titi Ufomata, in a paper entitled “Women in Osofisan’s Short Stories,” corroborates this gap in Osofisan’s female characterization. She agrees that women play important roles in his work but insists that, “in playing out the power relations between his characters, Osofisan positions women as underprivileged” (Ufomata, 166). According to Ufomata, Osofisan depicts women in all their individual “strength.” “He shows compassion for their individual struggles and treats them sympathetically,” but the playing out of power relations between men and women are still heavily weighted in favor of men (Ufomata, 166-167). And this is what we see in Altine’s Wrath: the issues are still in favor of Lawal for Altine dies at the end of the play.

Equally, “Centring the Marginal? Notes towards a Query of Women and Gender in the Drama of Femi Osofisan,” by Tejumola Olaniyan, raises similar questions highlighted above. Olaniyan agrees that, “Osofisan has been consistent in his non-condescending representational emphasis on women as equal and worthy partners with men in the struggle for a just society” (143), but remarks that Osofisan persists in depicting women as “objects of social derision, foil for the affirmation of stifling customs and anarchic traditions, objects of gaze and pleasures of men” (143). Olaniyan’s query hangs on the fact that the female question in Osofisan’s plays is usually treated “in terms of a larger, that is, group or class struggle” (145). This assertion is true as it is evident in Morountodun, The Chattering and the Song and even in Altine’s Wrath. He avers that “Osofisan’s class lens goes blurry when it comes to capturing another content of the social relations between men and women: the specificities of gender difference and inequity between them” (149). He attempts to give free rein to the relation between men and women in Altine’s Wrath, but, a close reading of this play reveals that the representation of women is subsumed under the discussion of the issues of class and corruption.

Osofisan has been very vocal about his philosophy of playwriting and his role in society. He affirms his commitment to issues concerning women in “The Revolution as Muse: Drama as a Surreptitious Insurrection in a ‘Postcolonial Military State’,” when he states that, “(t)his is why female heroes are so prominent in my plays, since empowerment of women is crucial to this perspective program of liberation and modernisation” (58). Again, in his Inaugural Lecture
titled “Playing Dangerously: Drama at the Frontiers of Terror in a “Post-Colo-
nial” State,” he asserts his deep love for the wellbeing of his society and so he
cannot “afford to remain indifferent to its destiny” (143). To this writer, part of
the destiny of this nation is the well-being of the women-folk. The message to
Osofisan is that women are not “content with little fires” thrown to them in his
plays. What we demand from him as the champion of women’s cause is “to set
the dawn ablaze” (Okinba Launko).

WOMEN IN ALTINE’S WRATH

In Altine’s Wrath, Osofisan depicts the predicament women face in a male-
dominated society, especially when they are economically dependent, unedu-
cated, and therefore have no “voice.” Altine is not just owned by Lawal, she is
also abused. Her situation is compounded by her lack of education, money, and
a sense of self. Altine provides support services for her husband and performs
practical duties within the household. Through her, Osofisan is able to examine
the status of women as dictated by cultural and biological issues existing in his
society. In marriage especially, the woman is a victim as shown in this play.
Osofisan shows a selfless, self-sacrificing woman who gives all—her life and
love—to someone not worthy of it. Her life revolves around Lawal; she keeps the
house, washes his clothes, and warms his bed. This last part she has not done for
the past three years because he has restrained her from his bedroom. According
to Lawal, her husband, “Altine’s room is at the back of the house. I have not
allowed her to step into my room for over three years now” (4). Lawal says this
to his mistress who has come as a live-in lover even in his wife’s presence.

Altine is thus reduced to a maid in her own household as she serves Lawal’s
mistresses. She suffers physically and psychologically at the hands of Lawal
who sees her as a “trap, a burden” (10). Lawal holds Altine in great contempt.
Her case is that of neglect and abuse. Despite her ill-treatment by Lawal, Altine
records less anger than Lawal who we see raging and abusive all the time. He
insults, abuses, and calls Altine names, uses hateful and harsh words like “goat,”
“idiot,” “imbecile,” and ”animal” for her even in the presence of a mistress.
This is the way he maintains superiority. The psychological trauma moves to
domestic violence as he in several instance descends physically on Altine, beating
her up. With his angry outbursts, Lawal seems to get what he wants. He orders
her around and she obeys meekly and submits. He humiliates her and she in turn
becomes afraid of him. We see her trying to escape from his beating in the play.

Lawal’s anger is a self-centred anger that is mainly used to exploit a helpless
person. Obviously, he is unhappy in his marriage and engages in extra-marital
escapades and brings mistresses home. The obvious question to ask is: what
has Altine done to warrant this inhuman treatment? We are not told why he has
changed so much, but we can deduce that his depravity is such that even his mother warns Altine against him. Altine recalls that Mama:

SAT ME DOWN ONE EVENING TO DISCUSS IT, HOW YOU HAD CHANGED TOTALLY, 
AND HOW SHE COULD NO LONGER RECOGNISE YOU... YOU WERE SO FILLED WITH 
YOURSELF! SHE COULDN’T REACH YOU ANYMORE, POOR WOMAN SHE ADVISED 
ME TO GO AWAY WHILE I WAS STILL YOUNG. (31)

Altine recounts tales of pain, humiliation, and betrayal she endures living with Lawal. Her selflessness, self-sacrifice, and service to Lawal are typical of the status of a woman in a patriarchal society.

Altine: Remember, all those years you went to the university and I 
had to slave to pay your fees, and maintain the children, as 
well as your aged mother... (34)

She endured those years of hardship only to have Miriam, another woman, reaping where she did not sow. This makes her angry as she resorts to calling Miriam names.

Altine: Go on! Say them again! ‘Darling, she’s so illiterate!’ “Darling, what are you doing with a woman like this?” Darling this, Darling that. But you don’t know, do you. How many years it took me to mould him into a ‘darling’? From a thin little stick of a boy, all gaunt, with ribs showing like the aftermath of a civil war? So wretched, and always so frightened then. Tell her, Lawal, how you were when I met you! How I tended you and sewed you together always sac- 
rificing myself, always bowing my head, refusing to listen to 
the screams of my own inner needs! All so he could become 
your ‘darly’ one day, Mrs. Harlot! ‘Darling’ (31).

Of course, Altine is angry because of the injustice committed by Lawal against her. She is traumatized, unjustly used, and unloved. At first, she meekly obeyed until that day.

Altine: Until that horrible day, when you brought that girl, Hauwa, 
to sleep on our bed. And the next day I had to wash the bed 
clothes, yes wash off your smells and muck, after you’d 
beaten me up.... (32)

She responds with “bitter tears” that she cried which “acted like a drug and cleared her head. I became wide awake” (32). Her anger becomes a weapon,
a motivating force for her to change her life. It gives her a new vision, a new perspective that clarifies her problems, and challenges her to take her destiny in her hand. Altine enrols in an adult class. Even the teacher is surprised at the high rate at which Altine is absorbing new information. Altine acknowledges the anger in her:

He thought I was a genius, and I could not tell him the truth, and it was just anger, that’s all! The anger you had bred in my stomach and nurtured with so many years of cruelty… (32)

This is positive, life-affirming anger. The anger that transforms Altine has not only found her voice (now she can talk) but also her dignity. She speaks impeccable English to the chagrin of Lawal, Alhaji, and Mariam. Anger has helped Altine to rationalize the situation and use the information to change her situation.

At this stage, her anger is moral. It merely demands fairness and justice in the power relations between her and Lawal. Lawal’s insensitiveness and maltreatment has turned her into a “silent woman.” She loses her voice after one of the several beatings. This is the result of the psychological trauma she goes through. She lost her voice metaphorically and physically. But her “dumbness” is in itself a reaction. It makes a statement which Lawal fails to understand. For, despite the pitiable state Altine finds herself in, Lawal continues to beat her. Thus, she has merely retreated into silence (8). Other ways by which she reacts to his beatings is to “drool in the mouth” (6) a physical sign of anger in her submissive state. This in itself is symbolic. But when she breaks a plate, Lawal is all over her with abuse and beating:

‘He is enraged’ What! What’s that? You stupid blundering imbecile! You broke that expensive plate! Why are you always so clumsy, ehn? I’ll teach you a lesson today! More to impress Miriam-[his mistress] he takes out a belt and whips her. Altine falls on her knees but takes the blows without even trying to protect herself. He hit her again, but the woman only keeps staring at him, her face impassive… (9) [Emphasis Mine.]

This defiance is Altine’s way of reacting (taking blows without crying). However, Osofisan has not been able to transcend the stereotypical depiction of women experiences in our society even in this play. This is because Altine is still a naïve, careless victim of patriarchy. Her anger has not in any way challenged the status quo. She shows no self-dignity eating bananas anyhow anywhere. That is the careless action that eventually leads to her death. To this writer, Altine’s fall derives from her inability to protect herself against the mountain of patriarchy. If Altine had been able to control, direct her passionate anger towards the right target, she could have successfully moved from the personal to making a political statement.
To become a social statement, Osofisan should not have Altine die at the end of the play. By her death, he seems to be reinforcing the patriarchal idea that the man will always win while the woman will always become the victim. Onookome Okome in “A Season of Altine’s Predicament: Femi Osofisan’s Altine’s Wrath” sees Altine as:

the conscience of the depraved society. She is the symbol of selflessness, a heroine who dies on behalf of the society. But her choice is not ordained. She is not compelled by any external force to give up her life… (50)

Is Altine’s death necessary? Why is it that we don’t get to see Lawal punished? Osofisan has built up our sympathy for Altine by showing Lawal as corrupt even in political spheres: he illegally enriches himself at the expense of the government he works for. Despite this, Altine dies when she could handle Lawal’s infidelity and insensitivity in many other ways and still live. For instance, she could remain indifferent to the immoral acts or walk out. Dr. Aina Jibo is her foil. She is educated, actually a medical doctor. She walked out of an unhappy marriage with Prof. Jibo. To her, “it was a relief, when it all ended” (12). She recognizes from personal experience that, “men can be terrible…You all think marriage is a modern version of the slave trade” (13). Dr. Aina Jibo does not see marriage as the only avenue where a woman can find fulfillment. She manages to temper her anger, pain, and loneliness and channels to humanitarian works like rescuing displaced Audu and Onene from corrupt and greedy public officers like Lawal. She has gone beyond anger. She asserts this when she states, “I am not a combatant. I heal and that compensates” (13).

Aina Jibo is caring, humane, and sensitive. She is shocked by the “rottenness” in Lawal. She tries without success to educate Lawal by telling him to show pity to the “unfortunate and the sick” (13). Lawal reminds her that in the society where he lives women are victims:

We snap our fingers and women far more important than you fall on their knees in obeisance… Women like you and better than you kill themselves to get into my bed! (18)

Even Miriam his mistress is objectified. She is a “whore,” and “a harlot.” Lawal is sure that “her pretty face will soften” Alhaji up as they conduct their “business deal.” Her reaction to Altine is a case of “women against women,” the “favoured” mistress against the wife. The favoured mistress envies the position of the wife at home and discredits her in order to warm her way into the man’s heart. Altine, the calculating avenger does not play her cards well. In a fit of uncontrolled anger, Altine rushes into Lawal’s room.
(Stage direction:) Altine has come in, completely transformed. She is grotesquely painted in Miriam’s make-up, with the latter’s wig, dress, and coat on. She is also wearing Miriam’s high heeled shoes. She is carrying a bundle wrapped in a scarf. She looks like an apparition but she walks in with complete confidence in her new shoes (28).

Why make Altine take this action? Does she think Miriam is her superior? Is she trying to become another Miriam? Osofisan does not stop there; he adds in a note: “Directors may prefer to do just the opposite of this, and dress her right, in fine clothes and jewellery. This is acceptable, although, my preference is for the first suggestion. Whichever the case, however, there must be a touch of exaggeration. Either she is very pretty or she is very grotesque” (28) [Emphasis mine]. Where then is poetic justice? If even in this “phantom house” we cannot hope to get justice?

Vincent Diakpomere asks the same question in his analysis of the imperative of Kunle Aremo’s death in Osofisan’s Birthdays are not for Dying. Diakpomere concludes:

> I think the unmistakable moral that Osofisan is projecting in this drama is ‘that any movement no matter how righteous in conception, must be properly planned, well grounded and carefully implemented…There is need for diplomacy, tact and shrewdness on the part of those desiring to foster change (155)

Altine throws caution to the winds. She is unable to manage her anger. Part of a strategy to better her lot could have been holding dialogue with the supposed “enemy.” She could have rationalized issues and asked herself what she is doing to cause the violent reactions from Lawal. At least Lawal confesses that he hates it when she eats bananas carelessly around the house. It is these same bananas that lead to her death. But she could have worked on her faults.

The anger that propels her to take steps to better her lot ought to strengthen her, clarify issues, and move on instead of becoming the pawn in the hand of a patriarchal and corrupt society. Lawal deeply despises Altine and she could have taken a firm stand, used her anger effectively without engaging in passing the buck—blaming others for her problems. People will fail us and cannot provide happiness for us. Aina Jibo’s statement that, “I no longer miss, for instance, the affection which I thought men alone could provide” is instructive here (13).

The day women realize that they owe themselves the debt of providing happiness for themselves, that day their anger will be effective. This is the concern of Buchi Emecheta in The Joys of Motherhood where Nnu Ego was abandoned even by the children for whom she labored all her life. In the first place, who is Lawal to determine Altine’s place in her own home? She had given Lawal her
all—including her ability to make decisions in her own life. She threatens to leave yet she stays on. Altine also lacks any bonding with her fellow sisters. Her life activities have been restricted to the house, her energy placed on developing others at the expense of who she is. Lawal’s mother who provides a listening ear to her cries and offers a shoulder on which she can lean is dead and gone. Sometimes, bottling up emotions can be dangerous, as we have seen in Altine. If she had a good friend like Aissatou is to Ramatoulaye in So Long a Letter, by Mariama Ba, her anger would have been used to define her life and assert her individuality. To every woman, “sisterhood” and “female-bonding” is essential in this male-dominated world. The absence of female solidarity is one of the reasons for Altine’s fall.

**CONCLUSION**

*Altine’s Wrath* was first published in 1986. Since then, there have been reactions, especially about the ending of the play. Based on this, Osofisan in his characteristic manner has revised the play’s ending in the 2002 edition. The suggested alternative ending is Osofisan’s usual way of holding constant debate with his audience through his plays. Many readers—including this writer—shocked at the death of Altine, have protested. He provides an alternative ending whereby Altine is revived by the powers of Baba Onene and Baba Audu. One wonders if given the stature, the Marxist leaning, and philosophy of Osofisan he has merely reflected the patriarchal restrictions placed on a woman and has not given us a way of transforming the challenge. Perhaps, it is a provocation. Osofisan has merely roused us from our lethargy and as usual invited us to take a stand. It could also be realistic. Osofisan could just have been confirming the view that in this world, the woman is the victim.

Obioma Nnaemeka’s remark in a foreword to Susan Arndt’s book titled *The Dynamics of African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African Feministic Literature* helps to reinforce our point in this chapter. She states:

On the eve of my departure for graduate studies in obodo oyinbo (the land of the white people) my great uncle called me into his Obi and sounded this note of caution. ‘My daughter’, he said, ‘When you go to obodo oyinbo, walk like a chameleon’. According to my great uncle, the chameleon is an interesting animal to watch. As it walks, it keeps its head straight but looks in different directions. It does not deviate from its goals and grows wiser through the knowledge gleaned from the different perspectives it absorbs along the way. If it sees a prey, it does not jump on it immediately. First, it throws out its tongue, it moves ahead and grabs the prey. The chameleon is cautious (14).
This is equally the point made by Ezeigbo in *The Children of Eagle* the opening quotation in this chapter. Like the snail, the woman must be cautious as she traverses the terrain of a patriarchal world but she also has inbuilt survival mechanisms like the “snail’s smooth and lubricated tongue” to guide her on her way. The image of the chameleon in Obioma Nnaemeka’s remark does not suggest lies or duplicity but inner strength, adaptability, and focus.

It is not the intention of this writer to glorify or valorize anger in women, but too often in culture and literature, women’s anger is trivialized. Adeyemi Daramola in an article in *Lagos Notes and Records*, asserts that in spite of women’s “indispensable” role in the human race as partners, producers, and providers of care for themselves and their children and spouses, little is known or understood about them. They remain an enigma (17). Only stereotypical depictions endure. Therefore, progressive, dynamic, and enlightened writers are enjoined to give vent to the woman as subject, depict her experiences and her condition. The exploration and analysis of these issues will fill the gap and provide a platform for a better understanding of humanity. In other words, this analysis should be an important insight through which our ideas about women should revolve. Relevant works in this direction will help to subvert stereotypes against women.

According to Ezeigbo in “Literature: A Tool for Gender Activism in Nigeria”:

> Men have used books, for centuries to further the interest of the male gender. The image created of the woman in many of the books has been rather uncomplimentary, to say the least. Many myths and false notions were thus created about women… (175)

One of the myths and false notions is the fear of a woman’s anger. Interdisciplinary texts in psychology, sociology, history, and literature should be written on this much maligned emotion in women correcting the trend that sees anger in women as irrational, illogical, groundless, or as mere hysterical outbursts.

This chapter is a call and a challenge to progressive and well-meaning people to move beyond the banal and try to articulate the reason for women’s anger, women’s response patterns and to channel or redirect angry energies towards constructive life-affirming ends in society. Issues of betrayal, pain, hurt, abandonment, and injustice will persist in this world, but the correct reading of the situation and our response to them will either make or mar us. A close examination of the issues such as this chapter has attempted reveals that women’s anger may be confrontational, assertive, or destructive, but it’s life-affirming, fertilizing agency cannot be denied. Such binary positions constructed by society in which emotion is female while reason is male should be discarded. Anyone can get angry. How we can manage and channel emotion is important to our growth.
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An Unpublished interview this writer had with Osofisan in December 2006.


Okinba Launko “*Minted Coins*” quoted in Tejumola Olaniyan ‘Centring The Marginal’? Notes Toward a Query of Women and Gender in the Drama of Femi Osofisan’ in


Femi Osofisan is one of the very few Nigerian male writers that escaped feminist indictment for negative portrayals of female characters. Most Nigerian male writers have been accused of marginalizing and suppressing women in their work. The icons of African literature, including Achebe and Soyinka, are all guilty of male chauvinism. But rather than indictment, Femi Osofisan receives commendation for his positive portrayal of female characters in his plays. Not only does this master craftsman give adequate attention to women, he even accords them some power. Because of his attention to women, therefore, some critics describe him as a “feminist” writer. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the merits of this claim against the backdrop of the actual meaning of “feminist” and in comparison with core feminist plays. Some of the questions which the chapter sets out to answer are: who is a feminist writer? Does one become a feminist writer by writing about women? Is Femi Osofisan really a feminist writer? Attention will be paid to female characters in some of Osofisan’s plays, especially those that earned him the feminist title.

Gender-sensitive critics have, for decades, decried the negative image of women in literature. Works of literature are subjected to scrutiny by these critics for signs of gender bias in the form of exclusion of female perspective or negative portrayal of female characters, or a stereotypical presentation of women at the expense of the changing role of women. Icons of African literature have all been indicted because of the persistent uncomplimentary image of women in their works. In spite of the fact that these writers have, in their later works, improved their female characters, these critics think they have not done enough. Notwithstanding the fact that Chinua Achebe has lately conceded some level of eminence to women in his writing by creating a character like Beatrice in *The Anthills of the Savannah* who is intelligent, highly educated, and expressive, Obioma
Nnaemeka thinks that the writer has yet to change his attitude towards his female characters. She is annoyed that, despite her academic and professional achievement, Beatrice is portrayed in the novel merely as an appendage to the men in her life. She is not shown living up to her professional qualifications, but existing as a beautiful companion to her boyfriend and a play thing in the hands of His Excellency (HE). Sylvia Bryan feels the same way about Wole Soyinka who, she observes, has improved his attitude towards his female characters from total marginalization to some level of recognition. However, Bryan maintains that, “even in presenting these ‘revolutionary’ images of women, Soyinka remains a creature of his culture and his writing reflects the absorption of certain cultural attitudes towards women” (127).

Femi Osofisan remains one of the few African playwrights free of these indictments. This is because of the apparent gender sensitivity which he consistently displays in his plays. His female characters exhibit the characteristics which these gender sensitive critics hope to see in literary representations—active, expressive, and independent. These critics, comprising both females and males, bear down on any work that glorifies traditional womanhood and casts aspersions on the integrity of positively active and independent women, an approach adjudged to discourage women from aspiring to emancipation. Such writings make it seem as if it is wrong, nay, a taboo for a woman to be free and independent.

In this post-modern period when democracy and human rights of all citizens are highly prized, the continued suppression of women in the pages of literary works is problematic. There are more questions than answers about the seemingly popular poor images of women in literature. It seems that the more women try to improve themselves in society, the more they are doomed in the pages of literature. The more recognition they achieve in society, the more they are diminished in the pages of literary works. This disparity between fictional female characters and real women in the society leads one to wonder if these writers are still committed to truth and social justice. The literature of commitment, which African writers advocate, appears not to extend to women’s problems. Dynamic and independently successful women in business, politics, economy, professions, and leadership positions are part of present realities in societies, yet the subservient and dependent domestic worker remains the favorite of literary writers in complete negation of the reality of independent women. It is, therefore, not surprising that progressive intellectuals such as Nnadozie Inyama would question the sincerity of purpose behind the presentation of emancipated and assertive women as doomed women. Damian Opata, in full awareness of the misrepresentation of women, tries to deduce a reason, namely, that men put women down because of their fear of losing power to them and as a defence mechanism for their own powerlessness.
Whatever the reasons for preferring passive and dependent women and ignoring the active woman, Femi Osofisan apparently does not believe in them. His consistent portrayal of strong female characters that are expressive and progressive has been recorded and commended by critics as refreshing and innovative. On account of this gender sensitivity in his work, Osofisan has been described as a feminist writer. The main purpose of this writing is to examine the import of this assertion. And in doing so the concept of a feminist writer will be attempted as well as a short survey of the implications for the theater.

CRITICAL RESPONSES TO THE PLAYS OF FEMI OSOFISAN

Critics fall into two groups in their attempt to define the kind of writer Osofisan is. There are those who take a broad view of the playwright’s commitment to issues of universal concern. For writers in this camp, Osofisan is fighting for social justice across races and genders and across cultures and religions, and for equitable distribution of rights and privileges in an atmosphere of freedom and respect for the citizenry. From this standpoint, Muyiwa Awodiya explains that,

The major objective of Osofisan as a playwright, it seems, is to catalyze the evolution of collective consciousness among all black people in an effort to liberate themselves from economic and socio-political oppression inherited from the colonial experience. (224)

Osofisan is thus motivated by the condition of black people, whose identity is displaced by colonial contact and defined by it. Osofisan, Awodiya seems to be saying, sees the need for black people to reclaim their identity, instead of forcing themselves to fit the colonial definition, more like the popular square peg in a round hole. In conclusion, Awodiya sums up: “His drama offers spiritual analgesia of hope to the underprivileged” (227). One sees clearly that Osofisan is a man who uses his writing to better the lot of humanity, especially the groups who are dominated and marginalized by another group that claims power and superiority and so lords it over the perceived weak and powerless, the group that has been coerced and hypnotized into believing and accepting their powerlessness. He gives voice to the voiceless and strength to the weak. Biodun Jeyifo, after studying Osofisan’s critical and theoretical writings, defines the playwright’s ideological leaning thus:

First, everyone knows that Osofisan is unquestionably a man of the left, a radical writer and critic who has embraced a class approach to the production and reception of literature in our society. (230)
This is despite the fact that he sometimes rains attack on leftists, probably in an effort to sanitize the leftist camp and rid it of mediocrity and lack of focus. Jeyifo also thinks Osofisan has an “ideological solidarity with the alternative tradition” (231) and a passionate advocate of “social justice” (232). As a leftist, then, it is only natural that the marginalized and neglected population will be his focus, and his commitment will be towards this group of people, among whom are women.

At another level, Edde Iji sees Osofisan as a writer wielding a liberating ideological weapon against “recalcitrant despotism” (88) in a Marxist fashion that overthrows oppressive power and reinstates democratic order. Osofisan serves as a spokesman for the oppressed and exploited population as well as a conscience for the oppressive ruling class. This is probably why Olu Obafemi asserts that,

Osofisan’s creative works, like those of others in his generation, deal with urgent, topical, contemporary social issues, some of which are inherent in the nature and reality of the parasitic social economy of neo-colonial heritage and which precipitated the civil war. His artistic aim carries the political intent of raising mass consciousness towards a positive revolutionary alternative to the decadent social polity of the present.

Though it is true that the contemporaries of Femi Osofisan also deal with contemporary social issues, but how many of them regard women’s condition in society as part of the social matters that need redress? A writer such as Osofisan, who writes for the larger population and addresses issues of general concern, must be defined by the scope of his thematic and artistic output. It would be a disservice to him to limit his significance to a small section of his literary achievement.

The second group of critics defines Osofisan in connection with his portrayal of female characters in his plays. They are attracted by the positive image of women in his plays—evidence of his gender-sensitivity and a refreshing break from the monotonous stereotype images of women. Positive images of women in Osofisan’s plays are not incidental. The writer makes it a point of duty to present women positively. Osofisan’s plays prove that a male writer is capable of presenting positive images of women, rather than the stereotype images of the doomed active woman and the favored passive woman that has characterized literary writing for decades. Osofisan marks a break from such uncritical controversially static and retrogressive image of women. This is a welcome relief for critics who are bored with decades of static and stereotyped images of women, they have received his radical approach with much enthusiasm.

Tess Onwueme is dissatisfied with the icons of Nigerian theater for their continued negative portrayal and shabby treatment of female characters and submits that,
Though the best of our older writers have tended to reinforce the preconceived and one-dimensional notions of women as perpetrators of “original sin” they have anachronistically clung to such superstitions without due regard to the profound implications of dualities (good and evil) and dimensions of humane possibilities. (228)

In contrast to the above accusations against Ola Rotimi and the rest, Onwueme commends Osofisan for deviating from that objectionable practice. She thus declares that,

Emphasis and prominence given to women in Osofisan’s plays as “guardian angels” and harbingers of social change rather than as “temptresses” and devils, reveal a positive image in the leadership qualities of women and therefore a radical departure from established norms and are thus deserving of attention. (229)

In the same vein, Mabel Tobrise observes that a situation where women appear unaffected by the political activities going on around them is absurd. It seems a deliberate attempt by male playwrights to “colour women in dark political light” (30). Involved in this absurdity are Wole Soyinka in his Kongi’s Harvest in which women feature in a harem and night club, while men are engaged in power politics; Ola Rotimi’s Kurumi and Ovonramwen Nogbaisi in which the female characters, Mosadiwin and Ebvakhavbokun, remain politically inactive in the midst of political frenzy; J.P. Clark’s Song of a Goat and Ozidi that present women as burdened by taboos, stigmas, and evil supernatural afflictions instead of being forceful political characters; Bode Sowande’s Farewell to Babylon in which the character Iyalode regards women’s role in the revolt as a mere source of entertainment, and in which Jolomi realizes, too late, that she has been used as a tool for the achievement of Moniran’s political ends. Again, Femi Osofisan is absolved of all these charges because in his Morountodun female characters are presented actively fighting side-by-side with men in the war to free their oppressed people (31), which Molara Ogundipe-Leslie advocates for in Stiwanism — Social Transformation Including Women in Africa — a strain of African feminism.

Eldred Ibibien Green, in response to Chikwenye Ogunyemi’s attack on gender insensitive writers, presents Osofisan as one male writer who does not share the “Soyinka and Bros Ltd” view about women. He begins his defence of the playwright by stating for the records, that, “in a way it is possible to see Osofisan as duty bound, because of the Marxist tradition in which he operates, to portray his women positively” (241). It has to be pointed out, here, though, that most Marxist writers still leave out women in their fight for social justice and equity.
After a study of female characters in *Morountodun and Other Plays*, including Titubi, Elusu, and Ibidun with their strong views and personalities, exhibiting strength of character and actually achieving their goal of change, Green sums up that:

> It is to Osofisan’s credit that in the instances in which the female characters change, it is not change that is based on one flimsy reason or the other. Rather it a change that is brought about by a higher (emphases mine) cause or level of reasoning or both. (243)

The words “flimsy” and “higher” are highlighted to show a point of weakness in this argument. When one is celebrating gender-sensitivity, and at the same time using partisan language, his claim of gender-sensitivity becomes immediately suspect. This issue of what is flimsy, which has come to be associated with women issues, and what is a higher cause, which always refer to mainstream concerns, is at the heart of the gender-injustice which women are fighting. Green has, therefore, contradicted himself by declaring Osofisan “a feminist writer” (246). The so called “flimsy” issues are of utmost importance to a feminist writer because that is exactly where the roots of female marginalization and discrimination lie. On the other hand, the so called “higher cause” represents the mainstream concerns which are lacking in female perspectives. How, then, can a man be a feminist writer?

Eldred Jones, with reference to the allegation that male writers often fail to communicate women’s feelings in such matters as polygamy, motherhood, and gender relations mentions Wole Soyinka (ironically, one of the most accused by female critics, of marginalizing women), Sembene Ousmane, and Ngugi Wa Thiong’O as some of the male writers who have created complex female characters — resourceful, determined, and resilient. But, he realizes that, “Maybe in the final analysis, even these women are merely shown as giving powerful support to their men, and it is left to the female writers…to present female characters with ‘a destiny of their own’” (2). It is really left to women writers to communicate the feelings of women because s/he who feels it knows it better. The most a male writer has been able to do is to present contemporary women objectively, positively, and truthfully. This does not necessarily make them feminist writers. It makes them progressive writers or simply writers.

Femi Osofisan [2001] knows he is gender sensitive and has even declared that he is incorrigibly drawn to his female characters in a deliberate attempt to counter the uncomplimentary image of women in literary works and to support the political emancipation of women. He declares his motive for doing this, thus:

> For indeed, ever since I began to write, I have been deeply concerned about the sorry plight of women in our society and elsewhere. Quite independently of any feminist movements, I have always tried to
expose and denounce the wrongs which our society inflicts on women, just on account of their gender...I have found myself impelled to do this, not because of any external pressures, but rather because, given the kind of writer that I am, I am always spontaneously drawn to social injustice and to its victims. (Osofisan, Literature and the Pressures of Freedom 6) [emphasis mine.]

The phrase, “given the kind of writer that I am” is emphasized because it is the point of focus of this writing. What kind of writer is Femi Osofisan? Is there a word that most appropriately describes him? He gives us an idea of the kind of writer he is when he explains, “Easily I find myself in alliance with the struggling poor and the helpless wretched of the earth. In a gerontocratic society, I am on the side of the young; in a patriarchal society, the suppressed women are my heroes” (7). He is not attracted to just any type of women, but the “dazzling, rebellious and adventurous maidens” (8). In spite of all this and in full recognition of the futility of a man trying to communicate the feelings of women he clarifies:

Still, I have to admit it, I am not a woman. However sympathetic or sensitive I am, I have to recognise that I cannot reach beyond a certain depth of understanding of the female condition...Besides, because I am a male, I partake spontaneously, and even in spite of myself, of the benefits offered to me in a male-dominated society — a situation which cannot but corrupt my view, however much I try to strain against it. (8)

He concludes that, with the exception of Nuruddin Farah, “there must be very few male writers who can truly represent women in any fully authentic way” (9). With this then Osofisan shows full understanding that he is not and cannot be a feminist writer. He obviously understands the full implication of being a “feminist” writer and that to be a feminist writer does mean more than writing about women. He is gender-sensitive but not necessarily a feminist writer. Who then is a feminist writer?

A FEMINIST WRITER

Going by various definitions of the word, a feminist is one who believes that women are wrongly treated, marginalized, and oppressed and is committed to fighting for the emancipation and inclusion of women. A feminist writer opposes aspects of life that suppresses and excludes women. The specific aspects of life that oppresses women is fought and dismantled. Consequently, a feminist does not only reject the traditional idea of womanhood, the one that must be dependent on a man to control her life, the one that will not eat until she is given to eat, the one
that will not talk until permitted to talk and must say what she is expected to say and not what she knows, the one that is hypnotized into believing she is weak and dangerous to men and so justifies her suppression, the one that does not aspire to achieve anything in life and so does not pose any threat to anyone, the one that receives the brunt of inhumanity to man and keeps silent, that lives in perpetual denial of who she really is and what she really is, that is totally and completely intimidated and browbeaten, whose every move towards self-realization and assertion is blocked and rewarded with dire consequences, that must suppress her own feelings and forget her own dreams in order that others will develop and soar high, that acts as a ladder for others to climb to limelight while remaining in the dark herself till death, that cares for all without anyone caring for her in return thereby living alone in the midst of crowd. What one understands from reading feminist writers and critics is that this definition of womanhood is obsolete, demeaning, and unacceptable. And that the problem women are having in this new age is this inconsistent use of ancient knowledge to define a modern situation.

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie spells out what it entails to be a feminist writer when she writes that:

One of the commitments of the female writer should be to the correction of these false images of women in Africa. To do this, she herself must know the reality of the African woman, must know the truth about African women and womanhood…On the biological level, she must tell us about being a woman: what the facts of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause contribute to the woman’s personality and the way she feels and knows her world. (8)

To be a feminist writer, therefore, one has feminism as one’s main ideological base. This means that women issues and problems are the writer’s central theme and his/her form and technique may not adopt the popular conventions and as a matter of principle, should not. For the obvious fact that he does not write about being a woman, Femi Osofisan is not a feminist writer. He presents positive images of women. But we have seen that one does not become a feminist writer just by writing about exceptionally strong female characters. The collective condition of women is the concern of a feminist writer. The gender specific issues in women’s writing as well as subversion of literary conventions has led to the concept of feminist aesthetic, which asserts that women have a different culture that affects their writing in a way that may never be found in men’s writing.

**THE FEMINIST AESTHETIC**

In full recognition of the marked difference in the art of women from that of men, and the natural tendency to judge women’s arts in relation to that of men,
which usually results in labelling women’s arts as inferior, feminist thinkers have evolved a different theory for the appreciation of women’s creativity based on its own merits. If adopted, the male critical criteria will stifle women’s literary growth. The feminist aesthetic, therefore, functions as an alternative critical standard for judging women’s creativity. It is based on the notion that women have a discernibly distinct culture from men. This women’s culture influences and affects their writing and should, of necessity, be taken into consideration when interpreting and appreciating women’s writing. The feminist aesthetic is based on the ideals and visions of feminism. It is hinged precisely on feminist beliefs and ideals. This theory takes into account why, what, and how women write. Carolyn Korsmeyer explains further on the subject that,

Like other Feminist philosophy, Feminist Aesthetic is founded upon the critique of fundamental assumptions that have traditionally governed this area of study. Such staple concepts as aesthetic value, disinterested attention, aesthetic conception and fine art have been analyzed for biased perspectives that explicitly or covertly favor masculine gender. (595)

The existing aesthetic theory, from the above explanation, does not take into cognizance the condition under which women write. The implication of this fact is that, if used to judge women’s writing, women writers will find it difficult to make it to the mainstream of the literary profession. To forestall women’s writing being swept under the carpet, feminist aesthetic theory, therefore, becomes imperative. According to Korsmeyer, the first feminist aesthetic theory was developed in the 1970s on the assumption that there is common theme and style in the works of women, because of their universal role as child bearers and domestic workers. The absence of rigid boundaries and divisions has been identified in women’s art; thus fluidity and softness are characteristic of their style.

Lizbeth Goodman, through a series of illustrations, demonstrates that there is “gender in the agenda” (viii) in the reading and writing of literature. This means that the gender of a writer as well as that of a reader affects creation and interpretation of texts. To illustrate this she directs us to read works whose covers have been removed together with the author’s name. She assures us that the gender of the writer will show in the images, symbols, language, and characterizations used in the book. Catherine Stimpson supports this claim of gender impact on the creation and interpretation of meaning when she states that the feminist literary criticism is based on the conviction that, “our production of culture and meaning, like our consumption of culture and meaning, influences our sex gender systems. In turn, our sex gender systems influence our production and consumption of culture and meaning” (quoted in Kramarae and Treichler, 1987).
This perceived gender bias in artistic conception and expression has been considered responsible for the rejection of women’s work by male critics. This unfavorable attitude towards women’s art has, in turn, led women into creating their own literary precedents. Women have been known to establish their own publishing companies in order to publish their works, which, under normal circumstances, would not be accepted for publication by male publishers. Flora Nwapa of Nigeria is an example of such women. Women are known also to have formed their own theater companies; for instance, Helen Chinoy informs us that having been banned from staging their plays in the mainstream theaters, women in America decided to form their own Women’s National Theatre where they perform their own plays for women audiences. Today many women theater companies exist in the United States of America, and, according to the list produced by Susan Croft and April de Angelis, there are seventy-six feminist theater companies in Britain alone. Marsha Norman expresses her conviction about feminist aesthetics when she declares,

It is time to stop asking if there is a feminist aesthetic. There are all kinds of aesthetic, and there always have been. Why shouldn’t there be a feminist aesthetic? The question to ask is, will the feminine dramatic aesthetic survive? (vi)

She states that a feminist aesthetic will cease to be relevant when gender and other forms of cultural differences disappear, when the voice of one writer will ring as true as that of the other irrespective of sex and race, a situation which she doubts will ever materialize. Her conviction about feminine aesthetics came after she has read many plays written by women.

The different roles that women play in society, invariably forms the source of their creative principles, which, though different from that of men, are not necessarily inferior. For men, whose traditional place is in the public sphere, to engage in the critique of women’s creativity may be a mission in futility. Perhaps this is part of the reason why some men think that female writing will best be left to women (178).

The conditions under which one person writes, one’s life experiences and affiliations including sex, occupation, ideology, sense of judgment, and so on, affects one’s creation and interpretation of meaning. It does not make one’s writing inferior, but different. Feminist aesthetic can be said to represent the female perspective. Feminist plays, in which conventional standards of writing are subverted, are sites where this aesthetic concept is exemplified. To further illustrate what feminist writing means, therefore, let us look at some typical feminist plays and the concept of feminist theater.
To further understand the tone of a feminist writer’s commitment, one should read some typical feminist plays such as Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*, comprising two hundred monologues by different women from different parts of the world, celebrating female sexuality. Since its publication, the Obie Award-winning play has been performed in so many cities in America and elsewhere in the world that it has inspired a global grassroots movement called V-Day — a campaign to stop violence against women of which Ensler is the founder and artistic director. The monologues in the play are drawn from the personal experiences of two hundred women. Its iconoclastic representation of the female body as an object of male desire and control is at once delightfully refreshing to some critics and scandalously vulgar to others. Ensler has written many plays that probe the condition of being a woman in society.

Another typical feminist play is “Details Cannot Body Want” by Chin Woon Ping in which a female character, in an effort to resist idolization of her body as a social construct, in order to call attention to the basic human essence of her being, strips herself virtually naked. By stripping herself on stage and fixing her gaze on the audience, the performer hopes to disrupt and dismantle male gaze. K.K. Seet reports that this play was the first play in Singapore to receive a “Restricted” rating, probably because of its graphic content. Only adults over the age of 18 were allowed to watch it. The play seemed to be concerned about the definition of woman based on sex and the tendency to accept her as an object of desire and control to be used and abused, as if all other attributes which she is endowed with do not matter to society. The account of this play is contained in Seet’s “Playful Phoenix: Feminist Manipulations of the Gaze in Contemporary Singapore Plays.” (See *Performance Art International*, Winter (1), http://www.performanceartinternational.net/html/KKSpaper.html).

There was a time when female critics were focused on the inclusion of women in all life’s endeavors. But that was when feminism was at its infancy, the first wave. At that time the glaring absence of female perspectives and approaches was the focus of the suffragists, and their task was to fight for the rights of women to vote and be voted for, a right to earn a living, a right to equal treatment at workplaces and elsewhere. It has since been discovered that it is futile to expect acceptance in a patriarchal society that has grown quite fond of the socially-constructed woman. Thus, no matter how much education a woman has and no matter how successful she is in her profession, her traditional role as a woman defines her success and failure. She must be married, must have a child, and she must be submissive to her husband or else her life will be made into a hell. How much one can achieve under bondage is a question that begs for an answer? In this situation then, even when women are granted all those rights, they still have to fill the traditional place of women and in so doing remain marginalized.
This is why the focus of feminist writing at this time is in negotiating the barriers and boundaries inhibiting women. This then explains why feminist plays are centered on specific women issues instead of issues of general concern. Such concerns cannot be the place of a male writer to handle, at least not for now. This also explains why feminist theater, to which these feminist plays act as blueprints, is a fringe theater created by women for women audiences in order to create a forum where women will be free to discuss how it feels to be a woman. Men don’t write for feminist theater but the mainstream theater.

A careful look at the meaning of feminist theater will help us understand further the implications of feminist writers, and in this case a feminist playwright. Lizbeth Goodman, in her entry in the online Microsoft Encarta Premium Suite 2004, defines feminist theater as,

theatre written by women, about women and also primarily for women, which is politically aligned to the ideas of the post-1968 women’s movement.

While discussing “early Feminist Theatres” in the same work, Goodman further clarifies that the term

usually refers to theatre written, directed and performed by women in the theatre since 1968. The term tends also to be restricted to use in discussion of English language theatres...the word and its range of meanings are Western in origin and primary association.

The aim of feminist theater is to address problems which are peculiar to women and which may not, for some reasons, be discussed before men. They are theater projects aimed at aiding women to understand themselves, have correct notions of womanhood, and accept themselves for what they really are and what their chances in society are. They are exclusively women’s affairs because this type of theater is not only written and directed by women, it is performed by women. Even when male roles are created, they are performed by women made-up to look like men. Roberta Sklar, in an interview with Cornellia Brunner, explains that the reason why feminist theaters do not represent men in their productions is because they do not understand men’s feelings. Echoing Sklar’s statement, Perlcut, the leader of the “It’s Alright To Be a Woman Theatre Group,” is quoted as saying that the reason why they represent only women’s dreams in her theater is “because we are women; we do not understand men’s dreams” (see Charlotte Rea, 79).

Another area of emphasis in feminist theater is language. Here, there is a conscious effort to employ words, symbols, and images that mean something to women alone, but which are sometimes forbidden by society. Thus they discuss
such issues as childbirth and reproductive rights, birth control, motherhood, sisterhood, female friendship, lesbian sexuality, the concept of “woman’s language,” family relationships, menstruation and the female body, women’s rights, and women’s health.

The concepts of feminism, women’s culture, women’s language, feminist aesthetics, feminist plays, and feminist theater are all implicated if a work is to appropriately answer feminist writing. From the foregoing it will not be appropriate to associate Femi Osofisan with feminist writing. Few African playwrights, including women, can be said to be feminist writers. If African female playwrights shy away from the term, feminist, it is probably because they are not really feminists.

WOMEN IN FEMI OSOFISAN’S PLAYS

A look at a few of Osofisan’s works will reveal the point that has been made, that he is not a feminist writer but a gender-sensitive writer. We understand the mandate of a feminist writer by reading critical works of women that center on the image of women in works of literature. Osofisan, no doubt, creates strong female characters who are rebellious and defiant against suppression and injustice. These women are selected to pose as models for women who are by this means being told that they too can be heroes.

Tegonni, for instance, is an exceptionally strong-willed maiden who obviously takes delight in antagonizing the status quo. First she chooses a trade reserved for men only: She becomes a bronze carver and a sculptor and joins the guild of carvers, an action which would normally have earned her death but for the intervention of the District Officer. As every woman knows, Tegonni must lose something for her impudence, and certainly, she loses her fiancé, Asipa, who cannot stand the scandal. Then she decides to marry the white colonial District Officer, Captain Allan Jones, a marriage which even the progressive-minded Isokun sees as “a tragic error” (Osofisan, Tegonni 22). In defiance of the imperial order, Tegonni, on her wedding day, decides to bury her brother, Prince Oyekunle. She is condemned to death. She even puts on the great egúngún (masquerader) costume, an abominable action. But we are made to believe that what saves her in that act is the fake bronze mask. How can a woman do this and go scot-free? Tegonni is able to do all this because of who she really is. As Isokun explains to the Colonial Governor:

That is because you do not know her. Right from childhood, she has always been like that, a problem child. She is a gift from our mother, Yemoja, and such children are never bound by the normal rules the rest of us live by. It’s the goddess inside them, they cannot be controlled. It’s what drove her, for instance to choose a white man,
of all available suitors, for husband — your son, Gomina! (Osofisan, *Tegonni* 85)

Her strength of character not withstanding, Tegonni is hardly a feminist character. For one thing, she is fighting a racial war and not one of gender. She is defending her people against the colonial usurpers. She states her mission when she declares to Isokun, “I want to live. I want to go on living! But if the cost of that will mean the death of our people, then I am willing to die” (Osofisan, *Tegonni* 106). She queries the Governor, “what you’ve done already to our men, is that not sufficient damage? When our souls are in bondage, what does it matter again what happens to our carcass?” (Osofisan, *Tegonni* 116). A feminist play centers around women issues. Osita Ezenwanebe confirms that characters such as Tegonni are not feminist characters when, examining women in *Morountodun*, she clarifies:

Though Osofisan represents women in *Morountodun* as active and independent, their activism is in the service of the masses, and not for the betterment of themselves as women. The socialist perspective of Osofisan dissolves the boundary between feminism and socialism. Though the two ideals are in support of emancipation from oppression, feminism emphasizes women fighting the special course of women. Though women are among the masses, there are some socio-cultural issues that are gender specific. (72)

These gender specific problems rarely form the focus of mainstream theater but they are the bases for feminist theater.

In *Altine’s Wrath*, the heroine Altine is sold to the highest bidder by her father. The marriage to Lawal turns out to be a very toxic one in which she is constantly abused physically, verbally, and psychologically. She fools her husband by pretending to be dumb for three years. She secretly enrolls in and acquires adult education, and when she is ready to quit her abusive marriage she opens up and speaks her mind to her husband and mistress for the first time. While one commends Altine’s courage to confront her husband, feminist critics will frown on the fact that she has to die a couple of hours after reclaiming her voice and gaining her freedom. After nine years of living in hell, she has to die just at the moment she is about to step out of her torture chamber. A feminist writer will not allow a woman who has suffered so much injustice to die at the moment of her freedom due to no fault of her own.

The folk tale which Osofisan used to illustrate the right kind of women writers, if subjected to feminist scrutiny, will be seen to be in dire need of deconstruction. The tale reiterates preference for the docile mother and wife who is also fertile, the doomed independent woman who is also barren, the witch who eats
up her own children, and the male who is the conqueror and ultimate protector. These few examples show that, though Osofisan is ahead of his contemporaries in the treatment of female characters, his heroines are not really feminist characters. Consequently, though a gender sensitive writer, Osofisan cannot be said to be a feminist writer.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages we examined some critical responses to Osofisan’s plays and discovered two critical approaches that define the kind of writer Osofisan is. While one sees him as a social critic and an advocate of social justice, the other sees him as a feminist writer. We also find that, though he creates strong and emancipated female characters, his writing does not fit into the definition of feminist writer. This is because an examination of some of his writings shows that women’s issues are not the focus of his plays and, being a man, he is not grounded in women’s culture and feminist aesthetics which are seen as responsible for the different way women write. Again, his plays, compared to the typical feminist plays examined in this writing, are not blue prints for feminist theater, which does not only focus on female gender specific themes, but is also created, primarily, for female audiences. Osofisan is more appropriately a humanist writer, not a feminist writer.

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THE FEMINISM OF FEMI OSOFISAN


The fact that man has the innate capability to experience and express sexual emotions is incontrovertible. Sexual relationships or copulation is fundamental to procreation and, by extension, to the continuation of the human race. God charges man in Genesis 1: 28 to “... Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth...” This injunction to “replenish the earth” can, naturally, be fulfilled only through the sexual union of man and woman. Apart from the Christian religion, other religions have similar injunctions given to their adherents as recorded in their holy books. According to John Adebayo Afolabi (Bode Omojola [ed.], 1999), sociologists in talking about man’s basic needs have placed sexual fulfillment on the same pedestal as “food, sleep and shelter” (8).

Different religions and races hold different opinions on sex. Consequently several myths, ideas, and concepts have been developed around it. Afolabi explains that while some schools of thought esteem it as “nature’s highest source of physical and psychological gratification” other schools of thought argue that “sex is the original crime committed by man, the forbidden fruit that warranted the exile of Adam and Eve from the euphoric garden of Eden, and so engendered all the problems of humanity today” (8). Scholars have written variously on the subject of sexuality. The various shades of opinion, however, agree that there seems to be something “mythical” about sexuality and each sex serving to complement and satisfy the other. One of the preponderant societal ills dramatized in Femi Osofisan’s Midnight Series is the aberrant expression of sexuality in society.
ABERRANT EXPRESSIONS OF SEXUALITY IN THE MIDNIGHT SERIES

Osofisan’s Midnight Series reveal a flagrant abuse of the code of moral behavior which requires symmetrical fidelity between sexual partners. Starting from Awero and Pastor Suuru in *Midnight Hotel*, through Prof. Juokwu, his wife Obioma, Iberibe, and Akubundu in *The Album of the Midnight Blackout* to Laoye, Tinuke, Bimbo, Sina, and Iyabo in *Fiddlers on a Midnight Lark*, there seems to be an orchestrated attempt by the characters to out-shine each other in the game of infidelity. For instance, in *Midnight Hotel*, Mrs. Awero Asibong, an honorable Member of Parliament takes Pastor Suuru to a hotel for what is called “sampling the goods” (21). Awero is the only female member of the Capital Projects Committee in the House of Assembly. She claims that everyone in the Contracts and Awards Committee is involved in this despicable act of “sampling”. She says,

_Awero: For Christ’s sake, what’s wrong with you? I’m telling you it’s a regular practice in parliament. All the male MPs are doing it even to their own nieces and cousins! Everyone in our Contracts and Awards Committee is taking some member of the opposite sex somewhere or the other before jobs are given out. (21)_

She has seen what Fabarebo describes as “the abuse of political and military powers, and arrant display of insensitivity to human feelings when these ‘mighty people’ engaged in sexual pilfering and pillage of other people’s wives openly without remorse …” (cited in Afolabi, 235). Awero, therefore, decides not to be different. Kolawole avers that, “power has various ramifications and involves among other things, control, authority … and directing the socio-political chart of a society” (3). The ramification of power which Awero demonstrates here brings about “role reversal.” Awero has no qualms “sampling” the contract-seeking Pastor Suuru. Her only worry is that Pastor Suuru has abandoned the job of wooing to her, thereby bringing about role reversal. To Awero, this is quite unacceptable because, according to her, Pastor Suuru is just another “political prostitute” like the rest of them. She therefore fails to see the logic behind the pastor’s seeming passivity. Awero tells Pastor Suuru to put out his cigar “for God’s sake” (32). Pastor Suuru reluctantly does so because “in business—I mean, in love…no sacrifice is too much.” No wonder he sacrificed moral rectitude, his friendship with Mr. Asibong, and his position as pastor in his bid to secure a contract. Ironically, he, as a pastor, could not “for God’s sake” keep away from moral depravity. Suuru informs us that it has been a long period of waiting for him in order to have Awero. He moans, “Awero, Awero! If only you know
how long I’ve waited for this moment! You’re so pretty…so delicious… I want you…” (33). Indeed, he is patience “sùùrù” personified.

Another glaring aberrant expression of sexuality in *Midnight Hotel* is seen in the provocative mode of dressing or “undressing” of women. Bicycle is shocked to find a female client who is “as naked as kere fish.” Bicycle’s consternation is aggravated by the fact that in her state of being “nakedly naked,” the woman “no care one t’ing at all—at all” (9). Also in *Fiddlers on a Midnight Lark*, instances of aberrant expressions of sexuality abound. Sina Durojaiye, a married man, lays siege for two weeks on Tinuke, a married woman who, unknown to him, is the wife of his friend. Sina claims to be “mad” about Tinuke. He says, “I know my style is unusual, but so what?... All that matters is that I love you, and I’ll try anything, so long as it brings me closer to you!” (12). For such amorous words to come from a married man to an equally married woman is, to say the least, unacceptable. Tinuke on her part initially puts up a veneer of moral uprightness. Her manner of bringing Sina into her matrimonial home is, however, questionable. She beckons him to “come in, come in, sir. This is where I live” (12). One wonders why Tinuke, who claims to be a “respectable woman,” would in one breathe gaily welcome a philanderer into her home and in another breathe ask him to leave or “I’ll call my husband” (13).

On Sina’s prompting, Tinuke not only introduces herself to him but also gets him to introduce himself to her. The manner in which this is achieved is both facile and artful:

*Sina:* Listen Margaret…
*Tinuke:* Who is Margaret? Sir, my name is Tinuke!
*Sina:* Thank you. Ah Tinuke—
*Tinuke:* What! How dare you! I absolutely forbid you to…Look, mister, whoever you are.
*Sina:* Sina, madam! My name’s Sina Durojaiye, at your service! (13).

By this introduction, a platform has been established on which further acquaintanceship between Sina and Tinuke can be built. When Tinuke rebuffs Sina’s amorous overtures, he (Sina) believes that the only explanation for it is that Tinuke is having extra-marital affair with someone else. “Be frank with me, madam! It’s because you’re in love with someone else” (26). Tinuke, no doubt, enjoys the attention she receives from both Sunny and Sina. When Sunny questions her on why she should allow Sina to be “chasing” her, she simply answers, “Aren’t you doing the same thing? And do I stop you?” (31). All these take place in Tinuke’s matrimonial home with her husband Laoye at home. Tinuke at one point sends Sina to meet her husband Laoye so as to have time to be alone with Sunny.
Iyabo, Laoye’s mistress, indicates interest in Bicycle. This is a precautionary measure taken to avoid being alone in the event that Laoye fails to keep his appointment with her. Iyabo takes the lead in establishing the relationship; a situation akin to the role reversal between Awero and Pastor Suuru in *Midnight Hotel*. When Iyabo runs into Sina, she wastes no time in re-establishing the cordiality and conviviality between them. She is determined not to have a lonely night and for that reason she will spare no effort at ensuring that she has company. Iyabo is a typical fiddler. Unable to remember Sina’s name, a man whose bed she has not only warmed before but anxious to do so again, she says:

\[\text{Iyabo:} \quad \text{Ah, my lovely…what’s your name again?}\]
\[\text{Sina:} \quad \text{Sina.}\]
\[\text{Iyabo:} \quad \text{Sina! What a stupid name! Well, it’s not your fault. And it’s not the name that makes the man after all (55).}\]

Mr. Durojaiye’s relationship with his wife Bimbo is, to say the least, laughable and aptly portrays the general attitude of fiddlers who have no scruples whatsoever in breaking marital vows and thereby making a mockery of the marriage institution.

*The Album of the Midnight Blackout* presents a new and dubiously innovative dimension to the aberrant expression of sexuality. Juokwu, a professor of medicine, is married to Obioma who was the wife of Juokwu’s late friend, Johnson. While in her first marriage, Obioma had completely trusted in the fidelity of her husband. She was therefore devastated to find out, at Johnson’s death, that he had not only been unfaithful to her but had also documented all the excuses he gave her on each occasion. Armed with this information, Obioma is resolved not to be fooled anymore. Professor Juokwu, on his part, is more determined not only to be unfaithful to his once docile wife, Obioma, but to ensure by every means, both orthodox and otherwise, that she never finds out. Juokwu therefore decides to turn science upside down so as to achieve his aim. Juokwu has this to say about his method:

\[\text{Juokwu:} \quad \text{(Tapping his head). Brains, my friend! Techniques! Or you forget I am a professor of medicine! I have my own technique, so many years in advance of Johnson’s crude methods! He was a mere amateur, with all his ego!... you see, I don’t need to worry about my wife’s vigilance, I put it to sleep! By the wonderful techniques of science!! (38).}\]

Professor Juokwu relies on his seemingly foolproof scientific method to send his wife into a “blackout” at will. Incidentally, he unwittingly reveals his secret to Iberibe, their family friend, who in turn uses the same method on Obioma.
whom he has been in love (or lust) with. Juokwu’s mistress is the contract-seeking Chinyere Akubundu. Obioma who often barges into board meetings in an attempt to find out any infidelity in her husband, certainly enjoys the attention she receives from Iberibe.

The Midnight Series thus dramatizes a wanton and outrageous abuse of the code of sexual prescriptions which requires fidelity on the part of sexual partners. This perhaps lends credence to Sigmund Freud’s submission, as quoted by Jacqueline Rose in du Gay et al, that, “something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavorable to the realization of complete satisfaction” (53).

SEXUALITY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF REVENGE

“Sexual pleasure,” according to Havelock Ellis, when “wisely used and not abused, may prove the stimulus and liberator of man’s finest and most exalted activities” (quoted in Afolabi, 7). In referring to Aristophanes’ Lysistrata, Afolabi stresses the “importance of sex in the life of men” (9). In this play, when all else had failed, women resorted to the denial of sexual intercourse as a means of stopping a war. While this denial may not have been a virtuous act, the purpose and result was no doubt most desirable. Thus the women in Lysistrata demonstrate that sexuality can be employed to the overall benefit of society.

One of the manifestations of the abuse of sexuality in the Midnight Series is its deployment as an instrument of revenge by the characters. Whereas the women in Aristophanes’ Lysistrata denied their husbands access to their beds to end a war, the women in Osofisan’s Midnight Series see their sexuality as a weapon for getting even with promiscuous husbands. In The Album of the Midnight Blackout, Professor Juokwu reveals that his wife, Obioma, is “even capable of taking a lover, just to punish me!” (37). In Midnight Hotel, when Awero accuses Pastor Suuru of luring her to a hotel, Suuru exclaims:

Suuru: What! Were you not the one always complaining of being left alone…while your husband goes away every night on “business”?...All you wanted was to use me to revenge yourself on him! Confess! The contract was just an excuse, that’s all! (66)

In Fiddlers on a Midnight Lark, Bimbo and Tinuke who are more or less strangers to each other are, however, able to form an alliance of revenge-seeking wives. They reach an accord to work in concert with one another in order to authenticate their husbands’ extramarital affairs.

Bimbo: I’ll take up his challenge! Yes! Provided you will help me Tinuke.
GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Tinuke: How?
Bimbo: My husband wants a date with you, doesn’t he?
Tinuke: Oh yes, I get the point!
Bimbo: That’s it! Let’s set a trap for him!
Tinuke: Why not? (43-4)

The fact that these women are unpretentiously avid in their revenge-seeking mission makes their motive suspect. Tinuke not only encourages Sunny in his flirtatious attitude toward her but equally lures Sina into her home. This is perhaps her way of making sure she will have a choice between both men at the appropriate time. Bimbo on her part decides not to be “choosy.” She will rather welcome “the first imbecile to come along” (43). In Midnight Hotel, Awero takes Suuru to the hotel in order to revenge herself on her husband. Obioma in The Album of the Midnight Blackout goes a step further than the other women by submitting to the illicit advances of Iberibe even before establishing a case of infidelity against her husband, Juokwu. Thus, we see a debasement of the essence of African femininity. No wonder Professor Juokwu in The Album of the Midnight Blackout concludes that, “SAP has loosened the morals of our women” (35). Juokwu, however, fails to provide inkling into what has shattered the virtue of men.

SEXPROLITATION IN THE MIDNIGHT SERIES

In discussing the evil effects of bad leadership which have led to a serious level of poverty for the majority of Nigerians while a tiny minority live in hedonistic affluence, Afolabi observes that the “results of such an imbalance are obvious disenchantment, corruption, moral bankruptcy and other attendant evils like the trade in sex” (11). The moral fabric of the Nigerian society has undoubtedly been shaken by a seemingly intractable leadership crisis. One of the manifestations of such moral turpitude, i.e., trade in sex, is largely what Osofisan’s dramatizes in the Midnight Series.

In Midnight Hotel, Jimoh, the receptionist, informs Bicycle that, “This is Lagos, man, and in Lagos, sex is business” (10) where women parade themselves in different degrees of nakedness all for the sake of money. The song master tells us in the “Song of the Lagos Woman” that the price the Lagos woman paid for “her thriving trade was a little escapade at the Midnight Hotel” (12). Lagos is used here as a microcosm of the larger Nigerian society. Osofisan thus avers that women rely on their sexuality to fund their booming businesses and to drape their feet and arms in gold. In Fiddlers on a Midnight Lark, Jimoh likens the trade in sex to an “oil-field” (51).

The Midnight Hotel itself is a business that thrives on society’s interest in sex. Jimoh, in a consolatory tone tells Bicycle that they “were born male, and poor,
and our part is to wash the sheets and clean the rooms afterwards” (12). The profit of this lucrative trade in sex goes to no other than the hotel proprietor himself who “will collect the cash and ride his Mercedes” (12). The continued prosperity of the hotel proprietor is guaranteed because the trade in sex is neither lacking in demand nor in supply. This is attested to by the fact that the rooms in the hotel are often fully booked. But for an error on the part of Bicycle, Major Alatise and his daughters would not have been able to secure accommodation in the hotel. The hotel proprietor is not the sole beneficiary in this trade. Jimoh may not drive a Mercedes like the proprietor, however, what he loses in monetary compensation, he gains in fame and recognition. Jimoh is honored with a chieftaincy title in recognition of his “contribution to the spread of African hospitality… in the world, through his long service as a well known …receptionist at a famous hotel” (14). In fact, Awero promises him another chieftaincy title from the northern part of the country. The type of African hospitality which Jimoh helps to spread is a worrisome one. Osofisan takes a swipe at the debasement of the age long ideals of the African people which uphold the sanctity of sexuality.

The Alatise daughters soon discover that there is something they possess which they can employ to make quick money. It takes them only a night at the Midnight Hotel to realize that men’s interest in sex is something which they can commercialize for their financial gain. Pastor Suuru is not left out. The reason he lusts after Awero is clear: it is his way of securing juicy contracts which will translate to fat accounts in Swiss banks. Iyabo in Fiddlers on a Midnight Lark seems to be available to the highest bidder. She confesses the purpose of being at the Midnight Hotel to Sina. She says “It’s a bet I was paid by one of his friends to try on him” (54). Despite being paid for the job, Iyabo has no scruples fiddling with whoever comes around.

Perhaps the most laughable case of sexploitation in the Midnight Series is that of Akubundu in The Album of a Midnight Blackout. Akubundu, the cuckolded husband of Chinyere, admits that he has been ridiculed: “A man whose wife sleeps with another man is always in a position of ridicule” (56). But instead of seeking to regain whatever is left of his honor, he cowers and claims not to be a “fighting man” but an importer and exporter who for the sake of his political ambitions “can’t afford to be caught fighting with anybody at this moment, with elections just around the corner!” (56). He, therefore, seeks to win Juokwu to his side politically and to strike a juicy business contract with him. Thus, Akubundu, who laments being ridiculed by his wife, inadvertently subjects himself to even greater ridicule.

CONCLUSION

Judging from the preponderance of sexually-related issues in the Midnight Series, one may be tempted to accuse Osofisan of gratuitous use of sexuality and
of seeking to gratify the amorous desires of the audience which is tantamount to sexploitation. According to Denis Aiyejina’s submission,

> Depending upon the intensity and the persistence with which an image is held in mind, the holder of the image became possessed by it and thereafter his behavior becomes the outward expression of that image...This in essence is what happens in the theater when the actor truly lives his role. (249)

One may equally be moved to say that the image of sexuality which Osofisan holds before his audience will negatively affect the behavior of the society. These positions, however, can be viewed from other perspectives. According to Garuba as cited by Bamidele, “the surest and most creative route to the discussion of serious socio-political problems is by way of laughter” (136). Bamidele also avers that “tragedy affects the purgation of mind through pity and fear and comedy through pleasure from the ridiculous,” and “comedy is for social commentary and not just to titillate our laughing system” (2-3). Thus, Osofisan’s farcical comedies are strong social commentaries intended for decisive societal transformation.

Osofisan is irked by the way those in leadership positions have put the nation in a “blackout” and have gone on “fiddling while Rome (Nigeria) burns.” Leadership is not a frivolous vocation for frivolous characters. As argued by Igili in Onimhawo, “the leader must be able to ensure discipline within the rank and file of the led. This invariably means that the leader himself must be disciplined” (124). By dramatizing the follies of the leaders and indeed of society generally, Osofisan seeks to provoke his audience to thoughtful laughter which will engender the needed change in society.

**REFERENCES**


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INTRODUCTION

The concept of feminity varies from one continent to another. In Africa, a woman has to struggle with the man who arrogates all political and social rights to himself, and relentlessly refuses the woman a place. If we are to go by the popular belief that the totality of a people’s outlook is harmoniously encapsulated in its body of literature, then it may not be out of place to turn to African literature in questing for the woman’s place in Africa and more importantly the re-construction of the woman’s position in the continent. Against this background, this chapter discusses the re-construction of womanhood as independent rather than emotional, and as one that can attain recognition based on her innate prowess and energy potentials rather than clamoring for recognition based on gender sentiments. We will draw specific illustrations from three of Femi Osofisan’s dramaturgy - Mororuntodun, Tegonni, and Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest as we progress.

Since the parameter to measure the African-ness of the African literature is its expression of African viewpoints and consciousness, African literature, therefore, is the expression of African people’s consciousness in their specific and dynamic situation. Therefore, African feminist scholars are teaming up and working through both governmental and non-governmental bodies to increase the participation of woman in politics. However, the effect of patriarchy still pervades all facts of African experience. These African women are clamoring for empowerment in all facets of life to be able to effect changes in the course
of history. Their move is no doubt widening the scope of the struggle for gender equity. However, a reality we have to contend with is that there is not just a recognition of gender differences but also the recognition of the inevitability of the major differences in their preoccupations as a result of these major differences as well as a case of assigning less importance to women and their female roles in the social process of the human world thereby effectively denying them any important standing within the social structure. (Aidoo, 17)

The outcome of the manipulation of the society by the masculine gender is the construction of a patriarchal order that places the masculine gender higher than the feminine in the society. According to Jane Bryce,

Woman then is produced by patriarchy systems as ‘other’ and unto her is projected everything that man is not. She is the negative to his positive, emotional to his rational, weak to his spiritual, absent to his present, orient to his occident, dark to his light, object to his subject (3)

This is in line with the argument that we advanced in another work that, Since man has occupied the positive and neutral poles in the linguistic framework, women are left with only the negative. It then follows that if man is strong woman must be weak (Owonibi, 92).

As such, the society within the context of this type of social order cannot do otherwise but to see the female as abnormal to the male’s normality, thereby categorizing her as ‘sub-human,’ an epiphenomenon and a product of after-thought. After all, the Holy Bible records that God created man in His own image and created woman from man to fill a vacuum of loneliness in man’s live. (Genesis 2: 7-20). This line of thought has done a lot of destruction to gender relations. This worldview needs to be consciously and carefully re-constructed if the battle of gender-equity is to stand the test of time.

The foregoing is the representation of the woman in extant literature of African history which has indeed generated lots of controversies. The largest bulk of post-colonial African literature presents the African woman as a thoroughly oppressed and victimized lot that has been totally conquered physically and psychologically. Hence she must remain entirely submissive. As a defeated and dominated gender, her voice must never be heard nor her actions in public. However, there are empirical proofs with respect to the romantic representation of the African woman in pre-colonial years, the oral historical-past when women were catalysts in historical process. Not only was the images and contributions
of these women of valor pushed to the abyss of insignificance in the post-colonial African literature, the heroic deeds of the post-colonial African woman as a progressive agent in the historical process and political evolution of her society is scarcely represented in modern African literature. According to a renowned scholar, Awe,

Most African oral traditions, surviving religions, cults and extant political institutions still attest to the significant position which women occupied in the social, economic, and political evolution of different African communities. Such evidence also shows conclusively that theirs was not merely a passive and supportive role, but was also dynamic and constructive. Indeed, it has been suggested that an analysis of the leading figures of pre-twentieth century African will show that there were more women than men in the forefront of social, political and economic life, than in contemporary Africa... (10)

In the same vein, Emeagwali argues that:

The specific roles, contributions and general activities of women, in the past, were neglected themes, relatively speaking. We are in fact dealing with gross sins of omission in historical reconstruction (12).

Research findings show that the experience of slavery and colonialism has in no small measure ‘refashioned’ the areas of life of the African woman. In line with this, Kolawole (1997) posits that colonialism:

Brought different kinds of affiliation to different parts of the continent. National, ethnic, and regional idiosyncrasy predominant religious influence, tradition, modernisms and post-colonial conditions (13).

She argues further that all these factors have condensed to de-emphasize the heroic contribution of the African woman in the world of reality. Arising from this is the fact, and pathetically so, that when orature transformed to literature, women’s roles were already subverted and their images pushed to a dark corner of civilization. The construction of this type of absurd and negative representation of African woman in literature has led to a development where some scholars, both female and male, have risen to re-construct the perverted social order. Prominent among these scholars is Femi Osofisan. This school of thought is concerned with righting the wrongs and putting the records straight for posterity sake. It is in the light of this that this chapter carries out an expository analysis of the role of Osofisan in reconstructing the image and re-positioning the African woman to her pristine leadership roles.
Tegonni is an adaptation of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, one of the trilogies in *Oedipus: The King of Thebes*. In domesticating the structure and content of this play, Osofisan has made Tegonni fulfill the same role performed by Antigone in the original script and has made the Yoruba tribe of Western Nigeria the setting, as he does in almost all his plays. Tegonni, a princess, proposes to marry a white man, Captain Allan Jones, the District Officer. She decides to marry Allan Jones because Ashipa breaks up his relationship with her “when she insisted in joining the guild of sculptors and no man since then would proposed to marry her” (12) thereafter because the effrontery to “encroach” into a male dominated profession is considered as an aberration, abomination, and a taboo. According to Isokun, a chief and a relative of Tegonni,

> It’s never been heard that a woman of our land and a princess at that will go and marry one of these ghosts from cross the seas. (13)

Although Chief Isokun is the only chief and male who supports Tegonni that she should be left to follow her wishes, he is nevertheless against her choice of an alien for husband. He defends his opposition to the marriage thus:

> It will be a tragic error, I tell you, this marriage with the D.O. No one here accepts it, except you her friends, of course. Even her father’s spirit in heaven will not approve it. Why are you trying to pitch me so recklessly against the dead? (13)

After a lot of pressure however, he gives his nod and blessings to the marriage. Nevertheless, the marriage turns out to be a disaster and a calamity. Tegonni and her bridal train, while dancing to the palace to pay homage to the royal tomb of her father and receive the fatherly blessings from the deceased; the happy train ran, into a tragic roadblock. Armed soldiers are seeing guiding a corpse of Prince Oyekunle, condemned to rot on the surface of the earth. The Governor, General Carter Ross, has ordered that the common rite of passage should not be accorded Prince Oyekunle, condemned to rot on the surface of the earth.

> The elder one however, Oyekunle, who caused all the trouble and dared to invite foreign troupes here to Yorubaland, will be made an example. I have therefore directed that his body be returned immediately to Oke-Osun, but to be left unburied in Public Square, abandoned to the claws of vulture. (*Tegonni*, 2).
Tegonni and her radiant train discover that the humiliated corpse is that of the elder brother Princess Tegonni who had engaged in an endless brawl with his younger brother over who ascends the throne. The shock can be best described in the words of Kunbi, one of Tegonni’s friends:

We were dancing round the town. Flinging our happiness in the air, like frolicking birds. And then, at the square, it was death we saw, waiting for us. (42).

Tegonni has decided to forget about her wedding plans and avert abomination by burying her brother. Not even the consequences of that action will deter her. The Governor has vowed that Oyekunle’s corpse shall be fed to the vultures to serve as a punishment for the dead and a lesson for the living, but Tegonni feels different about it; she believes her brother deserves the last respect of burial. Carter Ross’ order that, “anybody who attempts to bury him shall be summarily executed. Repeated executed without trial” (40), falls on Tegonni’s deaf ear. Osofisan has at this point crafted the point of conflict, this is made more complex by the orders of Carter Ross to Allan Jones, the bride-groom to be, that he (Allan) “must see to it that those orders are carried out” (40).

Tegonni, the lead character in the play has a unique trait that underlines all her actions: she does not believe in gender stratification or any social order that believes that womanhood is inferior, subservient, and submissive. She is propelled by an inner-will that will always make her assert herself, and makes her see herself as one that has the innate ability to reach her goals instead of pleading for a sentiment of the “weaker-vessel”. Isokun points this out when he says:

Right from childhood, she’s always been like that, a problem child. She’s a gift from our mother Yemoja, and such children are never bound by the normal rules the rest of us live by… (85)

Thus, living her true type, Tegonni tactically carries out the burial rites of her brother, beating the security network to it. This nonetheless leads to a great crisis. As a lady who is never bound by the normal rules the rest of us live by, Tegonni dares the gun of the Governor Carter Ross, buried her brother, and briskly faces death. She even refuses to renounce her marriage to Allan Jones or show any sign of remorse, even when she is face to face with death. These actions stand her out as having achieved greatness where perhaps even the masculine gender may feel jittery.

This same unusual personality is what underlines the personality trait of the lead character in Morountodun, a play that deals with the farmers’ revolt of 1969. The farmers from the Western part of Nigeria, under the leadership of Tafa Adeoye, revolted against exploitation and oppressive taxation by the government of the day. In the play, the sanitary inspector symbolizes the oppressing class. The
high level of oppression the masses pass through could be felt in the following dialogue between Mama Kayode and Molade while mimicking the excesses of the sanitary inspectors;

Mama Kayode: That day he stopped Titus in the rain! (she turns to Molade, and they begin to play-act). Come here.

Molade: Sha?

Mama Kayode: I say come here, and you are saying sha, Sha![ ...]what is that in your hand self?

Molade: You mean this umbrella sha?

Mama Kayode: Hen, hen that’s what you call t, this dirty smoky …! I bet it’s got lice in it too.

Molade: But it’s brand new! Alabi just sent it to me from the city last week.

Mama Kayode: Well, it’s under arrest.

Titubi: What! Because he wouldn’t give up his property? (Morountodun, 62-3)

The play is a fine blend of myth and reality. Osofisan uses the peasant revolt of 1969 to bring into light the Moremi of Ile-Ife. He draws a parallel in how Moremi safe her people from an external aggression of war and how Titubi, who initially appears as a socialite, anti-peasant, and a symbol of the oppressing class suddenly and dramatically turns a social radical that tilts the popular struggle in favor of the proletariats in what Marxism will term “social struggle”. At the beginning of the play, we see a revolt that has been in for quite a long time and which has made the police and the State to be fully spent. The uprising keeps raging as there seems to be no end to the war. A group of actress and actors is about to put up a stage to preach the need for peace in the land, and Titubi has come with her own team to disrupt the play, because according to her,

So in what are we responsible for the farmers’ uprising? Ehn? What does our ways rich have to do with it? Or is it only when we wear rags that we qualify to breathe the air? [...]You mount these stupid plays calling everybody a thief, simply because we work and sweat and use our brain. (Morountodun, 9)

Titubi, a symbol of the bourgeoisies feels challenged by the way the art is used to castigate the ruling class as she’s ready to challenge the masses and bring the raging war to a halt. The police under the leadership of Superintendent Salami, have come to the theater to quash the revolt but on finding out that Titubi, the
pampered daughter of Alhaja Kabirat the leader of the market women, is the real intruder, Salami challenged her that quenching the revolt would require bracer actions than disrupting a show put up by innocent citizens. Titubi, a character formed in the likeness of Moremi of Ile-Ife and Tegonni in Osofisan’s *Tegonni*, immediately takes up the challenge and surrenders herself to be captured by the farmers who are about to carry out a counter-attack to free their imprisoned colleagues. The main plot is for Titubi to be mistaken for a harmless, innocent sympathizer to the course of the peasants, under this guise, she is expected to use all power with her reach to bring Marshal, the commander of the farmers’ revolt, to the police station. There is doubt in the fact that this is not in any means a simple task. Without any iota of fear or disillusion, Titubi accepts the challenge. Alhaja Kabirat is shocked when she discovers this. She raises alarm at the condition of the prison:

> No bed. No window. No fan or air-conditioner the walls damp and clammy. A terrible stench which followed me all the way here from the gate. Ah Allah! What have I done to deserve this? (*Morountodun*, 18)

All Alhaja’s entreaties, threats, and cajoles to get Titubi out of the struggle falls in deaf ears as shown in the following conversation:

> Titubi: But, mama, it isn’t a punishment! I wasn’t arrested for anything. I came in my on free will.  
> Alhaja: I thank you. Let’s go now anyway. And the Policemen who brought you here, they will wish they’d never been born!  
> Titubi: Aren’t you listening to me? I—  
> Alhaja: Enough, I say! I’ve swallowed enough of this foul air into my lungs. Let’s go! (*Morountodun*, 20)

Titubi goes further to convince Alhaja Kabira, the only obstacle on her way, which her role is simple and straightforward, even when she knows that she is in for a big and dangerous task:

> …the only way left is to infiltrate their ranks quickly, discover their real leader and the source of their ammunition. I volunteered (*Moruntodun*, 20)

Volunteering to carry out this deadly task stands Titubi out as a woman of strong will and determination. This likens her to Tegonni. This is a role of spy which perhaps should be carried out by a masculine gender. But Titubi, a lady, volunteers because she knows she has the will power to achieve success within the intrigues of external aggressors. Her mandates are straightforward: she should arrest the
leader of the farmers’ revolt and bring him to the police station. This seems the only plausible end to the uprising. She’s equipped with the little knowledge she garners from Nursing School before she drop out., Impersonating as a nurse gives her easy acceptability in the camp of the enemies as her services are so much in need. With love and passion she attends to the injured warriors with the best of her ability,. This attribute as well as her kind disposition endeared her to Marshal, the warlord. Marshal has developed apathy, hatred, and suspicion in the person of Titubi. However, she braces up the challenges and became accepted by all. This marks a stage of exposition and great transformation in the peasant’s camp.

Titubi mixes freely with the peasants, does those things she never dreamt she could do in life. As a modern, fashion-conscious girl from a well-to-do family, she humbly and submissively go to the interiors, the farmland, the streamside, and all those places she has never visited because of her city life. She passes through pains and strains she never believes any human being could pass through. Nevertheless, she remains resolute and focused. In due course, she learns about truths she never come across before. Truth about human suffering, oppression, and resistance. Truth about the real cause of the revolt. She is empathic.

Titubi, at the opening of the play is a pompous, pampered anti-masses daughter of Alhaja Kabira, a wealthy business woman who believes that money is everything.;“Look at me. Go on feast your eyes. Am I not good to look at?” (Moruntodun, 7) She arrogantly lambasts the audience that gather at the theatre. She is full of herself and feels so great about her appearance, beauty and wealth that surround her person. She’s soon to learn that she is capable of another level of beauty and wealth. The situation in the prison and the peasants’ camp serves as a leveler and the needed initiation into her future leadership role. Her emergence from the camp introduces us to a completely different Titubi: a compassionate, mature, humble, and objective minded woman. She is convinced that the farmers she was pitted to work against are indeed just in their struggle. And here comes the Osofisan’s kind of woman. Not a woman that rises to stardom through the sentiment of “gender discrimination” or “gender inequality,” but a woman that passes through odds to assert herself and achieve greatness. A critical assessment of the personality of Titubi will stand her out as someone who has the innate ability to achieve success in the task given to her

Furthermore, her encounter with Superintendent Salami shows that she is a lady that will not always take the easy way out. The way she readily agrees to the plot of being captured shows that she is radical minded. Her seriousness becomes an issue when she hurries Salami up and says, “two weeks, I said. We’ve wasted five minutes of it” (19). The changing of her expensive dress for a prisoner’s wear is symbolic of the transition that is to take place in her life afterwards. This may be likened to the coming of Jesus Christ to this sinful world leaving His throne and the crown of grace in heaven and agrees to come to this sinful world to
die for the sinners. Titubi put off her expensive dress for the prisoner’s uniform, she never forget anyway to keep her “Moremi necklace” which she adores. She carries on as Moremi reincarnated until she divorces herself from her:

I knew I had to kill the ghost of Moremi in my belly, I am not Moremi!
Moremi served the state, was the spirit of the ruling class.

(Morontodun, 70).

She is no longer the Titubi who celebrates money and beauty and who feels it is a crime to be poor. Titubi is the spirit of Moremi up to the point when she changes her orientation as the symbol of the ruling class and empathizes with the oppressed. This is so because Moremi, a queen, was indeed a member of the ruling class, the oppressors. She serves the state, defends the state, and is never a defender of the less-privileged. Such a woman is not the type Osofisan will promote in his writings; little wonder then that he portrays her as the spirit of the bourgeoisie.

This transformation of Titubi from oppressor to human rights activist is indeed as a result of her experience on the peasant camps. She says:

That was when I began to ask questions. Questions. I saw myself growing up, knowing no such suffering as this…In our mama, house we wake up to the chorus of jingling coins. Have lived in the forest among simple folk, sharing their pains and anguish…and, I chose...

(Morontodun, 66)

It is indeed a situational irony when the ruling class sends her to the peasants’ camp as a spy, and instead of fighting for the ruling class she gets converted and supports the supposed enemies. Titubi finds a new alignment with her erstwhile enemies and gets her status changed. She gets elevated to the level of valiant woman like Tegonni. Her status did not only change, even her name change from Titubi to Morountodun. With this change of name there is no stopping this leader of peasants’ revolt as she exhibits all traits of a virtuous and courageous leader.

In line with this change of name, Gbilekaa is of the opinion that:

…Osofisan is making a case for socialism. Titubi comes from a wealthy background. She is not even of the race of which victims are made. Her concern for the peasants therefore springs from a deep sense of justice (104)

Titubi uses to advantage her innate prowess, actualizes her energy potentials, and embraces a qualitative decision that earn her a pride of place in the society instead of canvassing for recognition on the platform of being a woman. According to Ajayi:
undoubtedly, gender becomes a critical factor in revolutionary ethos; particularly in the way the playwright (Osofisan) uses the historical models to constructs his fictional heroine (97).

The crusade for gender (re)construction should go beyond mere sentiment and be taken on the path of a qualitative reconstruction that will bring into manifestation the energy potential of women. This energy potential needs to be harnessed for any society to experience any meaningful revolution.

The foregoing line of argument is what also marked out *Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest* out of all of Osofisan’s plays. A striking feature of this play is the fact that it is an all-female cast. Having a play made up entirely by women is no doubt an innovation by Osofisan. The play on the surface is all about an annual event in a particular society; the yearly dance contest of marriageable maidens. This play introduces an interesting twist in the gender discourse as the masculine gender is reduced to a mere object of endearment which a woman can win in a dancing competition. The most handsome man in the land is one of the prizes attached to the contest, hence each family presents a contestant. It is a thing of great honor to be the winner. The play opens during the peace week that precedes the contest. The whole community is agog as each family puts finishing touches to the dancing steps of its contestant. Jeosuwon family is represented by Rokeke, Majesesoge family by Osingin, and Aroorotan family by Gbemi.

It is seven days to the real contest hence, Iyaloja issues directives to the families to embark on a cleaning up of the market square. The cleaning up is, accompanied by songs dances and boastings by all contestants. The whole atmosphere is pervaded by festive mood. It is as if no one could actually wait for the day to come. Considering the heat that a mere cleaning-up preparation has generated, Iyaloja wonders, “what will happen on the day of the competition itself,” (*Yungba Yungba*, 16) it is indeed a moment of excitement and great expectation.

However, in the midst of this euphoria grows a crop of challenge. The emergence of group of three girls called Yungba Yungba has brought about a pertinent issue. Yungba Yungba team headed by Ayoka has approached the Iyaloja and raises certain questions and Iyaloja has unwittingly allow them to address the group of other girls. Leading the other girls in the trio, Ayoka raises a number of issues that has to do with usurpation of power. Apart from wining the most handsome man in the land, the winner of the dancing competition among others is expected to be the priestess for the year before she is succeeded by the next winner. It is this priestess that represents the maidens in the Council and Elders. Iyeneri, that wins the exalted throne ten years ago, has refused to vacate the power to the others after her. Arising from this long stay in power, successive winners have forgotten about the priestess issue and are preoccupied with the frivolities of the contest like winning of husband.
According to Ayoka:

...in the past, any of us here could be priestess! It was never the birthright of a single woman! It was not a personal legacy of anyone, to be passed down the family line! No! It was always won at an open competition, the reward of merit. And that is what we insist must be again... (Yungba Yungba, 26).

With these words, Yungba Yungba leads the revolt for power shift, as they head for Iyeneri’s house to demand of her to vacate the throne before the next contest. Ayoka and her team have not pleaded for any form of sentiment; rather they carry out findings, armed with facts and figures before calling for a revolution.

As a leader who is ready to bail her generation and others after hers from domination, Ayoka has radically insisted that Iyeneri should step down. She speaks further:

Are we Youth just going to continue to dance gleefully every Season and choose our husbands, as if that's all we're good for? The affairs of our state, don’t they concern us too? After we shall have danced and be applauded, shall we return home to find food cheaper in the markets, and abundant in our kitchens? Is it the husbands, we choose who we shall now cook to tame our raging stomachs? (Yungba Yungba, 29)

The Yungba Yungba bravely clamors for a democratic order in the face of dictatorship. They challenge Iyeneri and she promises to relinquish power, but she later reneges on her promise and sends death emissary to Ayoka. Ayoka is able to escape death through a defector from Iyeneri’s camp. As such, the twin bronzes sent to kill Ayoka goes back to attack Iyeneri and kills her. With this victory, the competition goes on and normality is restored and power is won for the good of the masses.

The all-woman-cast innovation by Osofisan in Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest has afforded him the opportunity to create different types of women, the good, the bad, and the ugly; this affords him the privilege of promoting heroic ones like Ayoka and condemning the bad ones like Iyeneri. Osofisan’s portraiture of woman is that which do not allude to feminine sentiment but that which attain fame and recognition through determination, hard-work, and zealousness. These women leaders must have overgrown stigma and discrimination to be able to achieve such a feat. In African context, a female achiever is usually stigmatized and labeled as a witch. In traditional African culture, most especially Yoruba where Osofisan hails from and which has been the setting of his plays, roles are already established. Individuals play these roles according to the social order. How best an individual plays designated role in what determines the status of such an
individual. There were “…heroines like Moremi who delivered her people when they were under external pressures of war…” (Owonibi, 95). Owonibi quickly added that Moremi having achieved this feat, succeeding where men failed, was particularly ostracized. It is believed that she must possess a power superior to that of man; as such she must be “…a witch” (95). Even in the contemporary Yoruba culture, this witch stigmatization still holds sway. For any woman to defeat man, it is believed that such a woman must possess the supernatural power of the àjé cult (i.e. witchcraft). According to Adams, “women are the witches and very old women are feared because of the suspicion that they might be witches (106) According to Owonibi:

Witch-craft is one of the productive weapons of blackmail the Yoruba Man uses to control the energy potential in a woman. No woman will want to be tagged as a witch because witches are stigmatized and isolated in the community (96).

The foregoing is not unconnected to the fatal defeat the male gods namely Oosanla, Egungun, and Oro suffered in the hands of Aje also known as Eleye. According to Yoruba oral tradition, Oosanla’s wife has gone to fetch water from Aje’s well and spoil the water thereafter. Angered by this, Aje went to Oosanla to report the case but Oosanla rose in defense of his wife instead of reprimanding her. In the course of the row that followed, Aje “swallowed him and his wife. Eegun and Oro who wanted to help Oosanla and his wife were both swallowed up as well” (Abimbola, 309). The power of Aje subsumed that of a perceived superior. As a shameful reaction to this, the Egungun and Oro cults never admit women up till today.

In fact it seems that these two divinities started as a means of curbing the powers of woman…There is no doubt at all that both Egungun and Oro were, and to some extent still are directed towards terrorizing woman as a means of keeping their powers in check (Abimbola, 310).

Hence, Aje was regarded as a malevolent spirit in Yoruba world-view.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Osofisan in his plays construct a different image of womanhood: a woman who is recognized for her achievement and not just for being a woman; a woman who commands and earns respect and adoration; a woman who is the symbol of excellence and not a “weaker vessel” that merely cries foul, feels cheated, and lives cheated; a woman who recognizes her energy potentials and
taps into it for empowerment; a woman who breaks the ugly yokes of stagnation and discrimination; a woman who sees being called a witch as complimentary and not derogatory.

Furthermore, either in the ingenuity of Tegonni, the political dexterity of Ayoka, or the revolutionary acumen of Titubi, Osofisan has displayed a striking attribute of womanhood that doesn’t only cry for injustice but moves out decisively to curb injustice instead of crying foul. Finally, for womanhood to win the obvious war of gender equity she must address her mind at those innate powers that make her stand out as a human being and not as a woman. Those valor and ingenuity in her that can make her impact in this world of reality. Then she must push forward for recognition against odds and restrictions. She must be ready to accept and admit being a witch and live up to the standard of a witch by beating a man in domains restricted and classified as masculine. She should attribute to ‘witch’ a positive connotation just like, ‘wizard’, that is now linguistically associated with excellence. As long as she sees ‘witch’ as a negative term that is associated with malevolence spirit that must be avoided, she will avoid the term like a plague and run away from anything that can earn her that title. It is part of prejudice. A male achiever is proud to be called a wizard in his chosen career, so also a female achiever should feel proud to be called a witch in her area of excellence. Margaret Thatcher became the Prime Minister of Great Britain without pleading female sentiments. She contested against male oppositions and defeated them. Without seeking for feminine sentiment, Indira Gandhi won the polls in India, Hellen Johnson Sirleff emerged the first African female president without campaigning for “give woman a chance”. One heroic deed or the other has placed them on the rostrum of global attention. That, I agree with Osofisan is the way forward for womanhood in Africa.

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SPOUSAL COMMUNICATION IN
OSOFISAN’S RESTLESS BREED

Ayodele Ajulo

INTRODUCTION

Language and society change simultaneously. A change in the historical experience of a society conditions the type of change that its language undergoes. Since language and literature are indices of national development in society, from the days of ritual drama traceable to the Greeks’ worship of Dionysus through African American transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, independence, and disappointment after independence, military dictatorship, to recent retirement to civil political culture in Africa the genre of drama has never been unproductive. Notable playwrights such as Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, and Femi Osofisan have neither ignored their role in documenting the historical experiences as well as cultural practices of their societies nor failed to ideologically teach their societies lessons to construct such societies. Osofisan in particular has published dozens of plays, many of which are set in Yoruba society. Restless Breed, our focus of attention in this chapter, is a collection of four of such plays: A Restless Run of Locusts, The Oriki of a Grasshopper, No More the Wasted Breed, and Birthdays Are Not For Dying.

In connection with this, one of the most recent polemics in literary circles is the effort to reconstruct the image of women and reposition them in all spheres of their society’s polity. Fashina has rightly claimed that, “the spirit of patriarchy is prevalent in virtually every element of patriarchal societies ranging from social relationships to systems of greetings, language, and every art of communication” (157). His claim attempts to consolidate or corroborate the view that patriarchy as an ideology of male dominance is not restricted to political, economic, and cultural power-sharing in society. In Ako’s feminist reading of Graham Greene’s selected works, she states two positions behind which scholars portray women; both are illustrated in the works thereby defining Greene as feminist/antifeminist paradoxically (153). While Greene on the one hand sees women as not always...
emotional, weak, passive, and dependent on men, on the other hand he sees some female characters like Sarah, Louise, and Phuong as sexual and reproductive objects, weak, emotional, and apolitical. Greene has argued that it is not a result of nature; rather these ideas have been inscribed, with their participation, by the patriarchs in the male-dominated cultures in which they find themselves. Having said this, the argument is that the man and the woman are capable of an equal level of reasoning, socialization, civilization, and even primarily speech activity.

This chapter however does not focus on further arguments on this subject. Rather the subject serves as a take-off point for our study in that communicative arts between men and women are guided by the culture of such participants in communicative situations. Since the four plays by Osofisan under consideration are set in Yoruba society, it is the focus here to study their speech acts as characters relate to each other as husband and wife and explore theoretically how the writer’s ideology has dictated the kind of speech acts made by a woman in communication with her husband. Definitely, as a creative writer, Osofisan’s thematic preoccupation ideologically pursued in the plays would influence him to derail the female characters from making acceptable, cultural, socio-linguistically permissible contributions to a conversation involving her husband. This obviously shows that the settings of the plays are patriarchal and passing comments and references will be made where necessary.

SPEECH ACTS

For Austin, a problem should be tackled by an examination of the way in which its vocabulary is used in ordinary situations. In his book *How to Do Things With Words*, Austin has introduced the theory of speech acts into the philosophy of language, giving explicit recognition to the social or impersonal dimension of language behavior. *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines speech acts as “the classification of utterances in terms of promises, warnings, statements, questions, orders, descriptions, explanations, apologies, etc” (64). On his part, Wales views speech-acts as “the linguistic acts made while speaking which have some social or interpersonal purpose and pragmatic effect” (149). Speech acts theory distinguishes between contrastive utterances and performative utterances. The former are statements whose function is to describe some event, process, or state of affairs and they have true or false value. The latter are used to do something rather than say that something is or not the case. Performatives have no truth value.

The major difference lies between doing and saying. For example, the statement “I do” (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife) as uttered in the course of a marriage ceremony; or “I bequeath my watch to my brother” as occurring in a will. The speaker of “I do” before the registrar or officiating
religious priest is not reporting on a marriage but indulging in it. Therefore, for performatives (speech acts) to be successfully performed, that is to be “felicitous,” all participants must execute a conventional procedure known as felicity conditions. The particular person and circumstances, according to Austin, must be appropriate in a given case for the particular procedure being invoked (14-5). Felicity conditions are violated when any of these conditions is violated, and consequently the utterance becomes infelicitous. In uttering, “I sentence you to two years imprisonment,” the speaker must be a judge speaking to a convict and the circumstance must be appropriate—coming after the person has been found guilty, and the punishment for such an offence is two years imprisonment.

In further development of this theory, distinctions are made between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is the utterance of certain words in a construction with a certain meaning. An illocutionary act is performed in saying something, asking a question, warning, giving a verdict, etc. This act involves securing the “up-take,” which means to bring about an understanding of the meaning and the force of the locution. A perlocutionary act is one performed by means of saying something to get someone to believe that something is so, moving someone to anger, consoling someone in distress, etc. It relates to the response, implicit or explicit, which an understanding of the force of illocution brings about. This theory has significantly turned attention from sentences as syntactic units to sentences as utterances in speech situations with specific intentions and goals.

Speech acts, as Austin and Searle themselves never imagined, delineate an ideal communicative situation since effective communication demands/elicits response favorable or unfavorable from the receiver of the message. Busby and Majors refer to this as feedback which shows that the message was clear/unclear, understood/misunderstood, and so on. Oladokun, quoting Harold Lasswell’s theory has described communicative situations in terms of “who says what, to whom, and with what effect?” (50), while Ajulo has claimed that it clearly “bears semblance with Austin’s speech acts of locution, illocution, and perlocution” (30). Undoubtedly, each turn taken is a unit of discourse equivalent to a speech act. Whether it elicits a response, the type of response it elicits from the hearer in interactions whose participants are spouses are also relevant to this exploration of Restless Breed.

**SPOUSAL COMMUNICATION**

Spousal communication simply refers to interaction, dialogue, exchanges, or conversations between a woman and her husband. Of the many types of communicative acts, most studies have been devoted to conversation, seen as “the most fundamental and pervasive means of conducting human affairs” (Crystal, 116).
Whether the analysts’ data is gathered from natural talks or literary texts, conversational analysts have paid attention to openings and closings of conversations; adjacency pairs, i.e., paired utterances of the type summons-answer, greeting-greeting, compliment-compliment response; topic management and shift; conversational repairs, and mechanics of turn-taking (Jaworski & Coupland, 118). It is believed that certain ethics—religious, social, cultural, or political—guide conversations and speeches made between spouses.

In Restless Breed, which is a collection of four short plays, A Restless Run of Locusts, The Oriki of a Grasshopper, No More the Wasted Breed and Birthdays Are Not for Dying, conversations take place between Iyabo, Sanda, Chief Micheal Kuti, and Mrs. Arike Kuti; between Moni and Imaro; between Elusu and Olokun; and between Bosede and Kunle respectively. There are two couples in the first play: Iyabo and Sanda, and Mrs. Arike Kuti and Chief Michael Kuti, while in the second play, one might hesitate to accept the relationship between Moni and Imaro as spousal. It will be validated here that spousal communication involves two lovers who are not married but relate in the sense of common boyfriend-girlfriend parlance. There should be no qualms about the spouses in the remaining two plays save the question that Elusu and Olokun are superhuman according to the stage direction. However, our analysis will further clarify issues on these spousal relations.

**SPOUSAL COMMUNICATION IN RESTLESS BREED**

*A Restless Run of Locusts* illustrates the rough and tumble of politics. It opens with Iyabo’s utterances, one of which is “Sanda, my darling!” an expression that directly justifies Halliday and Hasan’s argument that register has indexical features, indices in the form of particular words, particular grammatical signals, or even sometimes phonological signals that this is the register in question (38). Other utterances in the opening betray the situation as spousal relations. For instance, Iyabo speaks, “I wish I’d met them here. Who were they? Who dared to hurt my sweetheart?” (42). Sanda does not appreciate Iyabo’s loving gestures, because he sees her as one of his enemies, her father being his brother’s (Tunde’s) political rival. Since suspicion is a sign of separation/disintegration, the Iyabo-Sanda relationship is violated here by politics.

When Party leader brings report about Tunde’s critical condition in the hospital, he accuses Iyabo of being a spy for her father in Sanda’s house. Iyabo cannot believe that her father has sent political thugs to beat them up. Violation of their relationship is echoed this way:
Iyabo: [Broken] No, no, say you still love me. Say you’re still my Sanda!

Sanda: Go away. Your Sanda is dead. Your father killed him too. (5)

Since Sanda has promised Iyabo never to dabble in politics, he is to be considered dead now that he has to do so and avenge his brother’s victimization on Chief Kuti. From the Kuti’s perspective, Mrs Arike Kuti decries her husband’s moral-immoral transmutation into drunkenness in the name of politics. The transmutation definitely transfers the role of the husband practically and illocutionarily to the wife and she now castigates him:

Mrs. Kuti: For God’s sake control yourself. Why should you be ashamed; getting jumpy and nervous all because of an election. Are you the first person to stand as candidate?… (18)

Chief Kuti responds, “Shut your mouth woman! What do you know about it?” (18). Also, when the thugs that break their conversation leave, Chief Kuti begins to laugh first softly and then hysterically. Mrs. Kuti asks him, “Michael, what’s wrong with you? Have you gone mad?” (20). When Chief Kuti attempts to kiss his wife, Arike, she pushes him off and speaks, “Leave me alone. You’ve gone raving mad!” (20). Here, questions arise. Why is Mrs. Arike Kuti qualified to utter these speeches to her husband in the patriarchal, male-dominated, socio-cultural environment of the play? Are these utterances/acts felicitous? Is the occasion suitable for such utterances? The society is truly male-dominated and it is evident in Chief Kuti’s speech when Arike teases him that the “boy” Adeniyi will defeat him on Saturday. He says, “Don’t worry me woman! Carry on with your knitting or get into the kitchen and cook! (7). It further reduces Arike as a symbol of the womenfolk that she does not know politics or any other thing except the domestic chores such as going to the kitchen and cooking, knitting, etc. But one would not expect Arike to talk to her husband like that, and the playwright knows this. However, these acts are justifiable since Chief Kuti symbolizes the type of politician that the playwright satirizes. So it becomes a case of husband-loses-integrity, and his wife picks it up.

This reversal of speech-role between a teacher and a pupil or between a mother and a teenage daughter may attract rebuke or punishment because of power-relations involved. Montgomery symptomatizes power relations in such contexts with a display of foreknowledge in a subsequent follow-up turn, especially by evaluation or correction. Obviously, power relations exist in spousal interactions situated in a patriarchal society; but in this play, Chief Kuti has lost his power over his wife and daughter. Integrity may be defined in terms of power as the ability to manage one’s family effectively. In the Kutis’ relations, politics
is viewed and associated with bankruptcy, borrowing, neglect of duty, etc. When Iyabo enters to break the news that the chief has sent thugs to kill Adeniyi in the hospital, he strikes his daughter while Arike insists on knowing if it is true that he has actually committed the crime. Here Osofisan’s opportunity arrives to define politics the way people in Kuti’s class view it as he attempts to defend himself:

He should have known! He should have been on his guard. What did he think politics is? A game of ayo? A gutter game! A dirty game! A dangerous game! A game not meant for infants… (14)

Having echoed politics as a bloodcurdling hydra-headed monster, Iyabo signals her father’s complete loss of sanity as she preaches to him, “Thou shall not kill, love thy fellow men a thyself.” Arike speaks, “O, I hate you! God will punish you!” performing a speech act of cursing (15). According to Ugwu, speech acts such as threats, abuses, and curses are used for correction, intimidation, and coercion. “These forms sometimes act as a channel for the release of psychological tensions such as anger, frustration, disappointment, and other negative feelings which can build up in the human personality (218). Mrs. Arike Kuti’s speech act, therefore, is never an exception in Ugwu’s definition/view.

Through Iyabo’s speeches one is informed that Tunde Adeniyi is dead, although it is later revealed through the same Iyabo that Tunde is not dead. Iyabo is angry about the lies which Sanda himself claims that the party used to hoodwink him into the political gimmick; he cannot turn back by the time he knows that it is a political trick. As soon as Sanda reconciles with Iyabo, the Party Leader comes to break the news that Chief has won the election owing to his revelation before, instead of after the election, that his brother is not dead. Sanda leaves with the Party Leader, and Iyabo is abandoned again, and Chief is dead by suicide. The fact that the two women have accepted their fate in solitude is found in Mrs. Kuti’s speech:

That’s what men live for, my daughter. To die. To take their women and suck them dry of all affection, all devotion, all tenderness. And then to abandon them. Like a restless run of locusts. Like a restless run of locusts. (34)

The question arises again: Why has Osofisan not created spouses who share the same view of life and who are rooted in the same profession? Why has he not created ideologically compatible spouses like Moni and Imaro in this play? In the present socio-cultural and political context where women are determined to grasp more seats in the political life of their nation, why has the playwright created characters who are good only as political thugs or are politically passive? It is not that Osofisan is not aware of all these developments and prejudicial
accusations that may follow his arts. However, he has chosen these characters to preach an ideology different from boosting women’s morale. Their speech acts which cannot be considered incongruous have driven home the theme that politics is a deadly game that offers women nothing but lonesomeness.

*The Oriki of a Grasshopper* confirms this. Moni and Imaro are lovers whose compatibility lies in their sameness in ideological perspective; they are both socialists. Before the arrival of Moni, Imaro and Claudius in their dialogue have created an atmosphere for their spousal relations to ensue. The end of Imaro’s song, “When will they ever learn” serves as a symbolic parable for Imaro not only as a frustrated teacher whose students would not understand but also as a frustrated social reformer whose society would never admit to change. From the beginning, using Pozzo, a character in *Waiting for Godot*, Imaro and Claudius paint a picture of a society where people complain, express dissatisfaction, yet do not commit suicide—having hope of a better tomorrow. Human beings have ways of reacting psychologically to threat. Imaro believes they would always be disillusioned.

Against the background of a decadent suffering society where there is neither adequate insurance for the life of the police nor security for their families, the play is an introduction into the world of ideological struggles, capitalism represented by Claudius and socialism represented by Imaro, Moni, and others who are placed under arrest. While Fairclough notes that the term “ideology” has too many misleading senses and reverberations to be discussed in detail in a piece of writing (104), Gee sees it “as a social theory which involves generalizations (beliefs, claims) about the ways in which goods are distributed in society” (21). Ideology in this dramatic society could be viewed in the sense of Gee’s definition.

We could also see ideology in the works of Osofisan as an opportunity for the writer to construct his society through drama from Locke’s perspective that “ideology is an elaborate story told about the ideal conduct of some aspect of human affairs” (33). Locke maintains that the truth of an ideology is determined by the number of people who subscribe to it. It can be pursued, and therefore when the writer seeks to select and teach didactically about an aspect of the life in his society he is considered ideological. The love relations between Imaro and Moni have grown out of their belongingness to the same ideological class; the latter thinking the former would serve as a source of inspiration, a facilitator, a leader. But Imaro is misunderstood by the Vice-Chancellor to have incited the rampaging students, Moni too comes back to accuse him of insincerity for not being arrested like others.

This view of ideological struggle leads him to envy the capitalists. He wants to soil his hands too and make money but his years of service in lecturing have discouraged him from joining the capitalist class. Moni expresses her disappointment in Imaro:
**Moni:** I needed someone who could fly. And you gave me a promise of wings. But oh, you’re only a grasshopper, powerless before the wind. When the forest begins to burn, you’re just as trapped as all the crawling things.

**Imaro:** And you? What are you?

**Moni:** I know what I do not wish to be. I’ve had enough of this.

**Imaro:** Love is for the rainy day, as well as for the dry season. It isn’t on those days when a man is strong that he deserves to be called a comrade. (68)

When Moni is still not convinced, Imaro, angry, moves to strike her, which is another sign of weakness. Moni speaks, “I said, you poor man. You’re so filled with contradictions!” (70). The violation of spousal relationship is expressed in the following sequence as Moni wants to leave:

**Imaro:** Let me come along then.

**Moni:** No. It has to stop.

**Imaro:** I love you Moni.

**Moni:** Please let’s not go back to that.

**Imaro:** You too, you used to dream. And those dreams filled me with strength. So now it’s over, you’re no longer my Fairy Queen, Owner of A Thousand Dreams. You’ve become just another woman, prone to hurt and…

**Moni:** What do you want me to say? Yes, I’ve grown up. I used to think of you as a god, but I’ve come to see your weaknesses, and your feeble attempts to cover them up, to justify them…I don’t love you anymore. I don’t want to be contaminated. (69)

In this short play Osofisan has created a strong revolutionary and active woman who flies in the sky that some men cannot reach. Imaro is seen as a compromising socialist while Moni occupies the super-ordinate side of the power relation structure. To keep the flag flying she has to break her relationship with Imaro who is surrounded by capitalists thereby hanging between two ideological classes. Moni then becomes an ideal woman in her society, undaunted, “mother-figure providing spiritual shield, moral instruction, and energy for the sustenance of the male” heroes’ messianic vision (Fashina, 87). She becomes a woman like Tuere in Okara’s *The Voice*, Nyambura in Ngugi’s *The River Between*, Mwihaki in *Weep Not Child* and the woman voice counselor to the BOY in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*.

In *No More the Wasted Breed*, Osofisan creates temperamentally antithetical spouses—Elusu and Olokun—whose similarity lies in both having god/goddess, duke/duchess inseparable identity. Elusu is self-expressively arrogant, impatient, and retaliatory while Olokun is humble, patient, and reasonable. The stage direc-
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The play opens with Elusu’s self-praises of her beauty. She considers human form disgraceful. Their antithetical nature manifests in their dialogue.

*Elusu:* Olokun, these are little tokens respect for your wife. But see, see how they’ve stabbed me all over with stakes, and entangled my limbs in their fishing nets! Your wife Olokun!

*Olokun:* Yes, beloved. I know how wronged you feel. But there indeed lies the question.

*Elusu:* What blasted question?

*Olokun:* The question why. What could be their reason for such reckless behaviour? Why should they have chosen so boldly to defile a prized goddess? (77-8)

One cannot be surprised at Olokun’s speech acts. His last utterance distances him from external judgment or punishment without investigating why an erring person has behaved in such a manner. Elusu accepts and blames the disrespectful sacrilege on Olokun’s kindness, placable nature— “a bell, song and a ram dies at his shrine, that’s all.” For Elusu, “Human beings only learn from suffering.” But Olokun does not think like that. For Olokun, “Yes. But not from death. That is always too late, and we cannot be worshipped by corpses. If I don’t intervene, you’ll wipe out the entire race” (78). Elusu is not only irate but also belligerently destructive, capable of wiping out a whole race. In spite of this, the playwright paints a picture of a submissive woman in the male dominated societies of the physical and the metaphysical:

*Elusu:* Thank you. I’ve made my choice.

*Olokun:* Promise then not to lose your temper.

To do nothing rash while we are here.

*Elusu:* It’s your order, husband. I can only obey. (79)

Why these spousal relations are fascinating is that Olokun has the required dexterity to manage his irate, belligerent, and self-expressively arrogant wife. It is this dexterity of home/wife management that actually elicits humility from Elusu. Olokun has two checking measures, force and persuasive placation which are demonstrated in the following sequence:

*Olokun:* I could force you, you know -

*Elusu:* Yes, do I deny it? Will it be the first time? Why not go ahead and summon Obatala as you did before, to tie me up in the sky with his iron chain?

*Olokun:* (Placating) Look here, my dear—
Elusu: No! None of that. Wives are to be bullied, they have no rights. Why don’t you use your celebrated strength on them for a change, on my behalf? But no, that will be sacrilege for the god of justice (81).

Olokun himself has seen the need to break away from the uncivilized way of treating, punishing his wife to persuasive placation. Elusu’s turn sarcastically condemns the subjection of women to subhuman substandard treatment. More essentially Elusu’s later acceptance to obey her husband’s order that she should not lose her temper on earth, indicates parallelism between Yoruba culture and the Biblical precept in 1 Peter 3: 1-2 “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.”

Elusu knows her husband. She knows that he would not like to use his strength for revenge on the humans. It should be noted that speech acts such as abuses and curses rained on Chief Kuti in *A Restless Run of Locusts* do not occur in Elusu’s speeches here. It shows that the normal social order is maintained in this patriarchal society. Olokun has all it requires to occupy the super-ordinate position in his spousal relations with Elusu. One should wonder then that Olokun is saddled with the responsibility to dispense justice between his superfluously domineering wife and the seemingly revolting, seemingly iconoclastic society represented by Saluga and Biokun amongst others. But it will be safe to have it that way in order to portray his dispensation of justice. When Elusu wants to suppress Biokun’s speech, the following ensues between the couple:

Elusu: Are we going to listen to all this, Olokun, to words of abuse and reproach from a carrier?

Olokun: Let him finish (85).

Having listened to Saluga and Biokun’s complaints that the worship of the goddess impoverishes them, he orders his wife to die for Saluga and every dead thing in the society to come alive at the cost of his eternal sorrow. He speaks:

Priest, tides change for gods as they do for men. It is not a beautiful moment, when a goddess dies. The sorrow lasts a whole generation. My wife is gone, the beloved. But Olokun is a god of justice. (99)

*No More the Wasted Breed* is a folkloristic play which projects a society whose independence is marked by its fight to move from a god/goddess-controlled one to a human self-controlled civilized one. The play justifies reasons for modernization on the one hand and cultural subversion on the other.
Kunle’s conversation with his wife, Bosede in *Birthdays Are Not For Dying* depicts initiation into the corrupt adult world as he reaches thirty, exactly when his father wants him to take his place in his company. Bosede brings news about Segun’s sickness but he snubs her and refers to her suspected infidelity two years before, moving around in London and elsewhere with Yinka, another man. Kunle had sent her to London to buy only the best things for their wedding, but he complains:

*Kunle:* Then the news began to reach me. You were no longer in London, but in Paris. Paris? No, you had left for Amsterdam. Then for Rome. Where else did you go? I sent frantic telegrams to my friends in London. They knew what to do. There are men over there who specialize in that sort of thing. They picked up your trail. In no time the full details were in my hands. Dates, places…photographs. Would you like to see them, Ehn. [Goes to the locker and brings out a fat envelope. Throws it at her feet]. All the terrible scenes of your infidelity…

*Bosede:* Two years now! Two years and you still keep them. (111)

Since Kunle seeks to avenge his father’s death, he has placed himself in the position to reform his society and rid it of corruption. As a reformer, his activities should start at home—where he has a morally depraved wife whose home training is attested to by Chief Seminiyi, her father himself who has given Bosede to Kunle in order to cement his relationship with Kunle’s late father. After disowning his wife, he sacks the corrupt board members during the meeting he has called to herald his birthday. As a reformer, Kunle is also ready to pay very heavily for integrity. He pays whatever his Councilor wants to earn because he has a clean record while he goes through the files to expose the board members’ dirty deals.

Kunle is educated and not illiterate like his father. He cannot be easily cheated. However, he cannot hit without being hit back. The Councilor, Bosede his wife, and Major try their worst. His mother comes in to find that he is dead. An alternate ending has him revived again. It would have amounted to a Pyrrhic victory and illustrated the saying that “the rat would topple the bottle of cowpeas rather than accept its failure to have a taste of a grain” if Kunle had actually died. But that he revives in one version to start life afresh is a reading of Osofisan’s play in the context of a society which is determined to eradicate corruption. The play therefore celebrates victory over corruption and betrayal which would not have been realized if the playwright had given the play the kind of ending he gives to *A Restless Run of Locusts*. 
CONCLUSION

In *Restless Breed* as a collection, thematic preoccupations ideologically pursued have influenced the creation of compatible/incompatible, linguistically polite/impolite spouses whose speech acts have revealed. It is a read of Osofisan’s plays in the context of a patriarchal socio-linguistic background of which the playwright is a member. It has been argued here though implicitly that what one says determines what one is and it helps to analyze the psychological state of the individual. Entering through the psychological configuration of the male-female, husband-wife characters, literary arts particularly Osofisan’s plays, are, a good representation of reality which is aimed at constructing society. The spousal communicative acts studied in the plays have been treated as discourse and discourse defined by Fairclough as “a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (64).

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Section IV

STYLE AND LANGUAGE
INTRODUCTION

The contemporary African playwright constantly draws materials and inspirations from rich African philosophies and traditions. In view of his exposure to Western education, more often than not, up to the university level, the contemporary African dramatist usually benefits from the rich influences of Western dramatic forms and traditions on him. The dual exposure immensely contributed to the rich and unique hybridity of form (African and European) associated with what is known, today, as “modern” African drama. With the unprecedented growth of post-independence African drama there exist criticisms which have helped to engender its quality of focus and form. Modern African drama has, indeed, come of age; and it is quite possible to harness such findings as are common with its peculiar hybridity for the purpose of evolving a body of relevant “home-grown” theories and literary canons as are appropriate for its criticism. In the light of this assumption, basic forms in modern African drama with a view to examining how the modern African playwright exploits the advantages of a dual exposure (to Western dramatic concepts and the Africanloric traditions) to evolve authentic African dramatic forms, among other things, is the primary focus of this chapter.
MODERN AFRICAN DRAMA: OF CRITICS AND CRITICISM

For obvious reasons contemporary Nigerian drama, in particular, is germane to the present discourse. This is partly because Femi Osofisan, the focus of this volume, is a Nigerian playwright; at the same time, his internationality as a foremost playwright is never in doubt; and partly because the social milieu and artistic idiosyncrasies that foregrounded and, perhaps, still foreground the development of conventional African dramatic forms, or the emergence of the new dramatic/theatrical form that is the focus of the present discussion, are not peculiar to Nigeria, but are part of a phenomenon that characterizes the whole of Africa. In other words, whatever is observed or concluded in this study is applicable to Nigeria and the entire African continent.

The military incursion into Africa’s political life shortly after independence in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Congo (later, Zaire), Uganda, etc., and, the subsequent thirty-month Nigerian civil war, and other such fratricides in most African countries, marked the emergence of what are now generally known as second-generation Nigerian, or African, playwrights. Their emergence was in response to the continent’s rather unusual psychosocial idiosyncrasies. Prominent among this new crop of playwrights are Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Ben Tomoloju, Tess Onwueme, Tunde Fatunde, and lately Niyi Osundare, among others. They have been more persistent with, and vehement on, their criticism of the military dictatorship than their first generation predecessors.

Of particular interest is Femi Osofisan’s successful experimentation with a new dramatic form that is best located, or situated, within a universalist paradigmatic cultural correspondence that is akin to Bertolt Brecht’s epic dramatic tradition on the one hand, and the indigenous Yorùbá folkloric narrative form with its characteristic episodic plot structure on the other hand. Between 1969, when he produced his first play, A Restless Run of Locusts, in reaction to, as Sandra Richards (1996) aptly puts it, “the ugliness of his society in hopes that reflection will spur reform” (4) and regarding his country Nigeria as a nation without a meaningful direction at the tail-end of the Nigerian civil war, and 2007, Femi Osofisan has written and produced well over fifty plays, about half of which have been published, and which the playwright has directed and produced. Before I comment any further on the playwright’s creative and critical sensibilities, a brief examination of existing select-criticism of modern African drama is expedient at this point.

Oyin Ogunba (1977), identified three broad categories into which modern West African plays could be classified: (i) propaganda plays involving politics and ideology; (ii) plays expressing culture-nationalism or plays expressing preference for the new cultural integrationist vision; and (iii) satiric plays. Ogunba’s
classification was, probably, relevant at the time it was suggested. But now that many more plays have been written, and are still being written in addition to the new dramatic forms that have continued to emerge, such classification is unlikely to be relevant, appropriate, or applicable any more. This is because there are observable inherent ambiguities of oversimplification and over-generalization with the critic’s classification. For example, Ogunba’s categorization of some plays as “propaganda and culture-nationalism” is fraught with problems. These arise from the fact that so long as subjectivity and deliberate specious discourse are fundamental to propaganda, so long will propaganda be integral and of topical interest in literary discourse on culture, politics, nationalism, etc., regardless of region or race that informs it. In other words, any drama, the focus of which is culture or nationalism, possesses elements of propaganda of varying degrees, subtle or caustic. Similarly, Ogunba’s “satiric play,” the third in the classificatory paradigm, ought not to be a separate category. This is because modern West African, and indeed, African, drama, like African prose fiction, especially, the novel, is largely informed by sociological factors (see Izeybaye, 1979). In other words, regardless of the thematic focus or topicality (political or ideological propaganda, or culture-nationalism), or form (tragedy, comedy, or the Epic theatre), modern African drama has always been couched in measured degrees of satire.

Udenta O. Udenta’s Ideological Sanction and Social Action in African Literature (1994) takes a swipe at the early efforts of critics of modern African drama, and in one sweep, describes them all as works more or less sponsored by the playwrights themselves. The works, according to Udenta, include Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele’s Theatre in Africa, Michael Etherton’s The Development of African Drama, Eldred Jones’s The Writings of Wole Soyinka, Oyin Ogunba’s Movement of Transition, and such journals as African Literature Today No. 6, among others. Udenta opines:

What is, of course, annoying is the near critical silence on the works of the later Ngugi, the later Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Tess Onwueme and Tunde Fatunde—all revolutionary dramatists who responding to the call of their conscience, and aware of the growing heroism of the African working people create positive heroes who embody the revolutionary challenge posed to neo-colonialism and re-colonization. (94)

Udenta suspects that the observed gap was deliberate and a “conspiracy against revolutionary aesthetics in Africa, and not because of their relative newness on the scene” (94). What, perhaps, the critic failed to realize is that the artistic and social vision (or critical sensibilities) that foregrounds modern African drama is developmental, and in stages, as they obtain in most societies of the world, criticism grows with the arts, visual or performative, that is, it grows with time.
Therefore, the question of a deliberate silence does not arise. The early critical works, contrary to Udenta’s strongly expressed opinion, are great and commendable efforts that have engendered basic understanding of the first generation, as it were, of African dramatists.

While one is tempted to share some of Udenta’s sentiment and anxiety on a number of issues raised in the work under reference, I am of the opinion that he could still have made his point without being acerbic and uncivil in the usual Bolekaja-tradition. For example, his claims about, and description of, Dapo Adelugba’s edited work Before Our Very Eyes as “a very mediocre work” (94), is a clear case of abuse of rights to personal opinion and of claims which, unfortunately, are false and unfounded. If the contribution of great African scholars including Joel Adedeji, Bimpe Aboyade, Dan S. Izevbaye, Dapo Adelugba, and others in a collective celebration of the unique achievement of Wole Soyinka, the only Nigerian Nobel Laureate in Literature so far, is described as “a very mediocre work,” then that source of critical judgment needs a thorough re-examination! Let me simply stop at that point to avoid unnecessary distraction from the main focus.

But now that Ogunba’s classification is hardly applicable to modern African drama, an amendment to the classification is being proposed in this study for the purpose of arriving at a more appropriate alternative taxonomy for modern African plays. Therefore, the proposed classification is under four broad and yet indistinct categories: (i) culture plays, (ii) nationalist plays, (iii) rational plays and, (iv) neo-rationalist plays. It must be added, too, that the idea of creating four separate headings does not translate to a rigid delineation, or it will fail like the one being amended. This is particularly so since there is not much distinction between the first two groups. For example, “culture” is a major component of “nationalism.” At the same time, there are reasons why they are regarded as two different categories in the context intended here. Therefore, the four categories in the proposed taxonomy are informed by factors to be discussed shortly.

CULTURE PLAYS

African plays proposed in this study as “culture plays,” expressly show concern about dislocated social values or culture decline, and are suggestive of, or imply approval of, cross-fertilization of cultures or culture-integration. More significantly, central to their thematic preoccupation is culture. Most of the African plays in this category constantly probe the newly acquired European values. There is, predictably, a constant conflict between the African culture (the old order) and European values (the new order). Sometimes, the old and the new are satirized in a way that reduces the latter to a satiric butt in order to justify the ideals of the African culture. This is the case with Sekyi Kobina’s The Blinkards. Sometimes, the badly digested Western values are sharply highlighted. Examples
abound in Mrs. Brofusem among others in *The Blinkards*, and Wole Soyinka’s *Lakunle*, the village teacher, in *The Lion and the Jewel*.

There are also plays which explore the possibility of the coexistence of the best of the “old order” and the best of the “new order.” For example, Chief Baroka, the Baale of Ilujinle, and his newly acquired stamp printing machine in *The Lion and Jewel*, and the stranger-village teacher, Bambulu, with his *deux ex machine* anti-snake serum in Ene Henshaw’s *This is Our Chance*, as well as Efua T. Sutherland’s *Marriage of Anansewa*, among others, represent the cultural integrationist vision. Similarly, Joe de Graft’s *Sons and Daughters* examines the predicaments of the new order under the brutal oppression of the old values. In essence, contemporary African plays that can be located in the “culture play” category are of varied degrees. They do, however, take cognizance of the signification of African culture.

**NATIONALIST DRAMA**

African plays categorized as “nationalist plays” are concerned with political struggles of any ideological persuasion, the basic informing vision of which is nationalism. The plays in this category preoccupy with political struggles with nationalistic objectives, either in the colonial era as represented by the Mau-Mau and Maji-Maji armed-struggles in the colonial Kenya, and colonial Tanzania, respectively, or in South Africa, the anti-apartheid struggles. This is consciously re-presented in Ngugi and Mugo’s *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Ebrahim Hussein’s *Kinjeketile*, and Athol Fugard’s *The Island*, and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. Nationalist plays, in addition, express the people’s disaffection with the unresponsive and irresponsible neocolonial government; therefore, they consciously awaken the masses’ level of awareness with the sole aim of making them reject and resist colonial or neocolonial disillusionments and oppression in general. They are represented by plays like Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ngugi wa Mini’s *I Will Marry When I Want* (1977). That play, which focuses on exploitation and resistance, was originally intended as an experimental play which was commissioned for performance in Kikuyu, at the village theater of the people of Kaminutu, in Kenya. In South Africa, besides Athol Fugard’s *The Island* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, a form of protest drama had evolved, including Maishe Maponye’s *Hungry Earth* (1979), and *Woza Albert!* (1986) by Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema, and Barney Simon. These plays are characterized by a graphic representation of the angst and the anguish of the African, as well as his struggle for survival in the pre-1994 apartheid era in South Africa. Others include Soyinka’s *A Play of Giants* and *Opera Wonyonsi*, Kole Omotoso’s *The Curse*, and Niyi Osundare’s *The State Visit* highlighting in rather caustic burlesque, tragicomedy, and comedy, respec-
tively, the farce that is African leadership. In this category of African plays, the level of ideological commitment varies from playwright to playwright.

**RATIONAL DRAMA**

In either a “culture play” or a “nationalist play” the possibility of an overlap or admixture of both cultural and nationalist topicality cannot, sometimes, be completely ruled out. When an overlap occurs or becomes obvious, the play falls under the third group in the proposed classification, “rational plays.” African plays in this category fuse together both cultural and nationalist objectives. For example, rites-of-passage (spi-Ritual) which is integral of African culture essentially foregrounds Soyinka’s nationalist quest for political salvation in both *The Strong Breed* and *Death and the King’s Horseman*. Similarly, in a quasi-allegorical manner, Soyinka quests into what might be the future of the young independent African state, Nigeria (the Half-Child) in *A Dance of the Forests*. Notable deities of the Yorùbá pantheon are actively involved in the dramatic discourse that terminates, prophetically, in uncertainty. In the three groups already identified above, the playwrights employ propaganda, as well as exploit the resources of satire, regardless of the dramatic form, tragedy or comedy, etc.

**NEO-RATIONALIST DRAMA**

The fourth and last group that is proposed in this study is “neo-rationalist plays.” The plays in this category tap into materials from African traditions in pursuance of nationalist objectives, and does so in an unconventional manner that deliberately deconstructs the usual conventions associated with the plays of Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark (Bekederemo), Efua Sutherland, Zulu Sofola, etc. Neo-rational drama is a relatively “novel” theatrical experience that is aimed at a deliberate subversion of the essential syntax of indigenous cultural matrices/beliefs, as well as any perceivable “unprogressive” contemporary psycho-social superstructure.

The crop of playwrights in this category is favorably inclined to Marxist-Socialist ideology, albeit not so much for its party dogmatism but in Brechtian theatricality, and psycho-sociological mode. Playwrights in this category embark on a “programmatic replacement” of orthodox myths, legends, tales, and supernatural forces that congest the indigenous African imagination and extant cosmos, with a new order of reality and new myths that are capable of serving mankind in general, not just a few in the privileged class. Although indigenous African cultural icons constitute, largely, the raw materials for neo-rational plays, the fundamental matrices are deliberately ruptured, demystified, and demythified for
the purpose of making them perform new functions. The emergent ethos, Isidore Okpewho (1983) categorized as “Tradition refined” (1).

Culture, as far as neo-rationalist playwrights are concerned, no longer functions at the level of mundane romanticization of some morbid or moribund values, but is put at the service of the nationalistic quest for socio-economic salvation. Femi Osofisan, Ben Tomoloju, and lately, Niyi Osundare, among a few others, represent this group of playwrights. In this essay, however, exclusive attention is given to Femi Osofisan because of his unarguable prominence in the group, as well as his unprecedented contribution to the invention and emergence of neo-rationalist drama in post-colonial Africa.

A POETICS OF THE EMERGENT DRAMATIC FORM

Although it is unlikely that the proponents of neo-rationalist theater shared the basic concern that Frantz Fanon expressed in “Black Skin, White Masks”:

There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect... (10)

The fact that they intended from outset to prove the richness of their thought and the value of their intellect is not in doubt. It informs the uniqueness of form and the theatrics of neo-rationalist plays. This will be expatiated further shortly. Besides the conventional tragedy and its subsets, and the conventional comedy and its other subsets, which are the two basic forms that characterize modern African drama, neo-rational dramatic form is relatively an emerging drama which hitherto critics have always and hastily associated with the Brechtian theater. This is largely so because a neo-rationalist drama shares a number of features with Bertolt Brecht’s epic drama. Furthermore, like the Brechtian drama, a neo-rational drama can either be comedic or tragi-comedic, yet it is neither a comedy nor a tragic-comedy in the strict conventional sense. These peculiar similarities are foregrounded again by similar ideological sentiments of social vision and creativeness.

It is a fact that Femi Osofisan pioneered this “novel” dramatic form, at least in Africa. It informs the choice of his plays in this chapter besides the fact that, primarily, the entire collection of scholarly essays in this volume is in celebration of the playwright. But more importantly, the present choice is, largely, in recognition of Ososfan’s pioneering role in evolving this unique dramatic form, and the fact that he remains, to date, the most prolific and the most ideologically consistent playwright, dramatist, and theater technician and director in Africa, today.
In *Excursion in Drama and Literature*, a book of interviews with Femi Osofisan, the interviewer, Muyiwa Awodiya, describes the playwright as a second generation Nigerian playwright who provides an “alternative tradition different from that of older writers, especially Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark” (15). Awodiya also identifies the basic distinguishing characteristics that make Osofisan’s drama different from those of his contemporaries. Commenting further on the playwright’s dramaturgy and thematic concern, Awodiya observes that,

"The significant thing about Osofisan’s drama is not so much its philosophical content as its posture of revolt: its restless search for fairness in a world of abandoned justice. (13)"

Therefore, enacted myths of rebellion are common to all Osofisan’s plays. It is a rebellion pitched against all manner of betrayal. A rebellion that informs Osofisan’s deliberate subversion of loric traditions suspected to facilitate such betrayal of trust and perpetration of oppression in virtually all his plays. Again, this issue of Osofisan’s deliberate subversion of existing cultural matrices in virtually all his plays is the primary focus of Sandra L. Richards’s *Ancient Songs Set Ablaze* (1996). The “ancient songs,” in this case, are elements from African performative arts including storytelling, ancient myths, and legends, proverbs, dance drama, dilemma tales, trickster stories, and characterization bordering on trickster models, etc.

The subversion approximates Sandra Richards’s idea of “set ablaze,” to the degree that the loric elements, narrative sequence, and characterology, among others, are deliberately ruptured and made to serve new functions, new roles that are defined by specific artistic vision and ideological thrust in such a way that even the original custodians of the indigenous materials might not be able to recognize them. I also need to include the fact that the statement, “Ancient Songs Set Ablaze,” which was adopted by Richards for the title of her book on Osofisan’s plays, is actually taken from one of the songs in his play *The Oriki of a Grasshopper*. An excerpt:

And I shall sing, my love
Of a shield called freedom,
Against which the talons of eagle breaks;
Of a nut impervious
To the knocking of boots, in which

**The kernels are ancient songs**

**Set ablaze;**

Words felonious as the poet
And dangerous to the sword
Of tyrants… (quoted in Sandra L. Richards, iii, emphasis mine)
The lines capture the sense and spirit of his obviously premeditated (if it must be) rebellion that is akin to Bertolt Brecht’s social vision and Epic theatre/drama. It is a rebellion that is informed by a critical sensibility that reduces kings, and the “high” in the society to “buffoons” and “satiric butts,” and “riff-raffs,” while beggars, local tramps are elevated to the pedestal of heroes and heroines. It is a subversion that removes every cultural barrier of discrimination against women, etc. Osofisan’s subversion and loric de-iconization are not limited to the raw indigenous materials only, but extend to include such works which uncritically retain the tragic pathos or paradigm that is suggestive of the “helplessness” or “hopelessness” of humankind’s situation that is perceived to be beyond what humanity could contain. A typical example is the classical Greek tragedy Antigone, and the inter-text, Osofisan’s Tegoni, or other works by African dramatists, like John Pepper Clark’s (Bekederemo) The Raft, Osofisan’s Another Raft, Wole Soyinka’s The Strong Breed, and Osofisan’s No More the Wasted Breed. It is apparent that Osofisan is opposed to the Aeschelian tragic spirit which informed the organizing motif in Antigone and The Raft. In Osofisan’s latest play, Adventures In The Forest of A Thousand Daemons (2008), an adaptation of D.O. Fagunwa’s famous Yoruba novel, ògbójú Ode Ninú Igbo Irúnmalè, directed by Tunde Awosanmi and produced at the University of Ibadan Arts Theatre on 24th September, 2008², the spirits, ghomids, and daemons are made to play significant roles in a manner different from the usually predictable and facile deux ex machine phenomenon which the author Fagunwa originally intended in the Yoruba edition. Rather, for example, in Akaraogun’s encounter with a malevolent spirit which enslaves and rides him like a horse, Iranlowo’s (a benevolent spirit) intervention is to the degree that she merely calls the attention of the captive, Akaraogun (representing the oppressed in the society), to the need for him to use his God-given sense to free himself from his oppressor. Again, Iranlowo’s intervention during the six hunters’ encounter with Agbako, and shortly after Eru Orun, merely calls their attention to the power of the collective efforts of the hunters and the need for them to use their natural talents instead of going solo in tackling an apparent problem common to them all. By so doing, they are able to overcome their problem collectively. In other words, it is only when the hunters apply themselves practically, not through some gods, to the problems as human beings with thinking faculties that they free themselves from apparent danger that could have consumed them. Osofisan believes that the station of humankind is changeable for good to the degree that one is capable of defining and determining one’s destiny, therefore, there is no basis to resign to one’s fate as some myths demonstrated in the plays under reference would have us do.

Similarly, Osofisan seems to reject the concept of scapegoatism with its universal appeal as in Sophocles’s protagonist King Oedipus in Oedipus Rex, Ola Rotimi’s Odewale in The Gods are not to Blame, and Soyinka’s Emma in
The Strong Breed or in his *Death and the King’s Horseman*. The implication of Osofisan’s inter-textuality presupposes that it is no more fashionable for any forward-looking society to put its destiny in the hands of any individual or the so-called hero. In his plays, Osofisan advocates for a “plurimental/collective hero” (Ibitokun, 1986) where everyone is important, and as such, must contribute meaningfully to advance the cause of the society.

Awodiya, like most other critics of Osofisan, no doubt, captures the essence of Osofisan’s dramaturgy. However, the critic’s attempt to locate Osofisan’s dramaturgy without any reference to a theatrical framework, of which an antecedent exists in the Brechtian epic tradition, is a little disturbing. Like everyone and everything else, Osofisan and his theater are products of many influences: his innate endowments (as evident in his quest for artistic fulfillment and originality), his immediate society (drawing inspirations from indigenous African folkloric narrative form and contemporary history), and the world in general through his exposure to Western education and direct personal contacts (as is apparent in the European/Western dramatic forms and influence, especially, Bertolt Brecht’s Epic theatre, on his social and artistic vision, drama, and theater). Like Soyinka’s *The Bacchae of Euripides* or Clark’s (Bekederemo) *Song of a Goat*, the transplantation, transposition, or adaptation of the epic theatrical form onto Africa’s theatrical subsoil by Osofisan has not been uncritical. For example, Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not to Blame* is a typical conventional African tragedy and, regardless of the Sophoclean elements, its organic plot structure, characterization, the recognition of the three basic forces or elements (supernatural, societal, and *hubris*) that are factorial of making and unmaking of the tragic hero in a strictly Aristotelian sense, and regardless of the partial adherence to the use of the three unities, or evidence of classical Sophoclean (Greek) influence as in the story line, it is still incorrect to describe the play as an Aristotelian tragedy. The reason is not far-fetched; it is because of some fundamental features including, the playwright’s exploitation of the resources of Yorùbá language—proverbs, poetry, music, and in particular, such elements as the use of “comic relief” which an Aristotelian tragedy does not accommodate, but which typifies the *Africanness* of the “tragic spirit” in Ola Rotimi’s play.

As a corollary to the above assertion, therefore, it is incorrect to describe Femi Osofisan’s theater as Brechtian as Niyi Osundare (1980) does in his review of *Once upon Four Robbers* and *Morountodun*, without some qualifications, the seeming influence of Brecht’s dramatic philosophy on Osofisan notwithstanding. In the light of this, let me briefly comment on the areas of similarity and of divergence between Bertolt Brecht’s and Femi Osofisan’s dramatic/theatrical peculiarities for the purpose of properly authenticating, locating, and situating the *Africanness* of the latter’s neo-rational drama.
Even though a lot of critics seem to misconstrue Osofisan’s position on whether or not he is a Marxist, what is of relevance to this author is his concern about the extreme bastardization that Marxism has been subjected to, particularly in Nigeria, and in most other African countries. The playwright describes the bastardized version of Marxism which he silhouettes against the authentic Marxist ideals, and finally aligns his commitment and ideological inclination with these ideals. Osofisan identifies and condemns extreme romanticism in the bastardized or “Africanized” edition of Marxism which is being uncritically hoisted on Africans by some self-seeking opportunists. Osofisan (1993) then asks:

Isn’t it that ideas are not fossils, that they must grow according to history and context, that Marxism itself has first to be reintegrated into our own specific circumstances, to be thoroughly indigenized, that is, before it can become a useful tool for us? (37-38)

The playwright calls for a genuine Africanization of Marxist ideals in the original design of its ideologue and proponent if Marxism must be relevant to the reality of African people’s existence.

Similarly, it might be correct, as Michael Etherton concludes, that Osofisan is “of the left” or a “Marxist” (285). However, it is safer to state that he is, in a way, a disciple of the ideals of Marxism as he is often quoted to have professed, without the “Marxist” tag, the way Bertolt Brecht was a “Marxist” without a party-membership card. The use of “might” and “in a way” here, is deliberate, and arises from the fact that one could possibly be a revolutionary without necessarily being a Marxist. This probably accounts for his not being blinded by Marxian party slogans and dogmatism. Like Brecht, and going by Osofisan’s social vision and creativeness as a theater reformer, he is a revolutionary. Indeed, it is correct to conclude that, like Lucifer the “protagonist” in John Milton’s classic, Paradise Lost, Osofisan’s Byronic spirit is largely responsible for his measured degree of self-confessed “subversiveness” that the theater, both in form and content, affords him.6

In the light of the above, therefore, what are the distinguishing features in Osofisan’s dramatic form that were identified by critics and that need to be put in their proper perspectives? Contextually, social revolt dominates both Brecht and Osofisan’s plays. The two playwrights have always employed their characters to enact such revolts that embody the vision of salvation of their respective societies. Again, it is obvious that the two playwrights set out to interrogate the existing conventional drama. They in addition, made conscious efforts at subverting the superstructure because it is meant only to serve and service the ruling class while, at the same time, it further subjects the masses of the people to poverty.
and neglect. In its place the playwrights succeed in recreating new myths that could serve the marginalized masses. Characteristic of Brecht’s plays are that the ensuing dialectics and/or conflicts remain unresolved; similarly, in Osofisan’s *Once upon Four Robbers*, the debate as to who is guilty of the social menace, armed robbery, remains inconclusive.7

Brecht’s plays are episodic in plot-structure, so are Osofisan’s. Their plays often assume a narrative mode of a traditional storyteller. For example, Brecht’s *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, and Osofisan’s *Morountodun* and *Once upon Four Robbers* have their materials sourced from local myths, legends, contemporary history, and some other loric materials. Still in consonance with the folkloric narrative peculiarities in Brecht and Osofisan’s drama is the episodic structure which both playwrights adopt. Unlike the organic or tight plot structure: with “a beginning, middle and an end” that characterizes a conventional/Aristotelian drama, the plays of Brecht and Osofisan have episodic or loose plot. Usually the plays are in episodes and every episode has a complete and intelligible storyline that can stand on its own, and besides, any of the episodes can be swapped with any other within the plot sequence without a serious threat to intelligibility.

Also present in the drama of the two playwrights is the use of alienation effects/technique. It arises from the fact that the plays are intended to appeal to the audience’s reasoning faculty, not their sentiment or emotion. The audience is expected to regard the plays as an exciting experience and, more importantly, as an intellectual discourse on the reality of life where human beings, not the gods, are the judges and determiners of the audience’s fate, as well as the syntax of all actions. It is in this regard that the staging of their plays is made quite unemotional and relatively unattractive. Osundare describes the technique as “anti-illusion.”8 This is quite unlike the conventional drama that deliberately overwhelms its audience with spectacle and stage effects in an attempt to create an illusion that appeals to its emotions through make-believe or “suspense of disbelief.” In the case of Brecht’s theater/drama, there is a conscious abrogation of suspense which is further reinforced by the use of songs/poetry at the end of most scenes; or in some instances a narrator, usually a member of the cast, summarizes succeeding scenes or, as is the case in *Galileo* in which there is a display of a wide screen at the end, or the beginning of each scene on which is written an inscription introducing the next scene.

Osofisan’s adherence to the principle of alienation is not total but partial, to the degree that he does not completely abrogate the use of suspense in his plays. I shall come to this point later. In *Once upon Four Robbers*, for example, actors dress for the performance in the full glare of the audience. “Director,” a member of the cast, introduces the play at the beginning of the action and he reminds the audience that they are in a theater. What is of major interest to both playwrights
is that through the use of the “alienation technique” the audience is not made to suffer any illusion as is characteristic of conventional drama. The banishment of the spectacular, and the alienation effect notwithstanding, songs and/or poetry abound in the plays of both playwrights.

The ideal of a collective hero which characterizes every generic form of Marxist literature (Brustein, 1964), and which is also a familiar cultural index in Yorùbá indigenous social milieu, is also strictly adhered to by both playwrights. However, contrary to the practice in most cultures of the world, or to the true Aristotelian concept of the hero which insists that he must be of royal blood, or of the noble stock, a *primus inter pares* (first among equals) and a *filius dei* (son or a favorite of the gods), Brecht and Osofisan draw their “heroes” from the “wretched-of-the earth,” riff-raffs, drunkards, and social outcasts, etc. It is in the light of this that, in Osofisan’s *Once upon Four Robbers* the four robbers are led by Alhaja to bring about a necessary change for the purpose of reorganizing society. In *Morountodun*, the oral account of the historical Ugbo raids on Ife is the source of the drama; the Yorùbá-Mọrèmi legend, as well as a contemporary historical issue (The Agbekoya-peasant uprising of the late 1960s), are synchronized into a manageable narrative bloc in the play. Titubi the young daughter of an affluent Alhaja aspires to be Mọrèmi the legend. She agrees to be captured by the revolting peasants so that she can facilitate the arrest of the peasants’ leaders, Marshal, Bogunde, and Baba.

The ironic twist is that Titubi later identifies with the peasants’ just cause. She returns and denounces the establishment and its superstructure. The peasants, later joined by Titubi (the legendary Mọrèmi figure), constitute the collective or “plurimental” hero in the play. Perhaps it is of note too that attention be drawn to the fact that what moves a writer into writing is not as important as what he makes of it. In the actual oral account of the legendary Mọrèmi, her personal sacrifice of daring the enemy’s enclave paved the way for the freedom of the Ife community from the incessant attacks of the Ugbo people. The legendary Mọrèmi returned and remained with the ruling class. Similarly, the contemporary historical account of the “Agbekoya” uprising was similar to the original Ife-Ugbo-Mọrèmi legend. This is evident in the police officer who volunteered her womanhood and dared the camp of the perceived “enemy” of the then Western State military government of the governor, Colonel (later Brigadier) Adeyinka Adebayo, and through whom the “ringleader” of the Agbekoya movement was finally arrested after feigning to have “married” him. After accomplishing her mission she still returned to her job to continue to service the status quo, the ruling class.

However, in Osofisan’s successful deconstruction of the Mọrèmi legend, Titubi, unlike Mọrèmi, commits class suicide and joins forces with the peasants. This is quite similar to Ousmane Sembene’s refraction of the actual Senegalese railway workers’ strike of 1947 which failed woefully with tragic consequences,
but which the novelist makes to succeed in *God’s Bits of Wood* under a properly-coordinated strike and a well-organized workers’ union. Refracted events like these are a common feature in Marxist literature which endeavors to state, not what is on the ground but what ought to be. Therefore, as Osundare puts it, Osofisan does not only aim at relieving people’s minds of the stranglehold of myth, he also demythologizes the theater as a medium of social and artistic communication. The fear one entertains, however, is that playwrights of conventional and neo-rationalist plays have the tendency to become extremists of some sort unless caution is exercised in their exploitation of the resources of history and legends. Sarah Joseph (1998) argues history could lead to romanticization of the indigenous, and with it, the lifestyle and living conditions of the society, and fail to take cognizance of “the changes which may have taken place in cultural patterns over time” (94); similarly, there could be something “unhistorical” in the subversive use of history, myths, or legends by the latter. While citing Nicholas Dirks, Joseph cautions, “culture cannot operate outside history and history is always mediated through a multiplicity of cultural forms”\(^\text{10}\)

Still, on the heroic, in Brecht’s *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, the kind-hearted protagonist and heroine, Shen-Te, is a public whore; even the three visiting gods could not measure up to her rich, impressive, and functional virtues. Similarly, in *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, there are characters like Azdak, a notorious local drunk, but who ends up giving a most thoughtful and sensible judgment as Judge; and Grusha, a mere housemaid, who is both dependable, caring, kind-hearted, and motherly, although not yet a biological mother. In these cases, as in all other plays by the two playwrights, these “commoners” are elevated to a heroic pedestal.

Both *Midnight* plays, no doubt, have some basic features of an epic drama. For example, they are narrative in form, episodic in plot structure, and rich in songs and poetry. Often the songs echo comments and criticism of the society. *Midnight Hotel* is a one-act play with short scenes. In *The Midnight Blackout*, there are thirty-three scenes of varied length. The prelude has two songs. There are about ten songs in all. The songs are either at the beginning of a scene or at end of a scene. The songs serve as comments on what has taken place or is about to take place in the plays. Finally on similarities of features, like Brecht, in some cases, Osofisan ends his plays on a deliberately controversial note, leaving the conflict(s) unresolved, as in the case of the four robbers and Aafa who try to convert the theater into a debating hall by asking the audience whether they still feel armed robbers should or should not be executed. Four people are made to participate in the debate, two for and two against. This is not peculiar to Brecht or Osofisan’s plays. T.S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral* also ends on similar controversial note.

Regardless of these observed similarities, as already argued in this study, Osofisan’s plays are not epic drama. This is to the degree that, notwithstanding-
ing the alienation principle,11 his drama accommodates the “use of suspense,” a legacy he probably must have inherited from Yorùbá folk narrative techniques, and the conventional Aristotelian dramatic form. Indeed, the fact that the playwright successfully deploys the use of suspense so effectively in his drama is fundamental to the strength of his dramatic thrust. Suspense, among other factors, gives it identity, uniqueness, and dramatic peculiarity. Suspense, in this case, is managed in a way that turns it into a powerful narrative tool in the development of the playwright’s plot and topicality. A few illustrations will suffice us here.

The use of suspense is a significant element in the conventional drama. Osofisan exploits the resources of suspense in both Midnight Hotel and The Midnight Blackout. Like Wole Soyinka’s The Trials of Brother Jero where the use of suspense significantly strengthens the plot of the play, Osofisan is able to employ, effectively, the use of sustained suspense in Midnight Hotel. For instance, just as Chume is unaware of the relationship between Amope and Brother Jero, so is Asibong unaware of the relationship between Pastor Suuru and Awero. In addition, Jimoh’s promised chieftaincy title in Kano remains in suspense throughout the play.

Furthermore, in The Midnight Blackout, the discovery of the strange piece of cloth torn from someone’s shirt heightens the tempo of the play to a definitive climax that, again, serves as another veritable suspense. The mystery of the professor’s escapades is sustained for as long as the playwright considers it necessary. Again, unlike Brecht’s Epic theatre of which the dialectics remain characteristically unresolved, Osofisan offers a definitive resolution to the complication (conflicts) in The Midnight Blackout in three installments/phases:

(1) the first phase being in Scene 27 (97), a mysterious piece of cloth found by the window leads to the mix-up between Chinwe and Obioma, compounded by Okoro.

(2) the second phase of the resolution begins in Scene 31 (105) as Obioma declares; “listen, I’ll confess everything to you...”

(3) the third phase is in Scene 33 (108).

Apparently, this is in contradistinction to Brecht’s Epic theatre and the alienation concept in the true sense and spirit of that concept. In other words, the use of “suspense” in Osofisan’s drama makes it non-Brechtkian, just as Ola Rotimi’s use of “comic relief” in The Gods Are Not to Blame makes the play non-Aristotelian.

Therefore, the Africanness of Osofisan’s form of drama/theater becomes all the more apparent in the source of the material for the play, theme, setting, language, imagery, characterization, mood, and mold of humor, among others. The immediate society provides the necessary inspiration for the playwright, like his conventional contemporaries. Midnight Hotel and The Midnight Blackout
are among the series of Osofisan’s *Midnight* plays. The former is a criticism of a society lost in the pursuit of wealth: a lost society morally, physically, and spiritually. Again, in a vein similar to Soyinka’s thematic concern in *The Jero* plays on the commercialization of religious institutions, *Midnight Hotel* and *The Midnight Blackout* are direct attacks on the moral atrophy of intellectuals in the field of politics, business, academics, or the clerics. For example, in *Midnight Hotel*, Pastor Suuru is not only engaged in extramarital affairs, he is also a business contractor, no longer the shepherd of the Lord’s sheep. Similarly, Professor Juokwu in *The Midnight Blackout* is involved in extramarital affairs.

In both plays the comedic and satiric interweave through characterization, situations, and events. In *Midnight Hotel*, characters like Jimoh and Bicycle (a tell-tale name) are stark illiterates, common hotel attendants, but intelligent and truly in charge of their official assignments. On the contrary, Osofisan paints a caricature of the so-called “elites,” or those who, in a conventional drama, could be regarded as “noble” characters. For example, Asibong the half-deaf businessman is made to look like a fool, in sharp contrast to the two attendants. There is also role swapping in the case of Awero the woman parliamentarian who always insists on “sampling.” Ordinarily, it is some man, not a woman, especially in countries like Nigeria, who is likely to take undue advantage of the “woman” in such circumstances as described in the Awero-Pastor Suuru episodes. Similarly, one expects an educated Chief Alatishe, a retired headmaster, to be more discerning, to have better decorum and a proper up-bringing for his three daughters, but he behaves more or less like a stock illiterate. The observable slackness in the ladies might not be unconnected with the lack of necessary exposure on the part of the girls, to the extent that they are vulnerable to abuse by the “friendly” and “nice” drunken soldiers. It is both a warning about, and a criticism of, the way some educated folks over-protect their daughters, and without giving them basic sex education, so that should they fall into the hands of opportunists, they might be easily preyed upon. Similarly, the general behavior of the soldiers reminds one of the Nigerian Police Public Relations Officer, Inspector Ogubuaja and his comments about “pepper-soup soldiers.” In *The Midnight Blackout*, similar characters abound; for example, Professor Juokwu and his queer behavior—his “blackout” formula through hypnotism, as well as his affairs with Akubundu’s wife; and Iberibe a highly placed diplomat, making amorous advances to his host’s wife, Obioma.

Some events also manifest the comedic, as well as the satiric. For example, such notable events in *Midnight Hotel* include the following: Chief Alatishe’s speech and mannerism; Pastor Suuru who is caught red-handed by Chief Alatishe; the Pastor’s fruitless attempt to lie; Chief Alatishe’s attempted suicide; the “ghostly” Asibong and the “dustbin-hat”; the three “innocent” daughters
of Chief Alatishe having fun with the soldiers; the meeting of Awero and the husband, and Pastor Suuru.

Osofisan’s materials for his plays, as demonstrated earlier in this study, are sourced either from contemporary history (Once upon Four Robbers) or from oral legends and myths, as in Morountodun, or even from ritual, except that Osofisan’s drama, like Brecht’s, does not give ritual or local myths the kind of attention and reverence associated with most conventional plays. His use of myth, legends, etc., is a means to definite ends. There is a deliberate demystification as well as demythologizing here, unlike what obtains in the plays of his contemporaries and of earlier generation. For example, even though Wole Soyinka in A Dance of the Forest attempts to make the divinities that people its universe appear a little less than gods, he does not consider them replaceable. Therefore, his effort lacks the boldness, the vehemence, and the thrust with which Osofisan pursues, almost with passion, his attempt to “desecrate the divine” associated with indigenous African beliefs and, in their place, erect new mythic structures meant to perform new and relevant roles.

In Once upon Four Robbers, Angola, Hasan, Major, and Alhaja, the four robbers, receive a charm called tírà from a Muslim priest which enables them to rob the people in the market. Soldiers are mesmerized, Major turns greedy and gets arrested by the police and is later tied to the stake to be shot. Aafa’s coup d’ état saves Major, but the question then is, who is the robber? One could trace the narrative source of the play to the traditional trickster story of the tortoise and the dog that went to steal from a distant farm during a famine. The tortoise got caught because of his greed, indicative of Major’s role or characterization in the play. It is significant to note that Alhaja and the Muslim priest who gives her the tírà have their antecedents in Midnight Hotel’s Pastor Suuru and Awero who are their Christian counterparts. By implication, it is the playwright’s way of condemning deceit, subterfuge, and moral atrophy that now characterize the two major religions in Nigeria. This is also what he has done in No More the Wasted Breed, Morountodun, Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels, Aringindin, and Tegoni, among others.

Again, it may be argued that this idea of replacing the old myths with new ones is not common only to Brecht or Osofisan’s plays, that, for example, in Ngugi’s Black Hermit or Ngugi/Mugo’s The Trial of Dedan Kimathi the playwrights evolve similar new myths. It is correct to say that it characterizes the Marxian dimension to literature in general, and perhaps, is suggestive of Osofisan’s ideological bias or preference; nonetheless, these other plays are largely conventional. For example, Ngugi, Bode Osanyin, Bode Sowande, and Olu Obafemi’s plays, among others remain within the boundaries of modern African conventional drama, except perhaps in characterology and topicality, which they share with Osofisan’s drama. It is for this reason, among others, that
it is not enough to identify Osofisan as a second-generation African playwright; his drama/theater stands out among its contemporaries and is best described as *neo-rationalist theater*.

**CONCLUSION**

By way of concluding this chapter, one must acknowledge and commend the efforts of critics like Osundare (1980), Jeyifo (1990), Obafemi (1992), Awodiya (1993 & 1995), Richards (1995), Olaniyan (1995), among a host of other critics, for their invaluable pioneering works on Osofisan; and the contributors, as well as the editors of the present volume for their sustained interest in, and vision of calling attention of the reading public to the invaluable legacy which Osofisan is handing over to the present generation and generations of Africans yet unborn, and for documenting the same for global visibility and accessibility. No doubt, the Osofisan neo-rationalist theater, like Brecht’s Epic theatre, constitutes a separate theatrical form in modern African drama.

**NOTES**

1. Niyi Osundare is known more as a foremost African poet; however, unknown to many, Osundare also has produced four topically revolutionary plays: *The State Visit, The Man Who Refused to Say Yes, The Man Who Walked Away,* and *The Wedding Car.* Besides *The State Visit* which was published in 2002 by Kraft Books, Ibadan, Nigeria, others are yet to be published, although they have been produced at different times at the University of Ibadan Arts Theatre.

2. Incidentally, Akinwumi Isola’s adaptation of the same novel, which was also directed by Tunde Awosanmi, was produced a week earlier at the same Arts Theatre. The marked difference is the fact that while Isola sticks faithfully, and as much as possible, to the original Yoruba version (in language and Yoruba philosophy cum-pseudo Christian doctrines), Osofisan’s version is in English, and there is obvious deconstruction to make the play comply with his kind of social and artistic vision (theatrical form and ideology) in his ability to collapse time and space, the past and the present, in the use of alienation principle, etc. The production was a unique theatrical experience altogether.

3. Not seven as we have in Fagunwa’s original edition.


6. This was demonstrated both in content and in the unorthodox manner he presented his inaugural lecture, “Playing Dangerous…”

7. There are few indications of resolved conflicts as in the case of *The Midnight Blackout*.
8. Osundare, Ibid.
9. Ugbo, an indigenous community, is located not far from Epe, a coastal town near Lagos. This explanation is necessary to correct the wrong impression often created by some critics and historians that the people were Igbo from Eastern Nigeria. The correct spelling is Ugbo, and not Igbo.

REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION

Beyond history and culture, the political and social problems confronting the emergent nations of Africa—Nigeria not excluded—contributed to the choice of “commitment” on the part of certain established and upcoming playwrights in the 1970s. This was to signal a shift in their (the playwrights’) perception of the possibility of salvation as a societal collective responsibility, rather than the celebration of the individual hero in plays of the previous generation. As it paved the way for the emergence of the drama of revolutionary change, this development also came to terms with the cleavages and clan identities which followed in the first ten years of independence.

Their thematic response naturally became manifest in the adoption of a doctrine of political and ideological commitment as a weapon in the struggle for the emancipation of the peasants, workers, and the urban and rural downtrodden from the bondage of the ruling classes. With an open identification with the less privileged, and a commitment to their eventual liberation, this drama offered a new direction, eloquently speaking a “new language,” as exploitation and oppression formed the kernel of their themes in favor of the societal “underdogs.” These themes—some of which have existed in the plays of the pioneer generation, notwithstanding—find fertile expression in the soil of corruption, already a festering cankerworm in the body polity of the Nigerian nation, as an offshoot of the civil war (1967-1970) which threw up more armed robbers and opened the eyes of many to the abundant, yet-to-be tapped oil resources in the country.
Since the writer lives in this society, and owes a responsibility to it, his/her response as a committed writer must come in themes and styles to reflect the aspirations of his/her people. The committed writer, Akorede asserts, “is to make his people aware of the socio-economic and political problems, the cause and to some extent, the solution to such problems (17).” In other words, the environment furnishes a writer with the material with which he/she creates his/her work; therefore, the influence of this creation on the same environment cannot be underestimated.

THE RISE OF AN IDEOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVE

Departing from the non-tangible, supersensible solution to practical and tangible social problems that were the thematic thrust of the Soyinka generation, Obafemi notes that a new group emerged, determined “to break down societal problems in the light of real historical occurrences (12).” Their ideology was materialist in description/perception and dialectical in approach. Their mission was to impress upon their audiences that man’s problems originate from man and not from the metaphysical realm or from the gods and, therefore, he further contends, only man can, by himself find solutions to his problems.

The group asserted that only a restructuring of society along purely socialist and egalitarian lines can put an end to strife, hunger, violence, war, pestilence, etc., all of which are caused by want or capitalist greed. To them, this is only possible through collective action on the part of the down-trodden masses. To overthrow the corrupt and decadent status quo, therefore, a practical manifestation of will and determination is required.

Social revolution, and the strident call for one, make a materialist perspective in art and society imperative, as Osofisan has argued that an animist worldview has been rendered obsolete by colonialism and the experiences of capitalism and modernization. To conquer corruption, decadence, graft, and moral confusion the awareness of class-consciousness becomes a task for the writer whose response the society actually awaits in most cases, to create the desired seeds for a revolution.

In response to the challenges of shaking off the stupor of post-independence disillusionment, this crop of playwrights came with a different thematic thrust, like a new weapon in the manner of legendary Ògún, Yoruba god of iron and war, who, according to myth, had fashioned a weapon of iron with which he cleared the path for the other òrisà when they all descended to earth. The list includes Fela Davies, Comish Ekiye, Soji Simpson, Kole Omotoso, Bode Sowande, Meki Nzewi, Laolu Ogungunyi, Bode Osanyin, and Femi Osofisan. To this crop, we want to add Sonny Otti (1943-1997), Tess Onwueme, Tunde Fatunde (a pidgin drama expert), Olu Obafemi, Akanji Nasiru, Segun Oyejunle, Sam Ukala, Iyorwuese
Hagher, Stella Oyedepo, Hyginus Ekwuazi, Rasheed Gbadamosi, Sonny Samson-akpan, Chris Nwamuo, Fred Agbeyegbe, Obi Egbuna, Catherine Acholonu, Ahmed Yerima, and Irene Salami. Many in this list constitute the band of ‘lesser-known stars’ in the generation, with their dramatic flowering coming in the 1980s and 1990s.

A handful of these dramatists have actually passed from the tutelage or brief apprenticeship under the pioneer generation. Anger, suspicion, and outright condemnation make up the collective mood of this generation, many of whom had gone to school in latter years of colonialism and are thus living witnesses to the way of life when their aspirations, dreams, and hopes were shaped and buoyed by the promise of a glorious future for their newly-independent nation. Their collective or individual expectations were however, gradually but surely deflated, one after the other, especially with the military’s disastrous rule and autocratic nature, and what they did to the fatherland through their insistence on holding onto power beyond the promised date of return-to-civil-rule.

The regime of General Yakubu Gowon (July 29, 1966-July 29, 1975) had earlier on set October 1, 1976 as the handing-over date for the much-desired Second Republic. On October 1, 1974 the administration announced the non-feasibility of the date after eight years of military rule. The collective hope of the people received a jolt and a general mood of despair began to sweep through the entire land. Even the oil boom which had hitherto given the people a sense of succor, soon turned to oil doom with the concrete evidence of a collapsed economy. The stage was thus set for the apostles of a positive revolutionary alternative to the decadence which Gowon’s rule threw up. The signpost of their departure from the Soyinka-led pioneer generation was their conscious ideological commitment with which they proposed to raise mass awareness among the people to contemporary social problems plaguing them.

Obafemi asserts that this group helped to reveal the revolutionary potential of the theatrical medium to make firm political statements, through their urgent handling of such topical issues as the phenomenon of armed robbery, students’ rampages, class struggle, corruption, fierce capitalism, and feminist concerns. He adds that,

in their total rejection of the idealist vision based on the animist-meta-physics of their predecessors and their preference for social change through the collective will of the masses lies their unanimity. (168)

From an intellectual terrain, the appearance of this group signaled the birth of an ideologically-driven force, a force that stood up against the overbearing hegemony of the ruling class, and was to declare that art is both “politically correct” and artistically powerful. Their emergence was not without its own fair share of dilemma, however.

Irele, from an analytical, scholarly, and critical perspective describes them as,
an eclectic group of radical university teachers and intellectuals, that came to be known as the Ibadan-Ife axis, distinguished by their strict doctrinal affiliations and common disaffection for the power structure in Nigeria, and their passion for a profound reordering of their society along socialist and egalitarian lines. (ii)

He sympathized with their dilemma of being caught between their resistance to cooption by the ruling class to which they are tied, and the pursuit of their advocacy. This dilemma forms the theme of Osofisan’s response in his play, The Oriki of a Grasshopper, from the psychological and ideological perspectives. Ogunbiyi’s reading of this group is of “a different crop of playwrights” (who emerged in the post-civil war period). “The finest crop...are set apart from their first compatriots not necessarily by any substantial age difference (where it does exist at all), but rather by temperament and vision, hardened as it were, by the wounds and trauma of the civil war” (36).

THE LESSER-KNOWN STARS: A SYNOPTIC VIEW

Before we go into the discussion of Femi Osofisan, the icon of this generation, it is pertinent to point out those playwrights who emerged alongside the aforementioned, but whose shine was not as visible. For our present endeavor, the quartet of Oyedepo, Obafemi, Nasiru, and Fatunde would serve to illustrate the coterie of “lesser-known stars” of the second generation, towards a definition of their dramatic enterprise and relevance, having chosen to depict and represent in their works, our contemporary socio-political and economic realities with a satiric brush in an agitation propaganda, or “agit-prop,” coloration.

Rather than being rhetorical like Sowande in their themes and approach to the ideology of Marxism in literature, this category projected their message through experimental dramatization of the fate of the oppressed masses in the hands of the oppressor-elite. Their thematic proposition is the overthrow of hegemonic tendencies in their society, based on the reawakening of social consciousness. We therefore want to see them in the light of a “transitional generation” from the second generation to the post-Osofisan generation, our main focus in this thesis, just as Zulu Sofola and Wale Ogunyemi stand as the “transitional duo” linking the Soyinka generation with the Osofisan generation.

OSOFISAN: THE ICON OF A GENERATION—AN APPRAISAL

That the plays and name of Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan have come to represent the second generation can be viewed in the same manner that Wole Soyinka
stands out as the doyen of Nigerian dramatic literature of English expression. The themes he has treated and still continues to treat have ensured the survival of his *revolution* and that of his class of dramatists, also represented by the trio of Bode Sowande, Kole Omotoso, and Tess Onwueme whose analysis we attempt in the following section.

It is obvious that Femi Osofisan *did not* take part in the Oxford University Press, OUP-sponsored playwriting competition of 1969 in which Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not To Blame* won the first prize, while Kole Omotoso’s “Pitched against the Gods” placed third. Dunton informs us of Omotoso’s participation in the above competition, and it is pertinent to note here the similarity of titles, and probably even theme, in the first play by Osofisan, titled, “Oduduwa Don’t Go,” a play about the Yoruba gods and their attitude to socio-political reality, with the above plays. Perhaps Oxford University Press had prescribed a thematic perspective for the drama competition. The coincidence of their dates of debut, 1968 and 1969, makes Osofisan and Omotoso respectively members of the second generation of Nigerian dramatists.

Osofisan as the exemplary icon of that generation has been described by Goodman in the following:

Osofisan and his ilk of the generation after Wole Soyinka obviously agitated the Nigerian Theatre by their social zeal. Their generation differs from Wole Soyinka’s because of their technique and ideological commitment. They are apostles of the New Left. Thus, being branded leftists or Marxists never bothered them, especially with some of them nurturing bushy beard, as signs of rebellion against the status quo, and going further to wear their belt’s buckle the other way round, and to the side of the pelvis. They turned the stage into a platform and a pulpit like Arnold Wesker (of the British Theatre) and are held together by the common bond of social protest, which gives them an ample chance to expand their thematic preoccupation as wide as possible. (216)

The oil-boom era of the 1970s, and the attendant squander mania on the part of the military rulers, provided the canvas on which the playwrights painted their responses to the social and political realities of the time. Since Osofisan’s first play mentioned above, he has been radical thematically, technically, and stylistically in his taming of the stage with his experiments. Whereas Sowande has been more rhetorical than politically effective in his approach, Osofisan, conscious of the great social, political, and moral changes going on around him, has tried to see the times not just from a local or Nigerian, but also from a universal point of view. The social class differences, consciousness, and ideology—all these were critically but creatively explored by Osofisan.
Barakat has observed that, “there is no theme that could not be presented in an artistic and creative form (135).” Osofisan in conformity to the above has used the folktale motif to weave dramatic statements on the political realities of our time, in his role as a visionary writer who stimulates active questioning, doubting and insurrection, in order to help diagnose and increase awareness on the Nigerian situation, protesting, and moving others to protest.1 Awodiya has noted the major objective of Osofisan’s drama as the ceaseless fight against corruption, oppression, and injustice, and fight for social equality in a transformed classless and egalitarian society. In his plays, Osofisan refuses to celebrate individual tragic heroes because, in his view, heroism based on the individual plane leads to catastrophe.

Through his thematic trend and preoccupation, which extend to his large body of plays, including published titles like, A Restless Run of Locusts, The Chattering and the Song, Who’s Afraid of Solarin?, Once upon Four Robbers, Morountodun, No More the Wasted Bread, Red is the Freedom Road, Midnight Hotel, Farewell to a Cannibal Rage, Oriki of a Grasshopper, Altine’s Wrath, Another Raft, Birthdays Are Not For Dying, Fires Burn and Die Hard, The Inspector and the Hero, Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels, Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen, Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest, The Album of the Midnight Blackout, Twingle-Twangle, a Twyinning Tayle, Many Colours Make the Thunder-King, Tegonni, Reel Rwanda, Africa Ni, Nkrumah Ni!, One Legend, Many Seasons, he has constantly sensitized the society to the potential of theater as political activity.

The Chattering and the Song is the play that established Osofisan’s ideological commitment to the plight of the downtrodden. Not content merely to expose the ills of society, he has dared to provide us with glimpses of his vision of a new society. Chattering has been described by one militant and critic as, “the most revolutionary play ever written and produced in Nigeria, and its fervent plea is for a revolution,” as Jeyifo records in his book, The Truthful Lie. Jeyifo further notes that the play attempts to show the world how revolutionaries are made; of what stuff are they made; in what consists the rightness and authority of their cause? (52).

On another level, a number of Osofisan’s plays have come true in our present reality as vintage drama on the alienating of class society. In April 1998—five years after the annulment of the popular June 12, 1993 presidential election mandate given by Nigerians to the late M. K. O. Abiola (who was to die mysteriously only three months later, on July 7, 1998)—the Agbekoya (or Farmers reject suffering), the real life precursor and model of Osofisan’s Farmers’ Movement in Chattering, betrayed the people’s expectations. These defenders of the people’s rights unfortunately pitched their tent with the state, and allowed the latter’s
agents to unleash terror on the masses and apostles of change, in the course of a
despicable pro-government rally to canvass for the transmutation into a civilian
president of the then *de facto* head of state, General Sani Abacha, who died on
June 8, 1998, about a month before Abiola.

*Once upon Four Robbers*, another play by Osofisan, rings so loudly of the
reality surrounding our lives which keeps us bound. The metaphor of armed
robbery as an equivalent to the function of the army is used against the backdrop
of society’s hypocrisy against the robbers, which the playwright criticizes. The
robbers are seen challenging society by the self-assessment of their daring audac-
ity, forcing the latter to painfully come to terms with the real plunderers of their
life and property—the soldiers deployed to “cage” the former—in an open ending.
Osofisan employs the same motif in *Aringindin and the Night Watchmen*.

It is equally pertinent to note that the dramatist could have alluded to the
present-day episodes of kidnapping which have become daily rituals in the oil-
rich, but highly devastated Niger-Delta region in *Aringindin*, where Aringindin’s
boys kidnap the Councilor’s daughter, only to be wagered for her hand in mar-
rriage with the former—obviously because the community is not endowed with
the “black gold” (crude oil) which could have become the bone of contention and
led to further bloodshed as the State abdicated its responsibility to the militants,
or *night watchmen*.

As the icon of that phenomenal generation of young radicals, propelled by
Marxist ideology, in response to the anxiety of liberalism, Osofisan takes to the
self-questioning of not only themes but also myths that are very familiar to the
audience, which he “tames,” as Richards has noted. Rather than oppose them, “he
subjects tradition to scrutiny and reinterpretation, using its own modes of thought
and structure” (288). The playwright himself has admitted in an interview with
Ossie Enekwe that he re-reads and uses myth, “only from a subversive perspec-
tive. I borrow ancient forms specifically to unmask them” (79).

The myth of Sango, the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning and retributive
justice which he borrows for *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* is used with
a deep understanding of the society in which he lives as a writer with a vision and
a task. Jacobson once noted in his response to Soyinka that

The duty of the writer will depend (in a Modern African State) upon
the particular society he lives in. And even then, each writer is likely
to see his duty in a different way. (28)

Thus, Osofisan has done with his themes what Marxist radicalism has done to
contemporary history and reality. The main thrusts of his thematic preoccupation
are *compassion, knowledge*, and *justice*, as the triangular impulses which have
shaped, and have been sharpened by, his dialogic climaxes in most, if not all,
of his plays in the form of debate, which sometimes begins right in the theater, immediately after the performance. The impulses have been aided by his aesthetics, a thriving revolutionary and radical “aesthetics of possibility” to enable progressive creativity, with theatrical forms, which Osofisan himself admits,
is a rejection of the old cultic conception of dramaturgy, with its quasi-esoteric mechanics and thematic forms; of hermetic tropes and symbols fashionable with neo-Romanticists and formalists; of the centrality of the agonistic hero with its implications of martyrdom and of enervating metaphysical anguish; and of Aristotelian catharsis, in favour of open-ended resolution. And finally, the audience is energized, provoked out of its customary passive response into active participation and challenge. (“The Terror of Relevance”, 93)

The challenge thrown at the Osofisan generation by the plays of the first generation Nigerian playwrights, which we have noted earlier, became manifest in a revolt against their forms and themes, to revolutionize the status quo of Soyinka’s original “ritual aesthetics,” in place of potential tragedy and annihilation. This development, Osofisan asserts, marked his departure from mimesis, and the beginning of his maturation as a dramatist.

Jeyifo has described Osofisan as, “a consummate aesthetist and mythopoeist, given to the creation of extended effects and motifs,” (53) because of the extraordinary nature of his forms, techniques, and style, which have aided his experiments to assume their own originality over the years. His characterization is more often than not done metaphorically, creating figures in drama eclectically for the purpose of educating, entertaining, informing, and enlightening his audiences. Osofisan apparently has proved the truism of Jeyifo’s dictum that form is always the dialectical handmaiden of content in his plays. His constant reminder that only a collective revolution can bring about change in the people’s fortune is anchored on his observation that an “enduring revolutionary work is collective work, of people acting together. It does not mean that the individual is useless. The individual is usually a good catalyst,” since he believes that salvation lies in the people themselves (see Awodiya, The Drama of Femi Osofisan).

Osofisan’s drama also makes an ample case for Nigerian youths to take their destiny in their hands in search of harmony as we encounter in both Yungba-Yungba and Aringindin, in a multi-ethnic entity like ours, as opposed to the type of youthful response Nigerians witnessed between 1997 and 1998 in the fraudulent and obnoxious Youth Earnestly Ask For Abacha, YEAA, an association which sprang up under dubious circumstances to perpetuate late General Abacha in office and purportedly held a “2-million man march” in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, on March 2, 1998 as was widely reported by many national dailies.
One other play by Osofisan that has become a common denominator of our collective consciousness in the quest for a just, transparent, and corruption-free polity is *Midnight Hotel*, first published in 1985. Inspired by the greed, recklessness, and betrayal of the politicians of the Second Republic in the aftermath of thirteen years of military interregnum, the play is situated in the world of the Midnight Hotel, a seedy haven for all manner of public officers elevated by the newfound freedom offered by democracy. Osofisan employs humor, according Awodiya, “to paint a scathing picture” (205), and to tell the serious, interesting but unpalatable story of hunger and squalor, diseases and agony, death, and violence which became the order of the Shagari days in the midst of our endowment. Two decades later, the story still rings true in the characters of the new pseudo-democrats who still dole out squalor and disease and hunger alongside seeds of hope to the teeming population, even in the face of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the anti-graft institution set up in 2003 and backed by law in 2004. The optimism expressed by the playwright is founded on the soil of sacrifice, and a life of unending struggle. But before the harvest, the likes of Pastor Suuru, Honourable Awero, Headmaster Alatise, Ashibong and the other guests in Midnight Hotel with their scummy escapades would taint the planting season.

Ashibong, housing-agent-cum-architect, whose company has leased out the hotel building, comes on a fact-finding mission upon the complaint that one of the rooms, Number 7, is being haunted by ghosts. Jimoh, the receptionist, who checks him into Room 7, enthuses:

JIMOH: (Seeing him tremble). But…you’re sure you won’t like to change your mind?

ASHIBONG: (Putting up a bold face). Oh not at all, chief! I see too there are many beds here. (Forcing a joke, to cover his nervousness). It’s a family of ghosts who come visiting then? (A sudden burst of singing and laughter from upstairs cuts in, startling him). Hey, listen, what’s that noise? Ghosts don’t laugh, do they?

JIMOH: (Laughing). It’s the lodgers upstairs, sir. Soldiers, here for a week.

ASHIBONG: I see. Ah, bissimilahi!…Allah, I am in the hands of your prophet tonight! (20)

Unknown to him, his wife, Awero, “the only female member of the Capital Projects Committee in the House of Assembly,” is on her way to the same hotel for a “safe” rendezvous with a frightened, but contract-seeking Pastor Suuru, her husband’s friend. According to her,
AWERO: …I’m telling you it’s regular practice in parliament. All the male MPs are doing it, even to their own nieces and cousins! Everyone in our Contracts and Awards Committee is taking some member of the opposite sex somewhere or the other before jobs are given out. They call it “sampling the goods”. So why should I be different? Listen, we even have a song about it. (23)

She calls for the Song in Praise of Sampling the Goods from the Songmaster, one of the many that make this play and some others by the same author operatic as they are checked into Room 6, opposite Ashibong’s. The point must be made that Osofisan uses songs in the Brechtian style of alienating the audience from the action on stage, advancing the narration and as a thematic device of enlightenment in a total theater experience. Awero assures the Pastor of getting the contract,

AWERO:Once you co-operate, and I sample – (She goes to him, but he recoils instinctively). Once you stop making a fool of yourself!…your company can bag ten…fifteen…even twenty! …Twenty contracts in a week! (35)

The naïve Pastor is reluctant and clumsy to take advantage of her offer, and in a dramatic twist, as he begins to feel a burning sensation in his head, claims his rivals have pursued him to the hotel because they also want the contract.

SUURU: My head!…I don’t know. Suddenly this burning sensation! Don’t leave me Awero! There is in my head…in my head…a fire! A fire!
AWERO:(Frightened). A fire?
SUURU: It must be my rivals. They want the contracts too. They’ve pursued me to this place! Ah Awero, you can see I did my best to the end. I’m going to die. (35)

He sings an ode to his Swiss accounts, which he would never see again if he dies, Awero can only think of her own reputation:

AWERO:You can’t, Kunle! You can’t! Think of the scandal in Parliament! You can’t die now; you’ve got to wait till you get home!
SUURU: How? You know we can’t go now. It’s not safe, with all these robbers about. We’ve got to wait till morning. Ah, Lord, forgive us, as we forgive you your trespasses! (Crosses himself). Jah! (Takes off his agbada). I feel hot all over …and I’ve not even written my will! (37)
The dramatic conflict comes when Alatise arrives with his three daughters, and they are checked into Room 7 by Bicycle, Jimoh’s assistant, who has no idea that someone is already staying there. Tension is heightened as Alatise runs into Awero in the lobby and recognizes her as Mrs. Asibong. As a cover-up, she tells him about a quarrel with her husband, hence, her presence in the hotel. He innocently detains her with talk about the new government and how he has lost his school, land, and even his deposit, subsequently calling for the “Song of the Lost Deposit”. After the song, Alatise asks his daughters to keep her company as they all troop into her room. His attempts to show concern for the girls and calm Awero’s obviously frayed nerves fail. As he moves to go, he appears to give up, interjecting:

ALATISE: All right then. Girls! (They start to go. He turns again at the door. Same game). I’m surprised, though, that you didn’t first seek out some of your close family friends to mediate in the matter. That would have been better than coming here, surely? I mean, that Pastor Suuru, for instance, whom you once introduced to me in your house. He seemed very intimate with your husband, and looked quite a responsible man too…Pastor Suuru is a close friend of your husband, isn’t he?

AWERO: Yes, very close. But if you please—

ALATISE: Then I’m sure he could have helped!

AWERO: I know….Only, he has travelled!…Overseas!

ALATISE: Are you sure? This afternoon, as we arrived, I thought…may be I’m mistaken. But I could have sworn it was him we saw from the bus standing by his car on Ikorodu Road…

AWERO: It’s possible. He …he only left by the evening flight.

ALATISE: I see …What a pity then—

(At that moment, the door opens, and the Pastor comes in. Everybody jumps in surprise). (53-54)

The “coincidence” of his appearance in his singlet, and all the efforts at covering up by both Awero and the Pastor are not lost on the headmaster, who decides to leave them for their own room, to which Ashibong returns later, making straight for the toilet, oblivious of the presence of four strange people. The girls wake up and begin the “Song of the Fairy Mother,” dancing round the candle. As Ashibong comes out and sees them, he runs out towards Awero’s door, shouting:

ASHIBONG: It’s ghosts! I beg you! The ghosts are coming! Please open up! Open up before they get me! (57)
He succeeds in forcing his way into the room where Awero quickly covers his head with a wastepaper basket and pushes him out. The play moves quickly to its climax from this point as the three girls, unable to wake up their father, flee up the stairs, where the soldiers give them VIP treatment and vice-versa. In the meantime, the older characters meet in the lobby to a hilarious moment of truth, from reconciliation to realization of the folly just committed by the couple and the girls:

BOSE: Papa!...The soldier, he was so kind! Papa, how easy it is to earn money in the city! We should have come long ago!

ALATISE: Pastor, you see? I’ve ruined them! Ruined my own daughters! (80)

Bicycle comes tumbling down the stairs again as he did at the opening, bearing the tale of Alatise’s suicide by hanging while trying to fetch the other two girls, only for him to appear, with his belt dangling from his neck, to his weeping Bose:

ALATISE: I’m here, my daughter...You see—Eti ro-o! The spirit was willing, but not the neck!...It seems to me we are in for a long and turbulent night. But before we retire to our rooms, why not let us sing a song together? (84)

whereupon they sing the “Song of a Faraway Land.”

The playwright uses historical consciousness as theme, to rouse the people from, rather than join, the general despair and save them from the asphyxiating amnesia characterized by the terror unleashed by the military since January 15, 1966. Osofisan thus hopes the people would be salvaged soon, even as he proposes a rite of cleansing, if the people’s revolution is to succeed. This is a vision the post-Osofisan generation, albeit, unconsciously at first, set out to fulfill.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

From the foregoing, we have traced the evolution and maturation of the second generation of Nigerian dramatists, who, taking up Soyinka’s challenge to shake off their ostrich posture, have utilized the “forgotten gems which dazzled and distracted the present” to reshape the same present, turning inwards, truly into the present, and into the obvious symptoms of “the riddling…and predictable present”. Their attempt has been able to bring forth enlightenment, enhance consciousness, provoke debate, and to ensure salvation through galvanized action. Osofisan, as the intellectual-activist, does not believe in any utopia (in contrast
to Rotimi’s observation of the thematic thrust of utopian model), as most of his plays have shown, but in a practical, realistic grasp of events. Okonkwo’s assertion that, “the intellectual subjects his appraisal of events, situations and natural phenomena to rigorous scrutiny in order to arrive at some solutions to social and physical problems in his environment and persuades others to accept his proposed solutions”, (15) captures Osofisan’s dramatic mission. That Osofisan has dared to engage his audiences to reflect on social divisions and on the miserable conditions under which a majority of them live is not in doubt.

Femi Osofisan was indeed not the first voice of a whole new generation of the post-oil boom writers who came to notice over the ‘70s and are now some of our leading established authors, whose names, works and thematic focus have shaped the trend of discourse in Nigerian literature. But he has carved a reputation for being the most vocal, visible, and prolific ambassador. An appraisal of the process of his evolution and maturation in the “playhouse” of Nigerian dramatic literature has been the subject of this chapter, with a view to celebrate one of Africa’s leading contemporary literary figures. His Muse—originality, creativity, imagination and zest—make him stand out among his peers as a consummate creative writer and a first-rate scholar. And he has indeed inspired many worthy successors, through his bubbling creativity.

Notes

3. Femi Osofisan, Midnight Hotel, (Lagos: Concept Publications, 2003). All the quotations above are taken from this play.

References


INTRODUCTION: LITERATURE AND PARALITERATURE IN THE ESSAYS OF FEMI OSOFISAN

In a statement released in 1978 in the course of an interview with Mudiya Awodiya, Femi Osofisan affirmed that, “as to my aim in writing...let me say I want desperately to get close to the spectator ...I want to make the spectator happy but uncomfortable” (Excursions, 18). This statement, which refers to Osofisan’s theater and to his highly-acclaimed Brechtian dramatic technique, may also be applied to the author’s collections of essays, which gather together most of his criticism published over the last thirty years, and contain some of his sharpest assertions. Amongst the latter are the author’s views on popular genres, all of which share the tone characteristic of the essay “Domestication of an Opiate: Western Paraaesthetics and the Growth of the Ekwensi Tradition” (The Nostalgic Drum), the most explicit on the subject, in which he writes that,

“As opiate, anaesthetic and consoling, functions the entire range of the literary corpus defined as “paraliterature” or, more commonly, as popular literature.... Paraliterature refers to such works as the novels of adventure, crime and espionage (“whodunit [sic]”), war thrillers, Sci-Fi, comic strips, cheap romantic fiction and so on.” (Domestication, 287)

I imagine that many critics, faced with such a firm, yet debatable, belief, might feel uncomfortable; however, Osofisan’s collections of essays are so rich in their overall perspective on African, and especially Nigerian, politics, history,
and literature that, notwithstanding the bewilderment that some of his statements may cause, it is difficult to imagine a reader not feeling intellectually happy after going through the many and varied issues that Osofisan discusses in his critical collections. Osofisan’s writing may in fact be seen as an enduring effort to mirror the real conditions of Nigerian society, as well as to enhance the people’s awareness of their present difficulties and future potentials, therefore contributing to both the resolution of the overall problems of the nation and to the eventual elaboration of a “national ethos.”

In this perspective, whatever the overall judgement on the whole of his production may be, Osofisan’s contribution to the debate on Nigeria and its culture remains invaluable. This is not to say that either the exponents of the previous generation of playwrights, such as Wole Soyinka and John Pepper Clark-Beke-deremo, or his present colleagues, from Bode Sowande to Kole Omotoso, have not equally contributed to the debate on the current state of Nigeria; nor that they have not reached Osofisan’s excellence in playwriting, given that, “if Osofisan derives in large part his satiric method from Soyinka, and his songs, dances, and poetry from the indigenous artistic repertoire, the ideological character of his work from Brecht and other practitioners of political theatre, his use of language follows the pattern earlier established by Ola Rotimi” (Obafemi, 205). This essay does not wish to draw any comparison between Nigerian playwrights or rate their success, which, as Obafemi has aptly shown in his Contemporary Nigerian Theatre, is the result of mutual exchanges all relevant to the making of Nigerian theater.

Rather, I aim at acknowledging that fundamental attitude of Osofisan’s theatrical production, which could be summarized as the wish to address specific audiences, drawing their attention to specific problems, as well as referring to circumscribed socio-political backgrounds, in order to trace its presence in the author’s essays. The main scope of this contribution is in fact to argue how, even though some of the theoretical opinions expressed by Osofisan in his essays are liable to give rise to objections, as will be seen, their practical action within Nigerian cultural landscapes makes them not only central for understanding the present conditions of the “crippled giant,” to use Osaghae’s term, but also successful in the primary aim that Osofisan ascribes to them: i.e., their social relevance.

Osofisan’s criticism is collected in three works, The Nostalgic Drum: Essays on Literature, Drama and Culture; Literature and the Pressures of Freedom: Essays, Speeches and Songs; and Insidious Treasons: Drama in a Postcolonial State, all published in 2001. The first is mainly historical and philosophical, and covers a number of issues, amongst which are the relation between politics and literature, the role of artists and intellectuals in Africa, and the development of Nigerian drama. The second collection includes essays originally conceived as
oral interventions on celebrative occasions and in most of cases have been transcribed as such. The third collection focuses mainly on Osofisan’s drama, and may therefore be considered as the most useful insofar as the socio-political backgrounds of Osofisan’s plays and some of his productions outside Africa are concerned.3

Little critical attention has been dedicated to Osofisan’s essays,4 the variety of which offers an interesting example of similarity with the author’s theatrical works, which, as Muyiwa Awodiya and Sandra Richards have shown in their full-length studies, include a wide range of genres and modes of expression that are often the result of intermingling Western-orientated choices and elements of traditional African drama. Of the existing contributions on Osofisan’s criticism, moreover, none has focused on his statements on popular genres, the interest of which lies in two main areas: firstly, because they can be framed within the international debate on the value of popular culture and literature, therefore constituting an important additional voice from a postcolonial context; and secondly, because they reveal (including at the theoretical level) a parallel with Osofisan’s dramatic corpus, which makes them into a useful critical insight into Osofisan’s work that goes beyond their intrinsic value.

In order to discuss these aspects, I have chosen to focus my analysis specifically on four essays collected in The Nostalgic Drum, which, of all of Osofisan’s criticism, are the most exhaustive on the subject of popular genres: “The Alternative Tradition: A Survey of Nigerian Literature in English since the Civil War”; “The Author as Sociologist: Cultural Obstacles to the Development of Literature in Nigeria”; “Domestication of an Opiate: Western Paraesthetics and the Growth of the Ekwensi Tradition”; and “Literacy as Suicide: The Audience and the Writer Beyond FESTAC.” In the first of these essays, the playwright observes that,

It is good, I think, to develop a literature that is accessible to the masses, if only to sustain a continuous literate tradition beyond the colleges. But entertainment in art always carries its dangers, in that the writer can be easily tempted to forsake his responsibilities to the public, and...indulge in highlighting only those aspects of human experience that are unquestionably base, frivolous and primitive. (The Alternative Tradition, 169)

This may be taken as a starting point in Osofisan’s treatment of popular genres, accused as they are by the author in the course of the three collections of being dedicated to “escapism” and mere entertainment, therefore functioning like opiates or drugs for the people they target, and preventing them from either understanding or reacting actively to their political surroundings. In this passage, though, Osofisan clarifies that the problem does not lie in the employment itself of entertainment devices, but rather in the role that the author ascribes them: as
long as entertainment is used as a means for achieving a greater, social scope, its employment is largely justified. The theatrical production of the author himself, even though Osofisan has been defined as “an heir to the Ekwensi tradition of crafting popular literature consciously geared to entertainment” (Richards 45; italics mine), may nonetheless be viewed as an effort to discuss issues of social and political relevance, if one agrees that “the playwright’s contention that literature should function as a catalyst for social change marks a crucial recession of that tradition” (Ibid.). His dramatic technique, even when conceived to surprise, intrigue, and, in a word, entertain the audience, is in fact always subject to a Brechtian conception according to which the spectator should not be allowed to reach a state of catharsis in the course of the performance, nor leave the theater without embarrassment, uneasiness, or doubts about what he/she saw. Osofisan is therefore aware that entertainment is central in attracting the audience’s attention, as well as in enhancing the social value of theater as a moment/place of collective leisure, distraction and, eventually, reflection on the issues proposed. However, the threshold between a controlled employment of entertaining devices, and the pursuing of entertainment only for the sake of itself, is in the author’s view very subtle.

The risk of becoming “addicted” to entertainment for both authors and beneficiaries of the work of art is for Osofisan linked not only to individual choices that might result into the employment of this or that specific device to the detriment of the work’s contents and didactical function, but may also be interpreted at a historical level as a tendency appearing in Nigeria after the end of the Civil War (1967-1970). This event, on which “The Alternative Tradition” almost entirely focuses, is for the author responsible for the main sea-change in Nigerian literature, which, along with some positive results, also brought the disastrous effects that the author describes throughout his critical production:

In the decade following Independence, before the Civil War, literature in Nigeria ... was almost exclusively the business of the small Mbari coterie, dominated by such names as Christopher Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and Ulli Beier...Since the war, and in spite of the prevailing state of emergency ... literature has blossomed into such a fertile field of activity, that it is now not possible, nor even desirable, to follow its very trend or manifestation.... The reasons that made for expansion and growth have also led, paradoxically, to a debasement of value and taste. If it is true, for instance, that there is now a spread of literacy, and that more and more people are able to speak and use English, which remains our national lingua franca, it is no less true that fewer and fewer people understand it. And the uncontrolled invasion of the novels and films of the gangster or erotic type, especially from America, black and white, coupled of course with their huge commercial success, has
helped to fashion a model of taste based on cheap sensationalism and primitive sensuality. (Osofisan, *The Alternative Tradition* 162-163)

On one hand, then, the Civil War resulted in literary trends less rigidly dominated by the relationship with the academic world, as well as by its juxtaposition with the Onitsha Market literature, which I shall discuss below; but on the other, this sudden and abrupt fertility became an ideal territory for the blossoming of weeds destined to corrupt the whole of Nigerian literary production. In this passage are summarized many of the elements recurrent in Osofisan’s discussion of popular genres: the relationship between a mass diffusion of culture/literature and the loss of literary quality; the attack on selected genres, such as crime fiction and erotica; and, eventually, the acknowledgement of sensationalism and sensuality as the main elements of most “lowbrow” productions. As we shall see, the international debate about popular genres has also long been characterized by the idea that the more literary genres are mass-produced, the more they include sexual issues and the more orientated they are towards detective, crime, and science fiction, then the more they lower their value. However, the main interest of this passage lies in the elements regarding the local situation to which Osofisan refers—such as the historical reasons that brought about the blossoming of popular literature, as well as the role of the founding fathers of Nigerian literature in the first ten years or so of Nigerian independence—that allow us to interpret Osofisan’s statements not only as general observations immediately liable to be taken as referring to the whole of African and non-African popular genres, but, more fruitfully, as mirrors for local cultural issues.

Of particular relevance, in this perspective, are first of all Osofisan’s observations on the relation between literacy and the employment of English in Nigeria. As is well known, the debate about the employment of European languages by African writers is one of the harshest in the history of postcolonial (and not only African) literature, with the consequent polarization of the debate into the symbolic rift between those writers, like Chinua Achebe, who believe in the opportunity to employ European languages for making African culture known outside Africa, and those, like Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who have chosen to abandon their previous productions in English to regain possession of African languages. This is not the place to go into this debate thoroughly; it will be sufficient to note that, beyond the ideological juxtaposition of the two parties, the reasons for these different choices lie in a more complex discourse rooted in the factual, specific contexts in which African writers elaborate their productions. Osofisan clearly refers to these contexts, although he adds a personal interpretation to the matter, when he affirms that, even though English is today known and spoken by most people in Nigeria, therefore dismissing the main reason adduced in favor of African languages—that the majority of African populations are not familiar with European languages—that one has also to consider that between using a language and understanding it the differ-
ence may be a remarkable one. This suggestion, which may sound harsh and even snobbish towards Osofisan’s countrymen and countrywomen, nonetheless brings to light the possibility the opportunity of considering, amongst other factors, the practical employment of both African and European languages, and in particular their transmission media. The main point is not that English should be linked only to the literary, “highbrow” production of authors coming from an academic background, with the consequent exclusion of any form of popular literature, but that its massive employment in certain genres has resulted in the debasement of its standards, as well as of the tastes of the audiences themselves.

Secondly, Osofisan analyzes the historical reasons that have brought Nigerian literature to such a debasement. As he explains, going further into the details concerning the “birth” of this “deviant” trend in Nigerian literature, “the subject that has provided the greatest literary momentum has been the civil war. This is clearly the area where our writers have been most fertile and the works published so far show two visible features:...they are mostly the products of the older writers, and secondly, these works are mostly written in prose” (The Alternative Tradition, 166). However, the Civil War originated a subdivision of contemporary Nigerian literature into genres promoting, on the one hand, new and original currents, and, on the other, forging the bases for the current literature of “escapism.” Therefore, along with works “designed as a kind of diary of firsthand experiences,” or inspired by the Civil War, such as those of Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi, Flora Nwapa, and Cyprian Ekwensi—who, even though he is often criticized by Osofisan, deserves a place here thanks to his Survive the Peace (1976), which is, according to Peter Nazareth, “a fine political novel” (Nazareth 176)—there is also a category which is “so far the thinnest, although it gives hope of blossoming in the future into a more popular and patronized genre. These are the thrillers, in the Euro-American sense of the term, in which the war is not being evaluated as such...but merely serves to provide a décor for a thrilling story of adventure” (Osofisan, The Alternative Tradition 166-7).

Insofar as these last are concerned, Osofisan is particularly critical when this kind of popular literature, which he already recognizes in books such as Eddie Iroh’s Forty-eight Guns for the General (1976), is translated into transmission media such as TV, radio, DVDs, and the like. His critical positions in this matter should not be interpreted as general and universally referring to the whole of “modern” transmission media, given that Osofisan himself, like Wole Soyinka, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and many other “highbrow” authors, have worked for Nigerian television and contributed to the admission of literary contents into the frame of more popular transmission media. Nor is Osofisan’s hostility to technological means of expression merely the fruit of ideological assumptions—since commodities such as these may be viewed, in a Marxist perspective, as accessory needs resulting from an endless greed for the new, the unnecessary, and the superfluous.
created by a free-market system. Rather, the author’s position seems to be a result of a reflection on the practical implications of such means in a context like that of Nigeria. In fact, as Osofisan explains in “The Author as Sociologist,” one of his most relevant essays concerning the role of artists within the Nigerian political landscape, the precarious existence of literature and literary works, subject as they are to that—even more precarious—of Nigerian publishers, makes the diffusion of certain forms of popular genres particularly damaging when in combination with given transmission media:

Nigeria has become a huge market, with a vulgar greed for the consumption of other people’s products: agencies for all kinds of Euro-American and Japanese business flash their wares along the fluorescent streets: among the most flourishing, are the importers of Western popular literature. Cheap, abundant, lavishly decorated and facile, these books...are the preferred library of a vast majority of Nigerians who bother to read at all. The situation is more than disturbing. Who is going to bother to read the...Soyinkas...of the local literati... when flashy magazines of depraved western erotica—He, Playboy, Penthouse, Swank, Oui, etc.—are irresistible titillations even by the look of their covers alone? Most crucially, which entrepreneur will bother to publish the local authors...when...he can import thousands of these cheap foreign ‘best-sellers’, and rake astonishing profits on the resale?... And those writers...who choose rather to combat it, have sadly, chosen the only immediately available solution—that is simply to reproduce, in local setting, these profitable western thrillers and pulp romances...Furthermore, the literate elite in Nigeria has also allowed itself to be swallowed up in the current ‘revolution’ of the electronic culture...Too often nowadays, the transition is direct from traditional oracy to ‘audiovisual oracy,’ with the intermediary ‘print literacy’ bypassed. In such a situation, needless to say, the audience of literature tends to shrink, and writers perform in the dimming lights of a bankrupt circus. (Osofisan, The Author as Sociologist 270-1)

The point, then, is not that writers should avoid “getting their hands dirty,” so to speak, with occupations related to productions other than “print literacy,” but that the current situation does not certainly favor the blossoming, let alone the survival, of literature in its strictest sense. The increasing success of popular genres, in fact, goes in parallel with an increasingly precarious existence of all components of the literary/cultural world: theater companies, theater venues, booksellers, publishers, and sponsors, etc., the survival of which is daily threatened by the worsening economic and political conditions of Nigeria. It might be objected that drama and theater are also experiencing a difficult period in the Western world, given that the same kinds of entertainment and electronic
devices are employed and often substituted both for reading and theater-going; however, one cannot ignore the significantly unstable and violent political profile of Nigeria, to which Osofisan pays very careful attention. The main problem with regard to the survival of literature seems to lie, for him, in the very directness of the transition from oracy to “audiovisual oracy,” which seems to constitute the main obstacle to the diffusion of what he calls “print literacy,” given that not only this direct transition undermines the opportunity for written literature to be spread and appreciated by an increasing number of people, but also, absorbing traditional oral entertainment into audiovisual formats, it actually improves an enjoyment of art on an *individual* basis.

In fact, as Osofisan “believes that the salvation of man in society needs collaboration because a non-tragic conception of history can be based on the dynamism of collective effort” (Awodiya, *The Drama of Femi Osofisan* 116), he cannot help knowing how the reception of any piece of art based on an individual basis might prevent people from exchanging opinions, discussing relevant issues, and creating a “community”—in Victor Turner’s sense of the word—in which they eventually become aware of their current status and lay the foundations necessary for criticizing both their society and governments. As is well demonstrated by one of Osofisan’s most famous plays, *Once upon Four Robbers* (1978), the ability to create active communities, which might act not as “opiates” but rather as “stimulants” in the making of the people’s consciousness, is a fundamental characteristic of theater and live performances, and namely of Osofisan’s drama. In *Once upon Four Robbers*, the play’s very title signals to a Nigerian audience two facts normally not juxtaposed. First, the drama seems to belong to the folk- or fairy-tale genre that serves the didactic purpose of inculcating in the young desirable behavior. Second, rather than being situated in some distant past, the play concerns a contemporary phenomenon, that of armed robbery and the public execution of criminals. (Richards, 125-6).

This play, like most of Osofisan’s productions, attempts to make the spectators “happy” through the employment of a familiar device, in this case that of traditional storytelling, but also “uncomfortable” through the presentation of a theme, that of robbery, and of characters such as those of the robbers, who Osofisan knows would certainly meet with the audience’s hostility. However, if the opportunity to address an audience directly, even at one’s own risk, is denied by the nature of most technological transmission media, independently of the value of the work transmitted, the possibility of inculcating both a political conscience and a critical awareness on behalf of the people risks being compromised. In my view, this is the main reason for Osofisan’s hostility towards *current* popular genres in Nigeria, linked as they currently are with technological and electronic means of transmission.
THE ROLE OF POPULAR GENRES IN THE POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT

Far from being an isolated voice, Osofisan’s position on popular genres and on mass media seems to be shared by authors in different postcolonial settings. A similar perspective is in fact to be found in an interesting article by the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano that first appeared in 1977 in *Index on Censorship* and was later translated into English and reprinted in *They Shoot Writers, Don’t They?* (1984), edited by George Theiner. Discussing the aim of writing is discussed, Galeano expressing political views almost identical to those often claimed by Osofisan to be the basis of his own writing: “One writes...for the people whose situation one feels identified with, the undernourished, those who cannot sleep, the rebels and the oppressed of this world; and the majority of them cannot read” (Galeano, 189). Given that only an educated minority can actually read, the paradox is, in Galeano’s view, that eventually “Latin American writers, in the pay of a cultural industry which serves the consumption of an educated elite, belong to a minority which they also write for. This is the objective situation of writers whose work confirms social inequality and the ruling ideology” (Galeano, 190). Galeano is mainly a novelist, whilst Osofisan’s work, being primarily that of a playwright and addressing audiences of all kinds, does not risk being available only to a minor section of the people. However, the preoccupations underlying Galeano’s positions on literature, and specifically on censorship, which he views not only as that tangible, arrogant, and violent procedure according to which power attempts to erase or hide any work discussing it, but also as a more subtle way to silence writers and intellectuals, are certainly common to those of Osofisan. As Galeano affirms, in fact:

> For the people whose identity has been destroyed by successive conquering cultures, and whose ruthless exploitation is part of the machinery of world capitalism, the system creates a ‘mass culture’. Culture for the masses would be a more adequate definition of this degraded art with a massive circulation, which manipulates consciousness, masks reality and tramples on the creative imagination...What is called ‘National culture’, is the culture of the ruling class, which lives an imported life and limits itself to copying, abortively and in bad taste, so-called ‘world culture’...In our period, the era of multiple markets and multinational corporations, internationalism applies not just to economics but to culture, ‘mass culture’, *thanks to the accelerated development and massive diffusion of the media.* (Galeano 191; italics [except ‘for’] mine)
For Galeano, then, like Osofisan, mass media, far from being, per se, dangerous or inadequate to convey artistic forms, is liable to become a weapon of a power which, soothing its people with products that actually support it, or at least avoid causing any criticism towards it, only wishes to impose its own view and life system. The striking similarity in the view of these two distant authors, who, as far as I am aware, have never met or shared any artistic exchange, confirms the broad perspective of Osofisan’s intuitions, which always aim at discussing relevant issues not limited to a local background. But the strength of Osofisan’s thought lies exactly in his being simultaneously on both the local level, discussing themes close to his own life and that of his countrymen and countrywomen, and on a more universal one, touching issues, from women’s rights to the relationship between generations, common to every nation throughout history. As he said in the course of an interview that I conducted with him in 2004, “the more local you are, the more international you become” (Morosetti, Politiche 192). If the word were not too horrible to be used, one might define Osofisan’s approach as “glocal.”

This may be easily seen in “Literacy as Suicide,” where, in discussing popular genres, Osofisan does not refrain from focusing on the historical role played by early popular literature in Nigeria, as he ironically (and nonetheless sadly) admits that, “If James Hadley Chase did not exist, the majority of us Africans would have happily chosen to remain illiterate” (Literacy as Suicide, 135), with the specific aim of distinguishing between this phase of popular literature and further developments of popular genres in Nigeria:

> Between the novels of Hadley Chase and the bulk of what goes by the name of African literature, there is a close, curiously unnoticed affinity—of essence, if not of intent. By essence, I am talking now of that subliminal quality of social irresponsibility which is the hallmark of all literature of escapism...The Western thrillers win their appeal precisely from this act that, as soothing channels of socio-psychological escapism, they are almost unsurpassed in their genre... Like tranquilizers, they take our mind away from the crushing weight of responsibility that each man has to assume for his own life and for the collective life of the community...And for all this the reader is willing to reach into his wallet and pay... (Osofisan, Literacy as Suicide 139-140)

If, therefore, popular literature had a central role before the Civil War in promoting a wider approach to literature (as opposed to “orature,” and thus all printed works), nonetheless Osofisan points out to the dangers that that diffusion represents in the current landscape of Nigerian culture, leaving aside all those forms of popular literatures locally originated and preceding the Civil War, which are not responsible, in his view, for the current decline of the Nigerian cultural scene. A
distinction between types of popular literature in the treatment of Femi Osofisan’s essays is necessary here. In fact, even though the author’s criticism clearly focuses on circumscribed forms of popular culture (those following the end of the Civil War), and attempts to analyze them in reference to given circumstances (when they are combined with certain transmission media), a possible confusion about Osofisan’s discussion of popular genres might arise from the ambiguity of some of his statements in reference to early popular literature.

As is well known, the history of Nigerian literature has been characterized by two main popular trends: Onitsha Market literature, which we may define, as Emmanuel Obiechina does, as “stories about common people, by members of the same class, for everyone’s enjoyment” (10) and which came to an end with the bombing of Onitsha during the Civil War and the destruction of its market; and popular theater, as a genre often exceeding national borders in mutual exchanges between artists and companies, which already existed in colonial times and of which the Yoruba Folk Opera and the Ghanaian Concert Party are famous examples. Popular theater, which has experienced a longer and more complex life than Onitsha Market literature, played a fundamental role in the overall landscape of Nigerian theater, given that, “the plays of Ghanaian and Togolese concert party share this characteristic with the Yoruba popular theatre. All three simultaneously confront and sell ‘modernity’. All three take up a self-conscious and selective relationship to ‘tradition’ while operating, in many respects, within the parameters of long-standing, indigenous art forms” (Barber et al. xii).

Osofisan recognizes the value of this theater, when, in “‘The Revolution as Muse’” (Insidious Treasons), talking about “folk tales in performance,” he clearly states that their popularity, which can be traced in elements such as “a protean one-man cast …who narrates and performs; a story located in fabu-land, whose protagonists are frequently non-human figures …; the involvement of the audience…; and finally, a closing moral…” (The Revolution as Muse, 65-66), is vital to theater and should also be an example for those productions meant to be more strictly literary. Osofisan is fully aware of the complexity of Nigerian theater (and African theater in general), and of the relevance of all its components within the overall cultural landscape, given that his education was mostly dedicated to the study of drama, and that his dissertation The Origins of Drama in West Africa: A Study of the Development of Drama from the Traditional Forms to the Modern Theatre in English and French is considered by Kacke Götrick to be “the best investigation into the relations between the traditional and the modern dramas” (Götrick, 210).

Therefore, Osofisan is fully respectful of popular theater, notwithstanding its later development. In fact, even if it did not come to an abrupt end with the Civil War, Nigerian popular theater also faced a crisis due to the precarious situation of both social life and the main channels of national communication, and traveling
theater companies above all were damaged in the process. Losing part of their movement, freedom, and appeal to the people who did not trust going out in the devastated post-war context, “since the early 1980s there has been increasing involvement in filmmaking and even more recently in drama videos sold directly to customers in motor parks and supermarkets” (Barber et al. 41) on behalf of artists previously involved in live performances throughout the national territory. The contribution of such a development to the diffusion of certain forms of entertainment has not gone unnoticed by Osofisan, who in “Rotten English, Rotten Nation” (Literatures and the Pressures of Freedom) describes Yoruba theater as “very much in decline,” and accuses the trend of producing home videos of being responsible for this. According to the author, in fact, the magical atmosphere characterizing previous (live) productions has been substituted by a superstitious and mystical approach that relegates humankind to the mercy of chaos, a vision utterly contrary to the author’s reliance on humankind’s ability to decide its own destiny, and which is clearly shown in his theatrical production. However, even when this sort of mystical approach is overcome, the problem with the current cultural products of Nigeria remains linked to “the complex of alienating cargo imported from abroad” and employed in the making of these products:

A new generation of plays and of filmmakers is replacing the old guard, with a different outlook, and a more modern perspective. In these recent works (where the emergence of Igbo video films along with their Yoruba counterparts is the major event), the fascination with magic and mysticism seems at last to have been outgrown. But what the new dramatists replace it with is a new drug culled from cheap Hollywood and Chinese kung-fu movies, or at the best from American soap-operas. (Osofisan, Rotten English 154)

What is relevant for Osofisan, apart from the chronological location of certain popular genres, and apart from the transmission media that convoy given forms of entertainment, is the origins of the cultural fashion displayed by the “new generation.” Not only historical dynamics and types of transmission media are responsible for the current decline of cultural life in Nigeria (and Africa), but also the foreign provenance of these genres. This does not imply that Osofisan is against all foreign, and namely Western, influences, which would also be a paradox with reference to his own theater and even to his personal education; rather, his critical attitude aims at being, once again, a mirror for the factual circumstances in which Nigerian culture today finds itself.

As we have seen, insofar as Onitsha Market literature and Cyprian Ekwensi are concerned, in fact, notwithstanding the explicit influence of Western authors (such as Marie Corelli and Bertha Clay, see Obiechina, 38-9) on Onitsha literature themes and modes of expression, and notwithstanding a clear aversion for the
writing of Ekwensi, viewed by Osofisan as the progenitor of the current cultural trend, Osofisan recognizes their relevant historical role in opening up the canon of Nigerian literature, and therefore understands that, whatever negative aspects these productions may have, their existence constituted an original contribution to the development of Nigerian literature. The same can be said of popular theater, on which he seems to share Karin Barber’s opinion when she asserts that, during the nineteen-eighties, “the popular or mass culture ... created by the industrial revolution and then by the second revolution in communications technology...are seen as clearly counterposed to both folk culture...and also to the high culture of the great European literary and artistic traditions” (Barber, 6). Folk culture was not exempted from being possibly judged as an “escapist” genre, and may become, as Barber says, “an instrument of ruling an hegemony in the Gramscian sense” (7). However, as with Onitsha Market literature, foreign influences were not merely emulated, as in current popular genres, but they were reinterpreted within a locally originated perspective. As Sandra Richards writes about popular theater, the “best known of the troupe founder-leaders are Hubert Ogunde, who early in his career specialized in anti-colonial protest plays; Duro Ladipo, whose area of expertise was Yoruba tragedy; and Moses Olaiya, whose forte is comedy. Though Western elements like frontal staging, microphones, jazz, and film have been incorporated into performances, the aesthetic of the movement remains non-Western or non-illusionistic” (47).

Art is still at the core of these performing productions, as well as their authors’ and promoters’ wish to contribute to the discussion of relevant issues such as, in that case, colonial domination. The “domestication” of foreign suggestions is therefore still subject to a political vision of society, whereas the employment of foreign modes that Osofisan denounces in his “Domestication of an Opiate,” for instance, is due only to a lack of originality in many artists, and to an excess of greed for greater incomes in both publishers and cultural promoters. In his criticism, then, Osofisan does not simply follow Bernth Lindfors’ suggestion that, “just as outside Africa where the masses of ordinary readers enjoy the popular varieties of literary potboilers more than the elitist...so inside Africa the general reading public is most absorbed by works which have aesthetics as only a peripheral concern” (Lindfors, v). He is in fact very much aware that the different conditions present between the political profiles of African nations and those of other countries, above all in to the so-called First World, lie in the fact that, although literature and drama may also be threatened and affected by the spread of “potboilers,” videogames, and cinema productions in the West, they can still count on a fairly stable system of publishers and readers. On the contrary, the same cannot be said of African, and especially Nigerian, literature, which, as a result of the intrinsic weakness of the cultural system, is more often published and appreciated abroad than in its native country.
Moreover, Osofisan’s hostility towards Western-orientated forms of entertainment is due, above and beyond their impact on the Nigerian cultural market, to their echoing the general foreign influence affecting the whole of Nigerian society, where foreign companies, investment of foreign funds and the application of foreign directions such as those dictated by the Structural Adjustment Programmes determine the country’s daily life. Therefore, given the colonial history of Africa and its current experience of globalization, which very often results in the reconstitution of a system of power based on a colonizer-colonized relationship and in a new and perhaps deeper subjection of Africa to other continents, Osofisan is hostile not to foreign influence per se, but to all those forms of expression that are actual carbon copies of this influence, and have lost every tie with any type of local production or tradition. And once again his voice seems echoed by that of Galeano (or rather, vice versa), when he affirms that, “The proliferation of foreign models and heroes goes with the fetishism surrounding products and fashions from the rich countries. Our home-produced photo-romances and TV serials take place in a limbo of cheap illusion...and the serials we import sell Western Christian democracy together with violence and tomato sauce” (Galeano, 192). Both writers point out to the necessity of a real national culture which must find its basis not simply in local “authenticity,” a word seldom used by Osofisan with a positive meaning, which would be too naïve, but rather in a real independence from other countries’ interference, which does not necessarily mean the exclusion of all foreign references, if they are freely chosen.

Furthermore, a national culture must be based on its intellectuals’ acceptance of responsibility; in Galeano’s words, “We are what we do, and above all what we do to change what we are” (Galeano, 196), and for Osofisan change has always meant the ability to adapt his own work to both the audience and the political conditions in order to achieve the best possible result. An example of this view, which is also very significant in terms of Osofisan’s practical attitude I mentioned at the beginning of this article, is to be found in his theatrical production, and in particular in *The Inspector and the Hero*, a one-act comedy in which Osofisan discusses the opulence and abuse of power of the corrupt Nigerian political class. In doing so, he employs a detective-fiction-like narrative in which the plot is built up around an investigation run by Inspector Akindele, and the challenge between the two protagonists, the investigator and the investigated, both characters of humble origins who confront each other on their principles. One, the Inspector, has chosen to stay on the side of justice notwithstanding the hard life he has experienced in his childhood, whilst the other, the Hero, a corrupt politician, has chosen to follow his own personal interests adducing as an excuse the miserable conditions he and his mother have survived throughout their life. In this play, about which, in the above-mentioned interview, Osofisan says that it “is a detective story, which I was commissioned to write. But in doing it, I decided to use
it for other meanings—specifically, to fight corruption,” the author employs one of the genres he usually criticizes in his essays, adding, though, a clear didactic function. The presence of a moral ending, together with the characterization of its protagonists, has convinced Frank Uche Mowah of the opportunity of reading this play not just as a comedy but rather as an example of folkloric drama:

The play is established by the unmasking of the ghost. This paradoxically revises our perception of the play as a comedy. From this point, it naturalises it into an African folklore. Each character then transforms into his or her folkloric nature of image. Their engagements with one another in a game of deception culminate in the tragic end of the archetypal folkhero—Ereniyi the Jackal (or the wolf)…Aduke…is a cunning heroine for whom only the end can justify the means. As in all tortoise tales, she ends up shedding crocodile tears when her weapons fail to work at the most crucial moment…The Inspector (Akindele) is the tale-bearer or cockerel…while his assistant, Coral, is the beautiful looking cobra. (Mowah, 101)

This seems to me to confirm that the dart cast by Osofisan against popular genres, as well as the very use of the term “popular,” should not be intended as a general attitude towards all popular forms of culture and literature; on the contrary, the threshold, though subtle, between “good” and “bad” entertainment lies in the ability to employ popular genres and devices not for the sake of entertainment itself, nor for commercial reasons, but in the attempt to contribute to the people’s education and to a deeper discussion of relevant political issues. Since most of the current popular genres distributed in Nigeria are affected by commercial interests and originate in a foreign model, when not replaced by forms of expression directly coming from outside Africa, Osofisan cannot but observe the risk implicit in this trend, which is that of shelving the very hope for Nigerian theater for maintaining both its strength and its social relevance to the advantage of other forms of entertainment. This does not imply, however, that his criticism is directed to all popular genres, nor to entertainment in general. More simply, as the case of The Inspector and the Hero shows, this entertainment should be used for a good cause and, when possible, interlace substantial links with local, traditional modes of expression.

**SOME NOTES ON THE INTERNATIONAL DEBATE ON “PARALITERATURE”**

However, when all of the above is said, and whatever factual explanation one might adduce to Osofisan’s statements on popular genres, there is no doubt that they go against the prevailing stream when compared with the international
debate on the subject. Should we then conclude that Osofisan, beyond the locally-orientated reasons that justify his statements, is not aware of such a debate? In order to discuss this point, I shall briefly refer to the contributions on this subject of the Italian critic Giuseppe Petronio (1909-2003), whose studies on popular genres are amongst the most relevant and appreciated at a European-wide level. Petronio, Emeritus Professor of Italian Literature at the University of Trieste and director of the Gramsci Institute, collaborated with Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus of the University of Klagenfurt on the theme of so-called “Trivialliteratur,” and has been amongst the first critics in Italy to bring the discussion on the value of popular literatures and cultures to the attention of the academic world. The interest paid by Petronio to popular genres is due, as he writes, “to the aversion for all this blah blah labelled as scientific…‘Paraliterature’, ‘marginal’, ‘mass’, ‘consumerist’ literature, Trivialliteratur, etc. etc.” (Sulle trace, 34) are for Petronio terms employed by most of critics not out of theoretical considerations on the actual value of popular genres, but out of prejudice and stereotyping. A genre, in fact, is in his view simply “a concept: the fruit of a mental process with which we collect and label a set of objects…, which differ from one another and nonetheless possess a quality that enables us to collect them under one common denominator. It is, therefore, a classifying and taxonomical process from which prejudice is excluded” (Petronio Sulle trace, 48).

According to this assumption, “literature is the whole of those works that, throughout history, have been either orally composed or written, and either listened to or read in the belief, common to both authors and beneficiaries, that they were ‘literary’” (Petronio Sulle trace, 54). In the course of the 1970s, Petronio therefore had the merit of introducing not only into the Italian critical debate but also onto the European scene a principle of “objectivity,” or at least an attempt to take into account technical standards, according to which literature and its genres may be judged and labelled. When certain genres, in fact, are judged instead on the basis of a prejudicial consideration of their overall political function, or of their authors’ commitment, the risk is that one erects borders between similar genres, without considering their historical profile, or their tendency to answer certain expectations at given times and in given places. For example,

until detective fictions came from England, and were labelled as ‘classical’, they had nothing to do with the ‘literary novel’, focused as this was on social analyses first, and then on psychological reflections on mankind and their memories. But when, during the ’thirties, detective fictions became more and more polemical towards society and started digging into the psychological world, the distance became less and less marked. (Petronio Il punto su, 125)
Without considering the different backgrounds underlying the English and American detective novels, the risk would be that of considering them as mere escapist genres or subgenres only due to the prejudicial idea that the more political these novels are, the more literary they become. Another prejudice long characterizing the critical approach to popular genres is underlined by Erin Smith, when she comments on the idea that, “writing ‘serious’ fiction required broad reading in Western classics; writing pulp fiction required no more education than that of the average man on the street” (Smith, 22), a condition that, even if it were to be demonstrated, does not necessarily imply that works of art cannot be conceived by “average men.” Other procedures employed by both critics and readers to distinguish what is “highbrow” from what is not, are also indicated in the study of Lee Harrington and Bielby, when they write that,

the designation of an object or practice as highbrow or lowbrow depends upon several interrelated variables. First is its degree of accessibility: the more accessible the object or practice the more likely it is to be labelled lowbrow. A second variable is the degree of emotional ‘distance’ adopted by consumers vis-à-vis the cultural text in question...The final variable rests on whether the object or practice is identifiably authored: that is, traceable to a uniquely gifted creative genius. (Lee Harrington et al. 6-7)

None of these variables, however, has anything to do with the inner characteristics of a given work or genre, which are too easily forgotten by the critics in order to adjust their opinions on certain authors or literary trends to a wider and theoretical vision of society. This vision may be linked to a precise ideology, as Ken Warpole argues when he says that “radical or Marxist traditions of literary and cultural criticism have often been no more sympathetic to the cultural possibilities of popular literature in this country [England] than have belles-letttristic, humanistic, scientific or Leavisite academic criticism” (Warpole, 24). This kind of vision possibly informing that of Osofisan when he attacks in particular comic strips, Hollywood films, and thrillers on the assumption that these are necessarily meant to convey an escapist vision of society. More often, however, the tendency to apply certain types of prejudice to given genres is, in Petronio’s view, the result of a historical process according to which one tends to ascribe literary qualities to works that are the result of the upper classes’ imagination, whereas the works conceived by or for the lower classes are also automatically debased:

The historical function attaining all genres and styles, which is that of imprinting the various levels or degrees of the literary expression with a hierarchical disposition, has been subject to a radical change. Just think of the hierarchy of dramatic genres, according to which tragedy was naturally conceived as superior to comedy, just as the noble class...
was naturally superior...to the middle class and to the peasant...But all of this has come to an end, as exhausted as the natural distinction between castes, orders, classes. And it becomes evident now that applying the same criteria and mental categories of the past to current (and mass) literature is impossible. (Petronio, Il punto su 135)

Most of today’s criticism mirrors Petronio’s statements, including in consideration of the notable impact of both the postmodern and the postcolonial in redefining genres and modes of expression. Given the remarkably European-orientated education that Osofisan received, and given also his awareness of the main literary debates within and without Africa, as well as the up-to-date knowledge of cultural phenomena he shows in his essays, I personally do not believe in the possibility that he is actually unaware of such a long discussion on popular genres and their value. The question, “is it possible that Osofisan is unaware of the international debate on popular genre?” therefore needs to be reformulated as follows: why has the author chosen to ignore the terms of such an international debate? Or, better: why does he actually pretend to ignore the terms of such an international debate?

A first answer might be that Osofisan has chosen to do so because, as should always be kept in mind, above all in the collections published by Opon Ifa Readers, but also in The Nostalgic Drum, published by the better-known and more widely available Africa World Press, he primarily addresses local audiences and intellectuals, only secondarily directing his works to non-African people, as confirmed in our interview in regards to both his criticism and theater. The fact that his rhetorical devices are addressed mainly to local intellectuals and critics is very evident also in his insistence on the juxtaposition between Euro-American, Japanese, and, in a word, Western-orientated (meant in its widest sense, as belonging to the so-called First World) popular genres in comparison with those that have originated locally or are conceived traditionally. However, as shown by the overall employment of literary examples and philosophical observations of non-African origin throughout his critical collections, the author is not against a discussion of local issues that might eventually also be carried out at an international level; addressing a local audience with regard to local issues does not imply that one could or should not make use of other sources.

Furthermore, it would be far too ingenuous to consider Osofisan’s essays as the fruit of an unmediated conscience, of a temporary forgetting of this or that theoretical discussion, and of an instinctive reflection resulting in provisional, impulsive conclusions. When, in the course of our conversation, I fiercely objected that some of his statements regarding popular genres could actually be misread, and resolutely pointed in particular to those included in the essays mentioned above, the reply I received was apparently very simple: “If I said that, it was an exaggeration. But you mustn’t take things out of context. Perhaps it had
a polemical aim, an answer to a provocation, meant to fight somebody! But such
a statement would obviously be an exaggeration.” Usually, I do not believe in
the opportuneness to take into account the author’s suggestions in regard of how
his/her work should be interpreted. However, in this case his statements seem to
confirm something already visible in his work, i.e., the attempt to counteract the
audience’s expectations in order to move it to a reaction, no matter how harsh
or negative, towards the issues discussed. I therefore believe that Osofisan does
make use of such resounding statements as those included in his essays, basically
for rhetorical reasons, because they can easily be misread and are therefore likely
to catch the readers’ attention on a polemical terrain, where the author can go
directly to the core of the matter without the help of any embellishment. In other
words, the “exaggeration” he mentioned in the course of our interview may be
considered as nothing more than a method parallel to that employed in his theater,
the dramatic technique of which is derived from Brecht’s drama insofar as the
aim of preventing the audience both from identifying with the characters and
achieving a state of catharsis is concerned. The same technique is employed in
Osofisan’s essays, which aim at provoking deeper reactions from the readers, pre-
venting them from feeling too happy to reflect on relevant socio-political issues,
or too uncomfortable to gain pleasure from the challenging discussions Osofisan
wishes to set up.

THE CREATION OF “UNCOMMON SENSE” IN
OSOFISAN’S ESSAYS

Osofisan’s attitude in both his theater and criticism may in fact be viewed as
responding to what Tejumola Olaniyan has called “uncommon sense,” the attempt
to shake the people’s conscience, casting a dart against common sense, in which,
as Gramsci writes, “the realist, materialist elements are predominant, i.e., all
those elements resulting from rough sensation” (1397), and which may therefore
be defined is “an equivocal, contradictory and multilayered concept,...“meanly
misoneistic and conservative” (1399-1400). In reference to Osofisan’s produc-
tion, the “uncommon sense” may be seen as, “at once the embodied leitmotif,
organizing principle, and ultimate goal of Osofisan’s dramaturgy...Uncommon
sense is a discriminating analytical perception produced by a reflection on reflec-
tion, that is, a second-order metacritical contemplation: a discourse on discourse”
(Olanian 111), which, in Olanian’s interpretation, “must be transformed into
critical consciousness” (112). Neither the current popular genres of Nigeria,
nor even the works of early Nigerian popular literature and namely the work of
Cyprian Ekwensi could achieve such a result. In fact:
Cyprian Ekwensi has earned for himself the reputation of being a sensational writer...perpetually preoccupied with the city and its disastrous impact on female morality...However, Ekwensi is a winner in other directions. His success with young and teenage readers is incontrovertible. His skill as a short story writer is widely acknowledged...Of all Nigerian writers, Cyprian Ekwensi remains one novelist whose work is likely to be picked up while one is doing the weekly groceries and read during a Nigerian (Lagos) traffic 'go-slow' to relieve boredom and tension. (Emenyonu, 26)

The presence of an uncontrolled and “wild” market, which makes Nigerian society more subject than many others to the diffusion of popular genres, which, however, in their Western characteristics cannot have the historical role played by Ekwensi and the Onitsha Market Literature on the Nigerian scene, and contribute instead to the decline of Nigerian theater, has moved Osofisan to the decision to employ the same rhetorical devices present in his theater to face these questions.

In its local reference, however, Osofisan’s contribution to the debate on popular genres, no matter how provocative and disputable it may be, represents in my view, an interesting additional voice on the subject of popular genres, as the author reminds us to take into account the historical conditions underlying both the use and diffusion of given literary genres: a lesson ultimately in agreement with Petronio’s views, as it does not consider popular genres per se, but as genres with their own internal and historical dynamics. In fact, on a closer reading, the very circumscribed historical and social background to which Osofisan refers throughout his critical collections clarify, once again, the necessity of distinguishing between Western and African contexts. Although Petronio’s analysis of current society may in fact be seen as absolutely correct insofar as it addressed Italian, and more generally European, societies, in a historical moment in which class divisions were perhaps less evident than they had previously been (although they are now once more becoming increasingly evident), the Nigerian situation is deeply embroiled in problems related to class division and social injustice. As Osofisan himself writes in “The Author as Sociologist”, the social structure of Nigeria may in fact be summarized as follows:

(1) a vast rural population and urban mass, which is illiterate, and which is principally addicted to orature...; (2) a growing sub-urban proletariat, only half-literate, and whose leisure is occupied...chiefly by the cheap cinemas (third-rate Indian films or Hong-Kong Kung-fu; (3) a literate, economically well-off middle class, which is philistine and culturally paralyzed,...is addicted principally to television – and reads ... cheap editions of Western paraliterature; and (4), a wealthy upper class, aristocratic by birth or pretension, whose only addiction is to politics. (The Author as Sociologist, 272)
Of all these classes, the most relevant, in Osofisan’s view, is the middle class. We are talking here of political relevance, as Osofisan is aware that most governmental officials have their origins in the middle class, and therefore, “it is inconceivable that we can turn our society successfully into a modern, self-sufficient, technological one, without the prior formation and emergence of a formidable, and strongly patriotic middle-class” (Osofisan University Theatre, 68). For this reason, “in some works, I am trying to expose this class failure, and probe its causes. In others I am denouncing its corrosive agents, while in others I am ridiculing its antics. And in others still, I am trying to stir the class out if its customary apathy into combat, provoking it into anger and active resistance” (Osofisan The Revolution as Muse, 57). This ideological shift from the working class, which is otherwise very much present at a scenic level on Osofisan’s stage, to the middle class represents an original contribution of Osofisan’s thought to Marxist theories, as the playwright is able to adjust them to the local situation of Nigeria. This shift, which finds a confirmation in Osofisan’s theatrical works, usually located in and/or referred to the university, may also be traced in Osofisan’s essays, mostly conceived for his colleagues, students, and other intellectuals. Insisting on the foreign provenance of the popular genres currently diffused in Nigeria is not only a way of discussing the still visible and tangible Western influence on Nigeria (and, more generally, Africa), to which most of his countries’ problems are ascribable in Osofisan’s view, and of which the diffusion of popular genres, before being a cause, is first of all a symptom. But this insistence also enables Osofisan to discuss the social relevance of these genres, the function of which is for Osofisan comparable with that of opiates not on the basis of theoretical prejudice, but following a lucid analysis of the current status quo of Nigerian society, in which technologies risk filling the literary void left behind by insecurity and precariousness, to the advantage of consoling, individually-based forms of entertainment.

If we follow Osofisan’s argument that a truly autonomous, independent and democratic society should have moments of collective discussion to its logical conclusion, then we may be led to a conclusion simple yet of immense importance: that, beyond the literariness of any given genre, drama alone may ultimately be considered a socially-relevant form of expression, whereas fiction and prose, based as they are mostly on individual enjoyment, may on the contrary unintentionally become weapons of a society that is more closed, rigid, and isolated. This possible conclusion, which Osofisan seems to suggest in his essays, is certainly something that calls for further investigation prompting broader analysis of African writers’ writing techniques and how these function within today’s postcolonial societies.
NOTES

1. See Femi Osofisan, “The Writer, the Artist and the Journalist, as Mirrors of the Nation’s Ethos” (Literatures and the Pressures of Freedom: Essays, Speeches and Songs, 2001).
3. Notwithstanding Jane Plastow’s affirmation that “apart from the essays in Theatre Matters and the interview in Comparative and General Literature already referred to, the only text where Osofisan talks at length about his view on his own theater is Excursions in Drama and Literature” (Plastow 196), all three collections published in 2001 offer a deep insight into Osofisan’s work, and above all into the production of certain plays, like Once upon Four Robbers.
4. There are various references to Osofisan’s criticism in both Chris Dunton’s Make Man Talk True: Nigerian Drama in English since 1970 (London, Hans Zell Press, 1992) and the more recent Portraits for an Eagle: Essays in Honour of Femi Osofisan (2006), edited by Sola Adeyemi; these, however, cannot be said to present a homogenous body of criticism. Most of the articles contained in the latter book (and in particular those of James Gibbs, Felix Budelmann, and Tejumola Olaniyan) make use of Osofisan’s criticism for discussing his drama, but do not treat it directly. Two of the present author’s previous articles focus on Osofisan’s essays, discussing respectively their treatment of Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and Cyprian Ekwensi (see Morosetti, Femi Osofisan), and the nature of his critical production, which is compared with Chinua Achebe’s Morning Yet on Creation Day (1975) and The Trouble with Nigeria (1983), and with Wole Soyinka’s The Open Sore of a Continent (1996) (see Morosetti, Making the Essay).
5. The Marxist discourse underlying Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s positions, for instance, shows that his most relevant action in favor of the “masses” does not primarily consist in the decision to go back to writing in Kikuyu, a choice arising mainly from ideological, personal reasons (Ngugi feeling himself to be a “traitor” to those people who, though illiterate, have made a definite contribution to Kenya’s independence), but in that of preferring theater to other (written) forms of expression: a choice factually advantaging those who can neither read nor write in any language (see Dorsinville 1983).
6. I am indebted to Professor Silvia Albertazzi for drawing my attention on this source.
7. The interview took place in Leeds on 15 May 2004, during the LUCAS Conference “Performing Africa.”
8. All translations into English are mine.

REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

CRITICAL SOURCES


Femi Osofisan is one of Nigeria’s leading playwrights and directors with many plays and productions to his credit. His plays reflect many aspects of Nigerian society, and most of them deal with social inequality. Most of the plays are marked by outstanding craftsmanship where a wealth of theatrical devices is employed. Another Raft is a good example of this, and the structure of the play is very complex indeed with ever-changing levels of fiction and time. While he employs some of the devices in other plays too, Osofisan here excels in the use of storytelling, flashback, play-within-the-play, reenactment, and the idiom of traditional theater, so that various levels of reality are created in the world of the play.

The complexity also includes layers of intertextuality, since there are references to other plays in Another Raft, and this is a form of intertextuality often found in Osofisan’s plays. The title itself indicates that the play can be understood as a commentary on J. P. Clark’s The Raft, and there are direct references to this earlier drama at the beginning of the play. So Another Raft can be seen as a paraphrase of The Raft, since the former follows the story and plot of the latter very closely. Where Clark-Bekederemo’s play follows a clear chronological chain of events with few discontinuities and with only one, uncomplicated world of fiction, Osofisan’s play mostly follows Clark-Bekederemo’s chain of events but allows parallel actions to cut in. This is achieved by adding an intricate frame where, for instance, storytelling technique is used, and in various ways this frame interrupts the unfolding story.

The rewriting or paraphrasing process results in a complex structure, and Osofisan employs several devices to emphasize the theatricality of the performance, asking the audience to keep its disbelief rather than to suspend it. This
observation is certainly not a new one. Many critics have commented upon the complexity of Another Raft as well as of Osofisan’s other plays. In particular, Sandra Richards often returns to the issue in her interesting book Ancient Songs Set Ablaze: The Theatre of Femi Osofisan, where she mentions Another Raft only in passing, though.

In Another Raft Osofisan never allows the audience to lose sight of the fact that it is sitting in a theater watching a theater performance. Among the theatricalizing devices, storytelling, and the idiom of traditional theater range high, and they are important means to create the complex structure of the play with its various levels of fictionality. In this article I will show in some detail how the theatricalizing devices in Another Raft convey the standpoint that gods are figments of man’s mind. Osofisan belongs to the second generation of Nigerian playwrights and he is at variance with his older colleagues most of the time. Using Clark-Bekederemo’s drama The Raft as a point of departure for Another Raft, Osofisan not only voices his disagreement but also uses it as a theatrical method to attack traditional institutions, which are not mentioned or referred to in The Raft.

The stated reason for the journey undertaken in Another Raft is to placate the sea goddess Yemosa by bringing her a human sacrifice. Although the journey is beset by dangers threatening from external and internal forces, rescue is assured as soon as the surviving travelers realize that the sea goddess is a fiction in the minds of men. Instead of bringing sacrifices to a fictional figure, the play recommends concrete human cooperation as a better way of solving social problems. Where Clark-Bekederemo’s raft is likely to run to its doom, Osofisan’s raft is paddled to safety. Thus Another Raft ends on an optimistic note, saying that man should rely on himself and cooperate with his fellow man rather than trust metaphysical powers and submit to their human representatives.

Another Raft operates on two levels. On the commentary-level, the actors address the audience directly, pretending to be nothing but actors. Although they are dressed as characters of the story to be acted out on the story level, they do not act these roles. They have a relation to the story level which is very similar to the relation between a storyteller and the story he tells. On this level, the actors comment on the events of the story level. Both levels are, of course, part of the fiction of the play, since the lines of the commentary-level are also written or prescribed by the playwright. On the commentary-level, however, the actors are meant to give the impression that they are not trying to create an illusion of anything. On the contrary, various devices are employed to make the audience keep in mind that it is a play, a piece of fiction, they are going to watch, and that illusion is not desired. The theatricality of the event is foregrounded again and again, and the foregrounding of the theatrical fictionality is the very strategy by which Osofisan brings home his message. To use a frame or a storyteller intro-
ducing the play proper is far from unusual in African or world drama. Osofisan, however, adds a new quality to the technique, or rather, he makes a very specific use of it.

On the story level, the aim of the journey is to bring a sacrifice to the sea goddess Yemosa so as to appease her and make her stop the rains and the spring floods, both of which are said to be her vengeance for being neglected for so long. The commentary-level makes use of the storytelling technique and the traditional theater to comment on the ontological status of the goddess Yemosa, referred to on the story level. Let us see how these two levels interact. Since it is in the very beginning of the play that Osofisan must lay the foundation for the interpretative strategy to be used by an audience, Parts One and Two are particularly rich in theatricalizing devices. I will therefore discuss these parts of the play at some length.

Part One opens in the dark. The lights come on to reveal the faint figure of a water hyacinth created by the dancers. Spectators, with knowledge of traditional Yoruba religion and religious symbols, might think of the sea goddess Yemosa, since the water hyacinth is her symbol. The movements of the dancers probably come close to the particular stage language of ballet, when the “petals begin to open out” (1), the petals being shaped by the dancers. The very first moments of the performance, then, signal that no ethnographic imitation of a traditional religious phenomenon is sought, but that an artistic interpretation is to be expected. Even when the spectators do not perceive the hyacinth as Yemosa’s symbol, the idea of the dance as an artistic expression as opposed to a realistic imitation is likely to come across.

The emphasis on the aesthetic, theatrical expression is also present, when Part One displays elements similar to those of a traditional storytelling event. In a light indicating a moon-rise, and emerging from among a group of dancers forming the hyacinth, an actor sings “We have come tonight / With an entertaining tale” (1). A dialogue then ensues, dropping words such as “narrator” and “author”, suggesting the telling of a story. Three actors, all dressed as manifestations of the sea goddess Yemosa, tell the audience straight out that this theater event is not a “marvellous world of dreams” (2) but “an open lie” (3). “All is fiction, the story is false, the characters do not exist. We are in a theatre, as you well know, and we see no need to hide it” (3). They go on at length to make it clear that everything we see is part of the fiction of the theater.

These verbal statements are followed by some stage devices to the same effect, for example when the scene ends by having the lights “partially restored to the auditorium” (4) to enable audience and actors to read together from the printed program notes. Lighting up the auditorium and making not only the actors but also the audience join in the reading in Part Two, certainly foregrounds the theatricality of the performance, because the audience is made aware of them-
selves precisely as being an audience sitting in a theater auditorium, sharing with the actors—actually producing with the actors—a text written long before. The reading presents J. P. Clark-Bekederemo’s drama *The Raft*, the social developments that have taken place since its publication in 1964, and concludes that, “the need seems to have become truly desperate for—ANOTHER RAFT” (5). Here it is clearly stated that *Another Raft* is to be understood as a commentary on *The Raft*, and therefore the audience is invited to keep the latter piece of fiction in mind while watching the former. The fictionality is, then, emphasized again, and the spectators can hardly forget that they are attending a performance of fiction.

The reading from the “notes” goes on to give the exposition, the supposed background for this new raft-story in a way resembling a storytelling style rather than following theatrical conventions. Again, we are not allowed to “slip” into any theatrical illusion. The first two parts constitute a kind of introduction to the “proper” play about another raft. They do not present a fiction in the ordinary sense since no fictional story is acted out, although they are of course part of the fiction as they mimetically reproduce the drama text by commenting on the story as it unfolds. The actors are certainly dressed and made up as if they are going to act out roles, but they do not play these characters yet; they try to come across as *actors*, a fact which is further pressed home, since all the actors are males dressed as the female Yemosa and her train. There is, then, a marked difference between the actors on the one hand and the characters they are later going to represent on the other. The relation between the actors and the audience is more like the relation between a storyteller and his audience at the beginning of a storytelling session. One could certainly claim that the actors act as storytellers. Each actor is, then, functioning in two different roles layered over each other: a storyteller; and a character that we expect to appear later in the play. Although one of them introduces himself as “the goddess writing the story,” this statement is immediately repudiated by another actor, dressed in the same way, saying he has “a message from the author” (2), whom everybody knows to be Femi Osofisan. Here we have a kind of a game: what we see is not the same as what is really there. It is probably clear to everybody present in the theater that this statement has been created earlier by Osofisan and is meant to be repeated at every performance. When somebody dressed like Yemosa says that he is going to take on the role of the goddess later on, and that this goddess is writing the story, the fictionality is strongly brought to the fore.

The combination of Yemosa being represented by dresses and the set of three actors, but not by role-playing, estranges Yemosa to the audience. The goddess is not allowed to become part of the illusion; the dance and the storytelling technique come between the character and the audience. As spectators, we get used to seeing the storytellers dressed like Yemosa but not acting her role. The foregrounding of the theatricality is very pronounced and thorough. It is achieved
by a series of repetitions, partly by different verbal statements, partly by stage
devices such as having the lights coming up in the auditorium or having the actors
dressed and made up as roles but not acting these roles, but rather functioning as
storytellers. The direct reference to J. P. Clark-Bekederemo and his play is yet
another way of foregrounding a continuity of a fictional theatrical tradition. Thus,
the verbal devices and the other stage devices have the same or similar semantic
content.

As we see, the first two parts operate entirely on the commentary-level: the
stage action is meant as a sort of a prologue where the actors introduce to the
audience the play which is to follow. The first two scenes, then, establish a kind
of pattern for the rest of the play in which storytellers appear amidst a group of
dancers. Because of the large number of signs to this effect, the message from the
playwright is indeed pressed home so hard that the audience is not likely to forget
it easily during the performance. A special strategy of interpretation has been
formed in the minds of the spectators, where they accept the play as an ongoing
fiction rather than abandon their disbelief. It is this interpretational strategy which
the audience is supposed to use throughout the performance. In the following
section we will see how the theatricalizing devices continue to call upon the
audience to keep that interpretational strategy at work.

Part Two ends in a sudden blackout. Part Three starts with the lights gradu-
ally coming back and this is where the play proper about the other raft begins,
which also means that we have moved on to the story level. The very opening of
the story level of Another Raft rather closely resembles the opening of The Raft.
For spectators familiar with The Raft, the closeness, or the repetition, functions as
yet another reference to theatricality, since it links the opening of the story level
to what has been said before, on the commentary-level, about taking The Raft as
a point of departure. On the story level, the two crew members find out that the
moorings have been cut, and that the raft is adrift. Those on board the raft can
be divided into two groups, the sailors and the travelers, where the differences
in power and class are clearly demonstrated. At the beginning of the play, it
is obvious that communication between the groups is almost impossible; only
the Ifá priest shows some awareness of the uneasiness of the sailors. Likewise
we find different levels of power within the group of travelers. By means of
exploring the disagreements between the various groups, the exposition is further
developed, and we are informed that a certain traditional sacrifice to the goddess
Yemosa has not been undertaken for years. All the people involved accuse each
other of neglect and of lacking responsibility. Members of the group belonging
to the cream of society (henceforth called the VIP group) reveal themselves as
believers of various faiths, although the mission they have set out on falls entirely
into the domain of the traditional religion. One by one the travelers realize the
precariousness of the situation, which gives rise to various reactions, demonstrating their different personalities and backgrounds.

The reactions grow stronger and stronger, until panic is quite close. In the midst of the turmoil, the silence of the priest of Yemosa becomes very noticeable. Finally, his son is very direct: “Why are you silent?” (19). A tense expectation has been built up among both characters and the audience. However, the answer—if it is one—comes from the sea. Amidst the water hyacinths, composed by the dancers, the triple goddess Yemosa appears with a song of accusation and bad omen: “your children will harvest / What you plant for tomorrow” (19). The stage directions recommend the light to change into “their special colourful light” (19), and the men on the raft to freeze. When the sea sprites have disappeared, the first line spoken is, “Voices! I could have sworn I heard voices!” (19). Taken together, these devices suggest that the characters on the raft do not perceive the sea sprites in the same way as the audience does, which could mean at least two things.

The appearance of the sea sprites can be understood as Yemosa stepping in to answer the question put to her priest. The fact that not all characters notice the answer could suggest either that not all characters believe in her existence, or that she intends to be audible and visible to only a few of them. This interpretation rests on the assumption that Yemosa is a character of the story-level. The Yemosas have, however, already been established as storytellers on the commentary-level. Using the same interpretational strategy, another—perhaps more likely—way of understanding follows. Up to the moment of the appearance of the sprites, the growing tension among the characters is likely to make some spectators so engulfed in the fiction of the play that Osofisan wants to break the spell by cutting to the commentary-level. At the beginning of the play, the triple Yemosa and her entourage was a main device to foreground the theatricality. Their reappearance now makes the audience remember the storytellers and their comments. In this way, the audience is asked to be intellectually alert rather than to lean back and just observe and enjoy the play as it unfolds. The theatricality is foregrounded, and the critical commentary runs on. The content of the song, “your children will harvest/ What you plant for tomorrow” (19), could, then, be understood as a commentary addressed to the audience, and, at the same time, as a warning to the characters of the play. In other words, the commentary-level and the story-level work simultaneously. We find a first hint of how to understand the sea sprites when the sailor Oge says under his breath that maybe the voices come from the tycoon Ekuroola’s conscience.

When the sea sprites have disappeared, only the story-level functions. Here, the VIP group immediately blames the sailors for the raft being adrift and questions their skill. The suspicion is particularly directed against Oge, who does not speak the same language as the others. When Oge’s skill and loyalty is doubted,
he counters by suggesting that all the catastrophes fallen on the village might be a punishment from the gods. This suggestion—or accusation—sparks off a new quarrel between the VIPs, uncovering several atrocities. We see the connections between the individuals as well as between the groups becoming more numerous and entangled. Parts of the rather heated discussion have distinct political overtones related to a clash of social classes. When the dispute comes to a head, the priest of Yemosa is again asked to intervene. When he has to respond in the end, he only points to their sins as the reason for the journey. Instead of indicating a way out of the plight, he makes matters worse by cursing them all. Since Yemosa’s priest wants vengeance to strike his own son Gbebe, who is the only one arguing with him, he tries to use his priestly power to kill him.

It is interesting to note that although he considers religion as fiction, Gbebe becomes involved or affected by Yemosa or her cult. As a kind of response or reaction to the curse, “Suck him back into your entrails!” (31) uttered by his father, Gbebe becomes possessed and kills his father. It is, then, the father rather than the son, who goes into the sea, the entrails of Yemosa. Since Gbebe was expected later to succeed his father as Yemosa’s priest, we might suspect this expectation to be his monster, and that this was the reason why he fled to Western education. True to character, Lanusen, the local chief, uses a trick to disarm Gbebe, and they are just about to throw him into the sea when the sacrifice intervenes. The sacrifice turns out to be a soldier, and he also admits to having cut the moorings during the night. Part Three ends in a series of very fast and startling events that partly throw the audience out of control. Although the scene ends in turmoil and surprise, the action is immediately given a new start creating new expectations and maintaining the thrill, namely by means of the figure of the soldier. Why is he there? Why did he cut the moorings? We are eagerly waiting for answers.

If the increasing speed of events on the story-level in Part Three has carried spectators away to embrace the illusion of the play totally, the swift appearance of the Yemosas in Part Four brings us back to the commentary-level almost with a start, provided there is no interval between the two parts. Very much like an interlude, Part Four presents us with the three storytelling Yemosas who, again, point out that they are figures of the fantasy in the minds of characters and spectators alike. They tell the story about a hunter who encounters a skull in the woods, the moral of which is that we should use our critical faculty before going into rash actions. In this particular context the message could be meant as a warning to the audience as well as to the characters: do not fall into the trap of fiction! Built up by the crescendo at the end of Part Three, the expectations for a continuation of the raft story are not only shattered very suddenly, but the harsh breaking of the spell of illusion also makes the spectators aware of the ease with which they might lose their critical awareness. The sudden masterly change of scene unmasks the
spectators, as it were. The playwright has taken us for a ride, and now he makes us aware of it, demonstrating how easily man is tricked, even when forewarned. From here on, we are probably more on our guard, and that is exactly what the play sets out to achieve, not only for the duration of the performance but also later when we step into the social reality of the world outside the theater.

The storytelling manner of the beginning of the performance continues in Part Four, and we are certainly back on the commentary-level. Storytelling has, of course, obvious theatrical elements, such as saying some lines from the point of view of a character. The lines can be accompanied by gestures, facial expressions, and so on, indicating the mind and attitude of the character speaking. Through Osofisan’s use of the storytelling technique, the lines spoken by the Yemosas, in their capacity as storytellers, are made very complex in the sense that they are simultaneously comments made by the Yemosas themselves and statements by the character in the tale about the skull. There is, then, not a straight-forward dialogue between the characters of the tale, as in a play-within-the-play, but now and again the Yemosas come in as constant reminders of themselves as conveyors of fiction to the audience. The result is that mimesis is problematized in the sense that the Yemosa characters do not imitate an image of the goddess. According to the stage direction, the scene should be presented as a “traditional masque” (34). The dancers and the Yemosas should now be made to look like an “agbégijó masque.” Black male actors, still dressed as sea sprites, should be “made up as white females” in a conspicuous and grotesque way, where the “caucasian features and the long, blond hair are grossly exaggerated” (34). Osofisan refers to this traditional masque as agbégijó, but it is also referred to by the Yoruba as alárinjó and egúngún apidán / onídán. In it, white male and female characters, or òìnbó, are commonly featured and they are characterized by strange habitual behavior and general inability to comprehend. Following Osofisan’s directions, a staging of an agbégijó masque featuring several white characters is likely to result in an estrangement, partly because the agbégijó theater is not very well known, and partly because to those who are familiar with the tradition, the combination of agbégijó and literary theater is unusual. Furthermore, to them, the very òìnbó character signals strangeness. If the dancers use wooden masks or elaborate makeup in a style imitating the agbégijó theater, spectators familiar with this tradition will add another sign of theatricality to the ones they have already noted. Spectators who are not familiar with the agbégijó will probably have some understanding of the idea behind the stage figures, that is, the theatricality, all the same, because the masks, as described by the stage directions, will appear quite theatrical. The dancers, including the Yemosas, take on, or at least refer to, fictional roles performed within the traditional agbégijó theater. When the dancers add agbégijó masks to the Yemosa dresses, they add one set of theater aesthetics to another, which means that they reinforce their theatricality.
In the mind of the spectators, the pattern from Parts One and Two with layered roles simultaneously performed by one actor, is now repeated and made more complex: the actor performs as an actor—more precisely as an *agbégijó* actor—who is dressed as a Yemosa, but acting as a storyteller, who, in turn, performs a role in a folktale. The foremost purpose of this game is to foreground the theatricality of the play, and, above all, the fictionality inherent in the theatricality. The perception of Yemosa as fictional even within the fiction is strengthened. Although the Yemosas address the audience directly, when pointing out that they “don’t exist,” and that they are “figures of fantasy / Actors made up” (35), they also relate themselves to the characters of the story-level: “We’re ...dream images / Made real only in the minds of / These men on the raft” (35). The next line, “And in all minds” (35), embraces audience and fictional characters alike. Hutchison concludes: “The implications of this are that the religious or spiritual beliefs of the audience are likewise constructions and projections of personal need” (210).

Part Four as a whole belongs to the commentary-level, and although short, the scene has a high density of signs foregrounding the theatricality. The dialogue makes several references to the workings of the theater. The storytelling breaks the flow of the illusion. The Yemosa triplets are storytellers who do not really act the role of the goddess, although they are dressed as her. In particular it is the theatricality of the white characters of the *agbégijó* masks worn by the sea sprites and the Yemosa triplets that rubs off on the Yemosa figures, so that these stand out as more fictional than the rest of the characters. They become fiction-within-the-fiction.

When seeing the raft in Part Five, we are immediately transported back to the story-level. As we will understand later, the interval indicates a leap in time: it is now the third day of the journey and the power structure has completely changed. Those who previously pulled the strings are now bound, and the soldier Agunrin, earlier a powerless and bundled up sacrifice, is now conspicuously displaying his gun. Agunrin forces everybody to repeat a humiliating scene of confessions, through which it is revealed that the journey has been undertaken because the Ifá priest, Orousì, “put false words in the mouth of Ifá” (59) in order to cover up the fact that Lanusen has embezzled public funds (24, 58). The scene begins with a mimed flashback, starting near the end of Part Three, when Gbebe stabs his father. The mime shows the moments following the stabbing up to the very end of Part Three, with one interesting addition, however. At the very beginning of the flashback, following upon Gbebe’s—now mute—line, “Die too, perverted father! Die and feed your goddess!” the sprites are seen, “*frozen as water hyacinths*” (52) in the background, while Gbebe stabs his father. A moment later, when he says that he has freed himself of a monster, the sea sprites disappear.
The presence of the sea sprites could, of course, be understood as Yemosa waiting for the sacrifice, which would mean that the character of Yemosa is finally acted out. But considering the previous complexity of role acting, where Yemosa was only one of several roles acted out simultaneously by one actor, as in Part Four, and also considering that the sprites appear only in the flashback (52) and not in the first enactment (32), there is another possible interpretation. If we have come to see the Yemosas as signs of a state of mind rather than as signs of an actual goddess, their appearance at this point functions as a comment on Gbebe’s action. They point to the strong grip of traditions and show how they work on the mind of man. A spectator might see the two interpretations at the same time, and a choice might be postponed until further events reveal more information.

A reenactment ordered by Agunrin follows immediately upon the flashback and shows what happened after the moments when Agunrin revealed himself at the very end of Part Three. The sea sprites reappear singing a dirge during Gbebe’s long line about cannibalism, while Agunrin the carrier becomes possessed and is able to remove his ritual gown only with great effort. When he has finally done so, the sprites disappear. The presence of the sea sprites seems to indicate the imprisonment by tradition, in which men like Agunrin and Gbebe find themselves. The sprites point to the risk of getting carried away by rituals and the paraphernalia used in them. After the reenactment the quarrels continue. The raft is torn in two, and some of the men are devoured by sharks. Accompanied by a dirge, Gbebe soliloquizes: “you go as unwanted sacrifice” (69), which is to say that the goddess, if there is one, does not demand any sacrifices. Only man himself creates the need for sacrifices, and in so doing he condemns himself to death. By and large, Part Five belongs to the story-level, but when the sea sprites appear in the flashback, the story-level and the commentary-level converge for some moments. This is accomplished in an intriguing way, since the Yemosas and the dancers can be perceived either as acting the role of the sea goddess at last, or as keeping to their original commenting function. For spectators who see both possibilities, the uncertainty—maybe even undecidability—adds to the thrill of the play. For those who see the Yemosas as storytellers still commenting on the events of the story-level, the performance takes on a more pronounced intellectual quality.

The stage directions opening Part Six explicitly state that it is a “masque as in Part Four” (71), that is, an agbégijó masque. Hence, the theatricality is foregrounded again. This time, the Yemosas do not need to point to themselves as figures of fantasy in order to foreground the theatricality in the minds of the audience. It is already well established. Following the pattern of Part Four, the Yemosas tell a story. Through the telling of this typical folktale, fictionality is again foregrounded, and this is strengthened by the signs for the agbégijó characters, since they, too, point to fiction as the content of most of the agbégijó
performances. The folktale is about a king, who has to decide which one of his three sons is to become his successor—but he cannot. The Yemosas then ask the spectators to solve the problem and promise a reward for the person who finds the answer. Storytelling is a reciprocal form of communication, and the audience is expected to contribute in some way. When the Yemosas throw the problem of choosing a new king to the audience, the spectators cannot really know what is going to happen at the end of the performance. Are the Yemosas going to demand an answer from the spectators? Does the end of the play depend on that answer? What relation is there between the tale and the play proper? Of course, the uncertainty makes the spectators think, and that is what the Yemosas have asked them to do throughout. Every time they appear, the Yemosas try to activate the critical faculty of the spectators.

After a quick blackout, Part Seven starts with the lights come on gradually. We are back on the raft, “now practically a wreck” (75), and thus we are also back on the story-level. The farmer Reore, the sailor Oge, and the Ifá priest Orousi, are the only ones still alive. Aware of an approaching catastrophe, Oge sings a song about the moon, the same song sung by the sea sprites in Part One. While he is singing, the hyacinth-like sea sprites appear. The song once again warns the listeners not to “walk astray” (2), a message which, in different guises, has been conveyed by the Yemosas throughout the play. It is therefore logical to see them as appearing to lend emphasis to Oge’s song as well as to underline the fact that Oge is a person with an open and constructive mind. He has constantly been looking for solutions to their problems, and he has listened to the message of the Yemosas. The similarity to *The Raft* is brought forth again, when the men of *Another Raft* hear the sounds of a nearby town, while the raft starts running into a maelstrom. Oge is now the only one with enough knowledge and authority to take charge, while the others have to be taught how to row. But in spite of the joint efforts of Oge and Reore, the raft does not change its course. When not even the Ifá priest’s incantations to Yemosa have any effects, it is another sign that there is no god to answer prayers.

Through the use of rhetoric echoing class struggle, Oge tries to persuade the others to join his battle: “Make we no surrender! De sea, we fit beat am! We fit fight de sea and win am!” (82). Almost as a response, the sea sprites appear with a song from Part Six, reminding everybody of the reward waiting for the person who finds the answer to the riddle about the king and his sons. Reore suddenly cries out that he knows the answer, while the Ifá priest Orousi asks who the sprites are. Here, spectators might remember a similar event in Part Three, where, instead of the answer expected from the Yemosa priest, the sea sprites appeared. The reactions from the travelers on the raft were noteworthy then: Oge immediately had his own understanding of the voices as coming from Ekuroola’s bad conscience, whereas Ekuroola, the Chief Priest of Rituals, preferred to forget
about the mysterious voices as soon as possible. A pattern was set: those who have embarked upon this journey supposedly for religious ends, are unable to perceive, or at least decipher, messages by the Yemosa figures, whereas those at the bottom of the social ladder, like Oge, perceive their surrounding world differently. Watching Part Three, an audience would probably not yet understand the meaning of this.

However, when Part Seven comes, the storytelling actors dressed as the goddess have gradually been given a meaning which is a negation of metaphysics. In Part Seven, as earlier in Part Three, it is someone from the working class, Reore, who is able to attach a meaning to the Yemosas, a meaning which is not metaphysical but applicable to the immediate physical situation of the raft. Again, as in Part Three, the man of religion, the Ifá priest, has to ask who the sea sprites are. He still needs help to arrive at an understanding. Reore has found the answer to the riddle: none of the sons is to be made king. The Ifá priest Orousi suddenly also understands the meaning: all of them should be made kings, and this means that he is gradually using his knowledge for the benefit of the people rather than for the elite. Oge says that this is what he has been advocating all the time.

Spectators are likely to see the raft as a metaphor for Nigeria, following the suggested interpretations of *The Raft* presented by the reading of the program notes in Part Two of *Another Raft*. The answer to the riddle, namely that salvation lies in joint human efforts and creativity rather than in submission to fictitious gods, becomes the answer to problems facing Nigeria as well. As soon as the travelers on the raft have the answer to the riddle, the sea sprites can join them in their efforts to achieve rescue. Yemosa’s dancers are still “made up as white females, but conspicuously and grotesquely, as in agbégigé masque” as stated in the stage direction (34). To the exclamations of the men on the raft, the sea sprites now unmask and turn out to be black males. When the lights fade slowly, the former Yemosas, their dancers and the three men, are all seen rowing together, and as a sign that the new awareness has made change possible regarding the future of the country, the raft changes its position.

In Part Seven, the story-level and the commentary-level finally conjoin when Reore announces the answer to the riddle. Although his answer is uttered as part of the fiction on the story-level and yet comes as a response to the Yemosas on the commentary-level, this enjambment, as it were, or confluence, does not come as a surprise to the audience. This is so because, thanks to the combinations of acting devices on the commentary-level, the spectators have gradually come to accept the foregrounding of theatricality as a characteristic not only of the commentary-level but of the entire play. Therefore, they abandon expectations of illusion of reality and rather watch the entire play from the point of view of theatricality. The whole performance stands out as what it is, namely fiction, and the spectators can apply their distancing critical faculty to scrutinize the content
of this fiction. What they are likely to see is that, when finding the solution to the riddle, Reore and the others are prepared to steer the raft, that is, to govern the country, by trusting their own strength and creativity alone. It is when they see themselves as kings—or rather as equals working together—with no obligations to submit themselves to any gods that their minds are set free to find a way out of their plight. Their actions prove Yemosa to be without any influence, since it is not her help but their own strength which is likely to take the raft to safety ashore.

This does not mean that Osofisan’s message is a total condemnation of all traditional institutions. Among those who seem to be able to take the raft—Nigeria—to the shore, is also the Ifá priest Orousi. Ifá is the Yoruba divination by means of which the Ifá priest communicates with Òrúnmìlà, the Yoruba god of wisdom and omniscience. It takes many years of learning to master the Ifá divination and the enormous text necessary to interpret the god’s answers, and so, being the authorized channel of communication with Òrúnmìlà, an Ifá priest is considered a repository of wisdom. To use Ifá creatively and for the benefit of everybody is equal to making good use of the traditional knowledge and wisdom acquired by the Yoruba peoples over centuries. According to the play, Ifá, correctly used, can contribute to the building of a better society in which everybody can enjoy equal opportunities. Certain expectations, created in the minds of the spectators by means of interpretational strategies, help to conjoin the presentational levels. Through the devices used mostly on the commentary-level, the spectators are made to perceive the Yemosas as fictional signs referring to fictitious figures. This conception leads to expectations that the travelers on the raft will come to the same conclusion. Therefore, not much is needed for the spectators to understand the implications of Reore’s answer to the riddle. Participants on both sides of the footlights now see that Yemosa, like all gods, is man-made.

It is part of (Western) theater conventions to conceive of things and events presented on stage as fictional. And the theater tradition within which Osofisan is working is no exception. The convention is so common that we take it more or less for granted; to watch a performance is to suspend disbelief. Like Brecht—and traditional Yoruba theater!—however, Osofisan wants the spectators to keep a critical mind throughout the performance and to be aware that everything shown is theater and fiction that should be scrutinized, however realistically the characters are portrayed. In Another Raft Osofisan does not want us to perceive the goddess Yemosa as just another fictional figure of the fictional world of the play on a par with the other characters, a perception which would make Yemosa real within the world of the play. Osofisan wants us constantly to see Yemosa as fictional even in the context of the fictional world, and by theatricalizing her in various ways he does not allow her to appear as an ordinary character. First he makes her a triplet, a device which estranges her to the audience. Then he does
not allow the actors to impersonate her but only to appear dressed and masked as her, and so the spectators see the actors and the Yemosas, but not the actors as the Yemosas. Finally Osofisan turns the Yemosas and their train of sea sprites into fictional characters of the traditional *agbégijó* theater.

As quoted above, from the very outset Yemosa points to herself as being fictional, and she repeatedly comments on her own ontological status. At the end of the play, when the men on the raft have solved the riddle and realized that they have to work together rather than fighting each other and being pushed by gods and goddesses, Yemosa says: “Gods and goddesses/breed in the minds of men/as hyacinths in fertile water,” and “all such powers as we have/are made only by your will,” (83) and finally sums it up: “We’re you, and you’re us. A goddess and her train, when that’s what you want, or hands with paddles, when you change your mind” (85). The men consequently ask the goddess and the sea sprites to help them row, and, remarkably enough, the raft changes direction! The change makes Reore conclude: “There’s no goddess but our muscles!...Sing to the recovery of our spirit! Wisdom is the human race!” (85). On the commentary-level, the theatricalizing devices of storytelling and the traditional *agbégijó* theater are employed to comment on the ontological status of the goddess Yemosa and her ritual referred to on the story-level. It is through the foregrounding of the theatricality of her stage character that Yemosa appears as fiction-within-the-fiction, and when the travelers on the raft see her as fictional, the two representational levels conjoin to convey the message that Yemosa is a fictional figure in the minds of men in general. To make his audience reach that conclusion, however, Osofisan has not only used many devices but also mixed them in a way that makes high demands on his audience.

When the theatricalizing devices keep the audience aware of the fictionality of the goddess Yemosa, it is possible for Osofisan to demonstrate that the transformation undertaken by a priest to become a mouthpiece of his god is similar to—or even the same as—the transformation undertaken by an actor when impersonating a fictional character. In the real world outside the theater, people have in general been prevented from realizing this, as different conventions have been employed to interpret impersonation within different contexts. Although the act of impersonation might be the same, the difference in context makes receivers use different interpretative strategies. According to theater conventions, when an actor impersonates somebody (or something) else on a stage, the audience takes the message delivered by the impersonated figure to be fictional. According to the interpretative conventions used by the traditional Yoruba religion (and other religions) a priest impersonating his or her god is understood to be temporarily transformed into a vehicle through which the god really can speak. According to the same convention, the existence of that extra-human power is not questioned, and so the content of the message is understood to be real and emanate from the
god. It is by operating within a separate interpretative convention that the priests can obtain a social position giving them a power (allegedly emanating from a divine sphere) which they would not otherwise have.

In *Another Raft* theatricality is foregrounded by the complexity of the two presentational levels and their conjoining. As a result an audience can see the parallel between two transformations: actors impersonate fictional characters; and priests impersonate divinities and ancestors. The next step for the audience to take is to realize that the difference in interpretative conventions is created by human beings alone as opposed to being different ontological properties of the impersonated figures. Both types of impersonation create fiction. The priests only deceive their congregations into believing that the transformations are different. If the audience realizes this, the priests will lose some of their power. As a result the ordinary person is set free to use his or her own creativity and energy.

Femi Osofisan’s “need /.../ for--ANOTHER RAFT” (5) is political. Where J. P. Clark-Bekederemo seems to be satisfied with only commenting on an existing social system and warning of a disastrous future, Osofisan wants members of the audience and, by implication, of society at large to take action in order to curb the power of the few. But unlike Clark-Bekederemo, Osofisan is not contented with pointing at certain groups in society, groups that have too much power and control over worldly goods. Consequently, he looks for the stumbling blocks encountered by the common person questioning the existing social system. What he finds is a mentally oppressive religious system in which gods and goddesses operate through human representatives, and which inhibits the common person from questioning decisions supposedly made by the gods and from attacking injustices and selfish acts committed by priests who are taken to represent the gods. The target for Osofisan’s attack is traditional religion in general, since he rejects the idea of the gods as really existing; since religion makes the heavenly representatives on earth important factors of power; and since the representatives use their power to promote their own, individual interests rather than the welfare of the society.

In the final scene of *Another Raft* Osofisan outlines his utopia. Two of the three surviving men represent the common people: Reore the farmer and Oge the sailor. There are also references to the role of multi-ethnicity in the future Nigeria, as these two men represent different ethnic groups and have learned to work well together. Orousi is an Ifá priest, thus representing wisdom, a wisdom he has gradually learned to respect and make good use of as opposed to the other priests on the raft who follow their own personal prestige rather than the doctrines of their divinities. The Ifá priest is capable of hearing Yemosa and the sea sprites when he realizes that they stand for wisdom and experience gained from contact with reality. In other words, when putting wisdom above his own selfishness
and when joining hands with the farmer and the sailor, he is able to survive.\footnote{2121}

In\textit{ Another Raft}, as well as in other plays, Osofisan foregrounds the workings of the theater in order to demonstrate the fictionality of myths and rituals.\footnote{2222} In\textit{ Another Raft}, the interpretative conventions employed by audiences in the theater and in the religious sphere are made visible through the complexity of the two presentational levels. That is, the theatricalizing devices prevent the characters on the commentary-level from becoming imitations of divinities. If the spectators realize that the conventions differ only to hide the fact that actors and priests alike impersonate fictional characters, they will unmask the superhuman powers of the priests and may change the ontological status of the gods. Gods exist only as “figures of fantasy” (35). Such a view is, of course, far more expedient in bringing home the message that, when used as a means by one class to suppress another, the gods can easily be abandoned. \textit{Bí ò sèniyàn imalè ò sí} (“Where there is no human, there is no god”).

\section*{Notes}

1. J. P. Clark is now known as J. P. Clark-Bekederemo.
2. Part of the intertextuality is also the fact that the theme of\textit{ Another Raft} is closely related to Osofisan’s own play\textit{ No More the Wasted Breed} (1982). It is a further complication of the intertextual “weaving” that the very title of\textit{ No More the Wasted Breed} refers to Wole Soyinka’s\textit{ The Strong Breed} (1963). For comments on the links between these plays, see Chris Dunton (1992:87f.) and Sandra L. Richards (1996:13-29).
4. The following analysis is not going to compare the two plays, since such a comparison deserves an analysis of its own. I am using a comparison only when I find it relevant for my understanding of\textit{ Another Raft}.
5. For a good analysis of the content of the dialogue, see Dunton (1992:88-90).
6. This is a good example of what Yvette Hutchison (2006:208) aptly describes as “the way [Osofisan] constructs and deconstructs himself as\textit{ auteur}”.
7. Here is the first distinct deviation from\textit{ The Raft}.\textit{ Another Raft} has a larger number of travelers, nine in all, whereas\textit{ The Raft} has only four. This fact urges knowledgeable spectators to ponder the reasons for the deviation, again a prompting of the critical faculties.
8. Just as\textit{ The Raft} deals with different implications of multi-ethnicity,\textit{ Another Raft} makes a similar, and even more emphasized, point of it: the continuous suspicion against other ethnic groups serves only to widen the gap between groups and prevents any solutions to the common problem.
9. It seems to be the same kind of irony that we find in Soyinka’s\textit{ The Strong Breed}, in which another future carrier abandons his home in order to try to escape his destiny, only to carry it out in a foreign place. Cf. the intertextuality mentioned above.
11. Muyiwa P. Awodiya (1995:58-60 and 1996:111), among others, comments on Osofisan’s use of storytelling technique to achieve a Brechtian alienation effect, and so does Modupe O. Olaogun (1988), extending the discussion to embrace other devices such as play-within-the-play. Sam Ukala (2001) and Austin O. Asagba (2000) hold the opinion that storytelling is a traditional device used by Osofisan to create an alternative form of theater that would come closer to traditional types of theater. Ukala lists 7 “laws” for traditional storytelling and analyses Osofisan’s use of them in his dramas. Sandra Richards (1996:72f. and 86-9) convincingly argues that Osofisan combines the traditions of storytelling and Brechtian Verfremdung, and that different types of audience can identify the source of influence of their choice or competence and yet “apprehend in this non-illusionistic theatre elements of the familiar” and how it “is subverted in order to question some of the ways in which the viewers postulate the world” (73). Later she says that the device is used to “encourage observers to retain a more objective stance” (88f.).


13. According to my experience, at least, most spectators coming to watch a “literary” play, such as one by Osofisan, staged at a university theater or any theater operating in a similar way, would not be very familiar with the traditional Agbégijó theater, although they might recognize it.

14. *agbégijó* means “we take wood to dance”; see Beier (1964:191) who describes one particular troupe with the name *agbégijó*.

15. It is worth noting that both Agunrin and Gbebe belong to families with strong ties to Yemosa: her priests are appointed from among Gbebe’s family; and her human sacrifices are provided by Agunrin’s family.

16. It is precisely in a state of possession that some of the murders are committed. Gbebe kills his father in a state of possession, and in order to get rid of a troublesome person, Ekuroola takes advantage of the starting of a ritual leading up to killing the sacrifice.

17. The concept of “unwanted sacrifice” might bring to mind the discussion about the “willing sacrifice” following upon Soyinka’s *The Strong Breed*. It has been argued that only a *willing* sacrifice can achieve something for the society. In *Another Raft* Orousi even speaks of a “wasted sacrifice” (76), when he has realized that the death of those travelers on the raft who have already gone into the sea have not placated the goddess. So the play can be read as adding another argument to that debate, saying that the discussion as such is meaningless, since there are no gods demanding any sacrifices at all, hence the unwanted sacrifice and wasted sacrifice.

18. Muyiwa P. Awodiya (1995:85ff.) has an analysis of the tale as told by Yemosa. Austin O. Asagba (2000:97) observes that the various oral devices are well integrated into the play proper, for instance when the characters’ “survival hangs on their ability to unravel the riddle” contained in the story.

19. Awodiya (1995: passim) interprets the Ifá priest as belonging only within the elite, thus failing to see his change from being a servant to the elite to becoming an active force when the raft is taken to the shore, i.e., putting his knowledge into the service of the whole nation.
20. Osofisan often makes references to Òrúnmìlà, metaphorically rather than in terms of seeing him as a god. We are introduced to this view in his Ph.D. dissertation (1973:85-88) and it is also, for instance, expressed in the following quotation from an interview: “All these gods and their inviolability ... one is tired of them” (Obafemi 1982:126). His 1992 article presents his reasons for choosing Òrúnmìlà as an opposition to Wole Soyinka’s Ògún. See also Osofisan’s 1997 article. For an analysis of references to Òrúnmìlà in Osofisan’s plays, see Awodiya (1995:67-79). In a long chapter Sandra Richards (1996:117-152) reads Chattering and the Song and Morountodun in the light of the “Orunmila-Esu paradigm” and concludes that this paradigm is discernible not only in many of Osofisan’s dramas but also in dramas by many other African and diaspora writers.

21. The negative results of the world-view based on the traditional religion are attacked by Osofisan in his earlier play No More the Wasted Breed (1982) as well. The ontological status of the gods is not, however, discussed in the earlier play, the emphasis instead being on the cruel and unjust demands the gods put on human beings.

22. Another Raft is not the only play by Osofisan that foregrounds the theatricality in order to discuss the ontological status of the gods. In Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels (1991) and Tegonni, an African Antigone (1999), for instance, a similar device is used, but it is far from being so complex and thorough. In several ways, Another Raft points forward to Tegonni, where Yemoja comes rowing at the beginning of the play proper, and she awaits her daughter Tegonni and Antigone at the end. Some of the actors act as actors with no role-playing. Flashback and storytelling are other devices common to the two plays—as to many other plays. The theme of the black man’s guilt reappears in Tegonni as well as in Women of Owu (2006).

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Femi Osofisan is one of the foremost dramatists in Nigeria; he epitomizes a playwright whose works have consistently expressed the beauty of the Yoruba language in all aspects of creative literary art. The range of influences on him includes indigenous traditions of Yoruba sacred and secular performances and festivals, which he successfully blends into his works with considerable formal innovativeness and lyrical excitement. This paper attempts an in-depth analysis and a critical assessment of Osofisan’s use of language in Tegonni, an African Antigone. Of particular interest is the playwright’s use of poetic verses, proverbs, and songs in the play. These are used to emphasize salient points as well as paint the moods in the play. Language is a powerful phenomenon. Of particular importance is its use in communication. It is a fact that no two people use language the same way. This underscores the fact that language is creative. Man uses language to communicate his experience and every man draws words from his lexicon of language localized in the brain. The extent to which a man can use language creatively therefore depends, among other variables, on the number of words stored in his lexicon. When language is used creatively, it becomes an object of beauty. The creative ingenuity of Osofisan in his language use is what we intend to discuss in this chapter.

One peculiar nature of Osofisan’s play is the way in which he oscillates effectively between his first language (L1) and second Language (L2). The efficient way with which he blends these two linguistic media commands attention. Of particular effect is the depth with which he presents the Yoruba culture through his L2. The linguistic fervor and cultural nuances of the L1 are effortlessly captured in L2. This suggests his attachment to his roots. Apart from this, Osofisan uses language for character delineation. He employs language to differentiate one group of characters from another. Based on linguistic features, Osofisan’s characters may be classified into three categories. The first category is the ruling class, who speaks the standard and formal variety of English. In Tegonni, this category of characters includes the British Governor, Lt. Gen. Caster-Ross, the
District Officer Captain Allan Jones, and Bayo the priest. A quote from one of the governor’s speeches would be appropriate here:

Gov: Welcome me with that! Rather audacious, isn’t it? This is what they call Christianity, these liberated priests who come over to Africa! They bring the word of God to the jungle, and what happens! Satan takes over! Everything changes to voodoo! Our sacred hymns are turned to dark incantations! And I am supposed to like that! I am supposed to tolerate it as “the expression of another culture” while the Devil crows triumphant in my ear! (46)

The second category consists of gods and religious personages who use an elevated style marked by a distinctive syntax and use of idioms, imagery, and proverbs. In Tegonni, characters like Chief Isokun, Chief Labiyi, etc, fall into this category. The following conversation between Chief Isokun and the 1st Elder will further clarify this point:

Isokun: You’re going to need a lot of patience Gomina, to listen to us. So I beg you, don’t be in a hurry. We are old men, and it is because the young are prone to falter, that Edumare created long life. Children, we know must be wayward. Simply because they are children! So when they have strayed, it is their parents who must step in, to clear the mess…

1st Elder: Well, Gomina, our people say, it is because it rains that the roof is placed above the house. (61)

The common man, who uses pidgin or non-standard English, constitutes the third class. In the play Tegonni, this group includes townspeople, soldiers, etc.

1st Soldier: My broder, sometime white man dey too wicked, sha! Or why e be say dat Gomina no `gree make we bury de body one tine for de battlefield?

2nd Soldier: How dat one concern you? Or wetin concern dog for kolanut? As for me, I no care one bit to know de reason for the war! White man dey pay good money for soldier, so me, I join army to fight war for white man, that’s all! And when our Oyinbo Gomina, when he gave us order, say make we no bury de body, but bring am here like this, me I obey one-time! Orders is orders, that’s all! (21)
Of note in the use of language of this category of characters is that they are of low intelligence, and their level of education is low. They are also used for stylistic effect in the play as they introduce humor into it. They discuss important subjects but in a light mood.

Osofisan employs metaphors, symbols, and allegories alongside dialogue that is sharp, terse, and concise. The symbols and images, which are often cultural in nature, reveal some part of the social setting as well as the culture of the people. Let us consider a few examples:

1. Isokun:...But several times already I’ve consulted Ifá on the matter ...(15)

Ifá is a Yoruba oracle. It is a cultural symbol and the link between the world of the spirit and of the living. It is an oracle often consulted in the traditional Yoruba setting to reveal secret things to the people.

1. Tegonni: My “beads” are complete, see? But if I am not as intact and clean, as on the day I was born to my mother please strip me naked and wash me in shame. (29)

Beads are cultural elements in Yorubaland. In Yoruba culture, it is used for decoration and it is mostly worn during festivals and special occasions especially during a marriage ceremony where the bride is adorned with beads. In the excerpt above, bead is not only an artifact for decoration, but used as a metaphor for virginity. Virginity is usually held in high esteem in traditional Yoruba culture where the loss of it is a shame to both the bride and her family alike. In the extract above, Tegonni proudly announces her chastity or virginity.

2. Jones: Leave? Oh yes, I forget! The bride must not meet me at home. (39)
The extract above brings out one salient feature of the Yoruba culture as it relates to the wedding ceremony. Culturally, it is a taboo for the bride to meet the groom at home on their wedding day. He is expected to vacate the home, and not until the bride has come into the house can he return.

The play is also rich in the use of metaphor as shown in the excerpt below:

_Tegonni:_ A certain “river” Yemisi mi.
A certain river Yemisi Temilola!
People of the town must not go there,
people of the farm must not go there.
But Tegonni went there and splashed her face!
Yes, I went and swam lustily in the waters
And see, my face turned into a “laughing flower... (25)
Here, Tegonni paints the picture of her professional success as a bronze artist, a trade hitherto considered exclusive to men. Using the metaphorical symbol of a “river” where nobody goes, she triumphantly announced that not only did she go to the river, but she also swam in it and she came out shining. Her beauty is what she metaphorically symbolizes as “Laughing Flower.” In other words, her fame has risen and fortune shines on her, making her an object of attraction. In the next example,

\[ \text{Isokun: } \ldots \text{You others! Are a “feast” to the eye! (28)} \]

Isokun describes the elegance of women and the beauty of their outfit for the wedding ceremony. He captures this in the metaphorical image of a “feast” for the eyes. Apart from the fact that symbols, images, and metaphors add to the beauty of language, it also helps in the clarity of the setting, thereby enhancing meaning. Understanding is facilitated by a reader’s ability to decode the sense of the use of these elements.

Another area of interest in Osofisan’s play is the way in which he uses proverbs to drive home his message. Yoruba proverbs, like proverbs of many other African societies, are used to embellish and support arguments during conversation and other oratory events. In the social life of the Yoruba people, proverbs constitute a powerful rhetorical device for the shaping of moral consciousness, opinions, and beliefs. Proverbs are often described as the vehicles for conveying words. They cover a wide range of subjects and apply to virtually all aspects of life. Proverbs have aesthetic value, especially with the quality of their poetic language and richness of imagery. Thus, Yoruba proverbs are often characterized by a high degree of moral instructiveness, richness in imagery, use of concrete symbols, etc. In the African literary scene, proverbs serve as an effective literary tool to express literary independence because it always reflects the African socio-cultural milieu and thus enables its user to give an authentic portrayal of African life and experience. Proverbs are a major way of character delineation in most literary works. They form a major part of the language use of elderly characters. These characters are usually versed in cultures and customs of the people and these are demonstrated in their use of language.

In Tegonni, the elderly characters such as Chief Isokun and Chief Labiyi are in this category. Their speeches are often laced with proverbs and idioms. Consider the following:

\[ \text{Isokun: } \ldots \text{He is a lion who has been stung in the foot by an ant! He is shocked that it pains. (78).} \]

In this extract, the governor is the one being referred to metaphorically as a “lion.” Here Chief Isokun describes the bloated ego of the governor that has been ruffled by an ordinary girl. His orders, which none dares flout has been flouted
by Tegonni. Thus he is confused and surprised by the kind effrontery displayed by Tegonni who is being referred to metaphorically as “an ant.” Tegonni, to the governor, represents the unrecognized lots (ants) now difficult to control.

Isokun: No lizard enters a house, unless there is a crack already in the wall. (79)

The proverb above captures the general lack of unity among African societies, which the colonialists exploited to colonize Africa. There was a crack in the wall of unity before the coming of the whites to Africa. Tagonni also in the same vein maintains that all white men are the same, so long as they are product of the same culture and they represent the same idea, having common intention.

Tegonni: No leopard in the end can be different from other leopards. The forests of this world will not permit it. (103)

The 3rd elder also has this to say: “But the elephant lost its teeth and took to eating grass (61). Consider also the following statement from Chief Isokun: “It is because the young are prone to falter, that Edumare created long life” (61).

A lot of Yoruba words are employed in the novel to contextualize it. All the names of the characters with the exception of the whites are Yoruba names. The non-English words are graphologically highlighted in italics to mark them apart from the rest of the text. They include, Sányán (native fabrics), Ifá (a Yoruba oracle) Òrìsà (Yoruba gods) Àsì (Amen), Òyìnbó (White man), Èdùmàrè (God), babaláwo (Ifá priest), Sàngó (god of thunder), etc. Apart from these, Osofisan also makes use of linguistic highlighting. The deliberate repetition of some phrases in the play is to achieve semantic effect as in the following examples:

A certain “river” Yemisi mi
A certain river Yemisi Temilola!
People of the town must not go there
People of the farm must not go there… (25)

Oh let us do all our flirting when we’re young
and innocent for tomorrow will be too late
Oh let us do all our flirting when we’re young
and innocent for tomorrow will be too late (29)

Apart from the semantic effect achieved by emphasizing the extracts, the language is also poetic and rhythmic in nature. In other words it makes it musical, thus adding beauty to the language.

One of the major qualities that give a work of art its individual personality is style. Style has to do with the peculiar way a writer chooses and orders his words.
to achieve a desired effect. Kirszner and Mandel define style as, “the way in which a writer selects and arranges words to say what he wants to say” (242). Osofisan displays his flair for poetic lines in *Tegommi*. Some of the lines are even meant to be chanted. He explores the Yoruba language in its poetic form especially in festivals and cultural ceremonies like wedding. Below is an example of this style:

**Kunbi:** Fondness has no equal!  
The bean cake’s pride  
is traced to beans  
That of the child  
is traced to his father  
Salute! I pay respect  
to my father  
Chief Isokun.

**Federera:** Oh father  
Oh you powerful one!  
Sand below the maize granary  
Cannot contain a colt;  
Nor the biggest bathroom  
Holder of the youngest wart hog  
Once you declare a road safe  
Then, Baba, the road is safe!  
Yemisi (Continuing)  
Owner of abundance  
Like the cowries of orunmila  
Who snatched wealth from Death  
Whose lands are rich in coral  
Whose lands stretch on and on…  
Ah, can master arrive unnoticed? (14-15)

The extracts above are praise poems. Here Kunbi, Federera, and Yemisi sing in praise of Chief Isokun. The language is elevated and rich in imagery, symbols, metaphor, and simile. For example we have the image of the bean cake, maize granary, colt, etc. While cowries symbolize riches, coral symbolizes beauty and wealth. To reflect the mood of mourning occasioned by the death of Prince Oyekunle, the women begin to dirge softly:

**Women:** The tree has fallen!  
Oh the tree has crashed!  
We are searching for Oyekunle  
Who has found him for us?  
The elephant went on a trip  
And has not returned to the forest!  
Oyekunle has changed skins.
The big tree has fallen… (34-35)

Songs occupy a strategic position in Osofisan’s dramaturgy. Most of his songs are usually Yoruba cultural songs translated into English. Of note is the fact that Osofisan manipulates songs to reflect the mood of the moment in his plays. The songs are usually accompanied with drumming in a way that makes it danceable, thus adding to the beauty and color of the occasion. A few examples will suffice here:

Èrò bá mi ká lo
People, please come with me
Ilé oko mo nlo
As I head for my husband’s house;
Ará e telé mi
Friends, accompany me,
Ilé oko mo n rè:
I’m going to my husband’s house:
Bí mbá jósíwá
If I dance forward
E se: Wál! Wál! Wál!
Swing your bodies forward too
Bí mbá fí sehín
And if I weave backwards
Ke se: Won-in!
Shake your shoulders along,
Woi-n! Won-in!
Shake your shoulders along,
Fátéwó yé mi sí …
And end with applause for me!… (27)

The mood in the above extract is that of ecstasy as Tegonni is happy that she is getting married. Another ecstatic moment is the occasion of the arrival of the Governor Lt. Gen. Caster-Ross to the Oke-Osun village to witness the wedding of Tegonni and Alan (the District officer). Upon his arrival, a group of women under the leadership of Mary began to sing the song below to welcome him:

O sé o Jésù-A ó má yìn Ó!
Thank you Jesus, we praise you!
O sé o Jésù-A ó má yìn Ó!
Thank you Jesus, we praise you!
O sé o Jésù-A ó má yìn Ó!
Thank you Jesus, we praise you!
Baba, O sé tó fún wa láyò!
Father thanks for giving us joy!
O seun, o seun
Thanks and thanks again!
Èmi ibá lègbèrún ahón,
Had I a thousand tongues
O seun, o seun!
Thanks and thanks again!
Ìyìn fún Olórún ni,
All will be to praise you
O seun, o seun!
Thanks and thanks again!
Èmi ibáà lórísi iójó,
Had I a myriad of dance steps!
O seun, o seun!
Thanks and thanks again!
Maa jó fún Jésù lókè,
All will be for Jesus above?
O seun oseun!
Thanks and thanks again!
O sé o Jésù, A ó ma yìn Ó!
…Thank you Jesus, we praise you!
Baba, O sé tó fún wa láyò!
Father, thanks for giving us joy! (45)

The event that culminated in the aborted wedding of Tegonni soon dampens her mood and that of her friends. She seems to have come to regret her decision to
marry Alan in the first place. However, she is reminded of Alan’s contribution to her success in her chosen profession as a bronze artist, a profession that hitherto was an exclusive preserve of men. To celebrate this, they sing the song below.

_Egbe asude ma re o_  
—Awa ma re!—  
_Alagbede wundia_  
—Awa ma re!—  
_Abiyamo su baba_  
—Awa ma re!—  
_Ewose wa, eyo mo wa_  
—Awa ma re!—  
_Awa asude ma re o!_  
—Awa ma re!—  
_Awa obinrin re o!_  
—Awa ma re!—

We’re the Guide of Casters  
Here we are!  
We female smiths  
Here we are!  
Women who cast brass  
Here we are!  
See our work and hail us  
Here we are!  
We, women casters  
Here we are!  
Hail us, female workers!  
Here we are!  
(56-7)

Language use cannot be divorced from meaning. We use language to make statements of meaning. Thus, it is relevant at this juncture to consider language and meaning in Osofisan’s plays. The central idea in Osofisan’s plays is emancipation from the suffering of humanity. His plays are often peopled by the downtrodden that struggle against enormous odds in society. By presenting opposing classes engaged in argument about the lopsided arrangements in the society, Osofisan advances a class perspective. In _Tegonni_, for example, we see a clash between the oppressor represented by the colonial Governor Lt. Gen. Caster Ross and the oppressed people of Oke-osun, the course of which is championed by Tegonni and the women. The condition of the people is noticed in their use of language just as the oppressive tendency of the colonialist is also noticed in the use of language of the governor. This can be illustrated in a table as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Class Represented</th>
<th>Argument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Governor  | The oppressor     | (1) Oh no, of course not! You know we’re just there to give the orders; it’s the niggers who do the fighting…  
(2) Good! You should see them in battle, my boy! All we do is just sit in the bloody hammocks and drink whisky!…  
(3) And I too repeat, the empire has only one Lord, Reverend Campbell! And that is Her majesty the Queen of England, which I happen to represent. (43-44) |

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One noticeable thing in the above extracts is the arrogance displayed by the governor in his speech. Besides, we also see him as a callous dictator who engages in setting the people against one another in a fierce war that only benefits him at last. It is often said that he who makes peaceful change impossible, makes violent change inevitable. One is not surprised, therefore, at the defiance of Tegonni when she is pushed to the wall. She is ready to die, but not without achieving her aim of burying her late brother. The extract below is the dialogue between her and the governor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Class Represented</th>
<th>Argument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>Oppressor</td>
<td>Tegonni…that’s your name, isn’t it?…You won’t answer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tegonni</td>
<td>Oppressed</td>
<td>I’ve no time for you, white man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>Oppressor</td>
<td>In your situation, I’d be far more polite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tegonni</td>
<td>Oppressed</td>
<td>Then let’s change position and see.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>Oppressor</td>
<td>You’re arrogant and rude, I’ve been told. But let me warn you. I’m not at all like the D.O., in case you think-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tegonni</td>
<td>Oppressed</td>
<td>No one will ever make the mistake of confusing you with him General.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>Oppressor</td>
<td>Good! So let’s keep a proper tongue in-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tegonni</td>
<td>Oppressed</td>
<td>Or what would happen? Can you do more than take my life, which you’re already going to do? (58)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another noticeable group, though among the oppressed whose language betrays their stand on their problem is the elders. This group believes that their problem is more internal than external. They believe that the colonialists only exploit the weakness among them to colonize them. Had there been unity among Africans, the colonialists wouldn’t have succeeded in gaining ground in Africa:

*Isokun:* Forget the governor now. I know he seems all powerful, but to spend our time fighting him is to merely waste our energy. He is not the enemy, but we ourselves.

*Tegonni:* Now I am confused! He’s not the enemy?

*Isokun:* No…look, the reverend here! When I look at him, for Instance—I ask, who were the people who came and captured him, and sold him to the ship that took him to slavery in America? Was it not our own people of the same colour of skin as you and me?
Like the elders in every society, we see Chief Isokun, in the above extract in his wisdom, trying to persuade Tegonni to apologize if only for her to summon up more strength to attack in future. He seems to be saying here that victory for African states can only be won by diplomacy and unity. Confrontation will only lead to more devastating effects on the people.

In conclusion, language plays a significant role in the plays of Osofisan, and it is also an important aspect of his dramaturgy. His language is simple and his style not difficult. Evident in his plays is his political ideology which is a commitment to societal change for the better. Stylistically, his language use has helped the clarity of the dialogue in the play. There is clearly a sense of beauty attached to language that makes it appeal to the ear and to the imagination of the reader. Osofisan achieves this by spicing up statements with such condiments like proverbs, imagery, and symbols, making them more exciting to listeners. Insight into the culture of the Yoruba people is also expressed in the play through the extensive use of imagery, symbols, songs, and metaphors, thus contextualizing the drama. As a drama piece that centers on the contemporary issue of the struggles of a people for political, social, and economic emancipation from colonial and neo-colonial domination, the play is politically correct. It is therefore a successful blend of both form and content.

REFERENCES


As to my aim in writing, and mainly for the stage, I want desperately to get close to the spectator, to each and everyone I have trapped in the darkness or half light, to penetrate very close and intimate, like a knife in the ribs. I want to make that spectator happy but uncomfortable. I want to turn him open, guts and all, spice him, and cook him in the filthy, stinking, broil of our history. I want him washed inside out, in the naked truth, and then I sew him back again a different man. I believe that if we wound ourselves often and painfully enough with reality…if we refuse to bandage our sensitive spots away from the hurt of truth, that we can attain a new and positive awareness. (Osofisan, *Insidious Treasons* 93)

Works of art, however politically progressive, are powerless if they lack artistic quality…we are equally opposed to the tendency towards so-called ‘poster and slogan style’ which is correct only in political approach but lacks artistic power. (Mao, 259)

Femi Osofisan may not have been judged, as yet, a great playwright/dramatist on both African and World stages but, even now, his success is assured. His significance, we insist, derives from his bold and confident innovativeness in the deployment of the resources of the limited and limiting theater space as it also derives from the fact that he cares profoundly about and for the quality of life of man-in-society. His entire oeuvre, whether as playwright/dramatist or as novelist, columnist, short story writer, poet, polemicist, etc., addresses directly and with no apology whatsoever, issues arising from the modern sordid life of the contemporary African man-in-society. These include issues of the use or
abuse of political power, gender, class, and of course what we generally refer to, rather flippantly, as “life” itself. In his career, as both intellectual and dramatist, Osofisan has discriminated between “nature” and “society.” In this process, Osofian has come to realize that if, as human beings, we do not really understand “nature,” it is because we, as human beings, did not create “nature.” However, his plays, especially the mature plays, illustrate that we ought to understand and master the laws and processes of “society” simply because we as human beings, created society.

One such law is that which puts human action and language in a dialectical relationship. If we examine closely Osofisan’s plays, we will notice that he writes in what seems to be simple language. We use the word “seems” advisedly. On the surface level of delicacy, Osofisan’s language appears very down to earth indeed—almost as if directed at “low-level” language users only. Indeed, Osofisan has written and spoken again and again of his intense desire to reach out with his theater to the masses of Nigerians. But, as we shall soon see, his language seeps beneath the surface of appearance and re-emerges from the depth of be-ing, of social be-ing and explodes and scatters its meaning, its truth, as they say, into the middle of tomorrow. This comes from the crackle of the action-language dialectic of his social and historical experience.

Listen to the rhythm of Osofisan’s typical dialogue and what you hear is the rhythm of the labor of the peasant farmers and workers and fishermen whose work fructifies the earth. It is not easy to discern this rhythm. This is because it is both simple and complex—at the same time. This is the nature of dialectics as much as it is the nature of what we generalize often as “life.” A specter has hunted and overwhelmed the black people of Africa and of the diaspora for centuries. Even now, this specter seems to have fastened its grip on the collective consciousness of the black races of the world. This strangling grip is so pronounced that no less a black personality than President Barack Obama of the United States of America, then the Democratic Party’s presidential candidate for the 2008 presidential race, had to comment openly and unapologetically about it during his campaign. This was when he lamented about the growing number of instances of Americans abandoning the socio-political struggle to take refuge in churches. This is the specter of ignorance laced through and through with superstition. After President Obama had spoken, some elite members of the black community in America said that they felt insulted by the Senator’s brave and bold words. The Nigerian sociologist, Omafume Onoge, has written brilliantly on this specter which he summarises as a “crisis of consciousness” in African literature and, indeed, African life. Onoge then sets forth to establish the roots of this “crisis” as well as illuminate the path toward the negation of this negation, summarized again by him as the “consciousness of the crisis” (Gugelberger, 21-49).
Our first prefatory quote above from Osofisan relates to this. “I want to turn him (the reader/spectator) open,” proposes Osofisan, “guts and all, spice him; cook him in the filthy, stinking, broil of our history” (Osofisan, *Insidious Treasons* 93). Osofisan’s conclusion for his project above follows positively (i.e., dialectically) not in a positivistic (i.e., undialectical) manner on the heels of his project in his dramaturgy: “I believe that if we wound ourselves often and painfully enough with reality…we can attain a new and positive awareness” (Osofisan, *Insidious Treasons* 93). In a word, Osofisan’s dramaturgy seeks for us a “consciousness of the crisis” from which our every socio-historic act will ensue. With Osofisan, consequently, we have, in the beginning, the act. Thereafter, and side by side with it, language.

We have arrived at the keywords and concepts of our title. We now need to illustrate how these characterize and empower Osofisan’s play, *No More the Wasted Breed*, and serve the stated purposes of his overall dramaturgy. But first we need to (re)examine the notions of action and language as human categories as well as their relationship in the overall scheme of human praxis, or what I may refer to as, “Project Man.” Man, it is being gradually recognized, is supposed to be the active agent of his history. Indeed, he is. Simple as this assertion is, we point out here that colonized peoples of Africa and elsewhere have not really come to recognize or, indeed, come to terms with this historic mandate. It is specifically for this reason that nature equips us with brains and hands. The one, once prompted, to direct, guide and control; the other, thus directed, guided and controlled, to make things happen and, consequently, (re)create man in the process. Again, the booming of dialectics. To make things happen, to create with our heads and hands, is to work. This is a process. From the context of this process, man gains in praxis or practical knowledge. This is experience and it demands sharing or communicating, one with the other. Behold the birth of language. Human language, that is. The more complex the labor process, the more intense the work experience and the more intense and the clearer is the recognition of these complex sets of inter and intra relationships.

However, as a corollary, the unawareness of these processes and relationships results in fetishism and blighting crises of consciousness. Let us add here that the labor process is a social and historic event. Man-in-society *acts* in the course of his human history. Man’s language bears the stamp of his acts and enlightens subsequent *acts* ad infinitum. This rather abridged scheme is the stuff of which “we can attain,” in Osofisan words above “new” and positive awareness: awareness of ourselves as of awareness of what we often flippantly address as “reality.” After a near-comprehensive study and assessment of Osofisan’s oeuvre in C. Brian Cox’s 1997 collection of essays, *African Authors*, Garreth Griffiths is of the view that,
Osofisan shows how art can be employed either as a means to expose social injustice by liberal critics or as a weapon to maintain the status quo by conservative forces. (Cox, 628)

It must be emphasized that this is Griffith’s conclusion is drawn from his peroration of the action of a single play by Osofisan, *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* (1992). Coming as this observation does close to Griffith’s concluding remarks on Osofisan’s work, it may be mistakenly grafted and read into Griffith’s conclusion:

Osofisan’s work throughout his career has emphasised the social responsibility of the playwright. He has sought in a number of ways to make the theatre reflect the problems of the Nigerian society and to make his plays a platform for exploring these social issues. (Cox, 628)

One of the ways referred to above is the juxtaposition of myth and history in a theatrical tableaux and letting current real conditions of life depicted in the historic moment engage and, in the phraseology of the Black American feminists and culture theoreticians Bell Hooks & Gloria Watkins, “talk back” to whatever mythic apparitions that continue to shroud and dominate the consciousness of the modern African person. According to Bell Hooks & Gloria Watkins:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonised, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of “talking back”, that is no mere gesture of empty words that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice. (Hooks & Watkins, 9)

As we shall soon see in our sample play, *No More the Wasted Breed*, Saluga, through his labor as a fisherman and the praxis (i.e., practical experience) which he gains there from, acquires the “new act of speech,” of “talking back,” no mere gesture of empty words, and becomes—behold!—the liberated voice. So, too, his friend, Biokun and, ultimately, his society. Again, the action-language dialectic is clearly evinced and pressed into service in Osofisan’s typical dramaturgy. Osofisan utilizes this strategy in *Morountodun*, but rather as an after-thought, indeed after the actual scripted performance is over. His warm sense of theatrical space suggests a juxtaposition of the legendary mythic figure of Moremi and the theatrical personage of the historically transformed Titubi-into-Morountodun. The scripted stage direction says:
The song cuts off in a general freeze. Lights come on in the auditorium. On stage, on opposing platforms, MOREMI and TITUBI are caught in harsh spotlights, looking at each other. BLACKOUT

(Morountodun, 79)

Moremi is the mythic, legendary figure. She represents and fights on behalf of the nobility. Titubi, we learn from the unfolding action of the play, is the historic, liberated voice. She has now become the eponymous character, MOROUNTODUN, meaning, “I have found a sweet thing,” through her historic—not mythic—action. Unfortunately, this strategy of juxtaposition, which should have crowned the action of the play, is certainly not deftly pressed into service here. Its resources of critical comparison, analysis, and evaluation are not fully milked for the needed dramatic effect and comment. In a word, the myth has not been made to actively “confront history on solid ground.” The two so-juxtaposed and supposedly “antagonistic” personalities are simply made by the playwright to merely “look at each other.” We miss, as presented in this tableau, the active playing-out for our edification of a fundamental law of human history as, indeed, it is of nature itself: the active clashing and disintegration of actively opposing ideas or positions and the necessary synthesis of these opposing ideas and positions into a higher, clearer level of consciousness.

It is, however, in our chosen sample play, No More the Wasted Breed, that Biodun Jeyifo, the Nigerian radical scholar, critic, and polemicist’s dictum comes ringing true: “in order to blast forth to reality, myth must be made to confront history on solid ground” (Jeyifo, Positive Review 15). In this play, this warm theatricalism is deployed in such a manner that there ensues a lively, verbal and dramatic confrontation between the dumb-show ritual power of the expropriating goddess Elusu on the one hand and, on the other, Saluga, the representative of the oppressed, defenseless Frantz Fanon’s “wretched of the earth.” Here, Osofisan’s dramaturgy presents us with the “scene obligatoire,” of two juxtaposed theatrical spaces: the one, that of the legend and myth of the goddess Elusu – dumb, of the mythic past, moribund; the other, that of the present times, Saluga and Biokun its spokespersons, active, historic, and vibrating with what Plato gave to the world – dialektike.

No More the Wasted Breed evinces a sound grasp and deployment of the strategy for the theater and grounds it firmly in the sound law of the action-language dialectic in which operation, man’s activity/action accords him the experience/praxis which, in turn, dialectically re-enforces man’s activity. This goes on and on in a progressive manner! The residue of the theater is a richer, more theatrically rewarding fare. It is for this important reason that our second prefatory quote taken from Mao Zedong is relevant. This ceases to be only “politically progressive.” It is also aesthetically memorable. Indeed, with the firm grasp and theatrically sensitive deployment of the strategy, what would ordinarily have
passed for “a poster and slogan” style of works ends up being raised from a piece of mere sloganeering to the heights of poetic theater (as opposed to poetry in the theater)—and makes it deeply satisfying because of the hope it stirs in man for tomorrow!

In *No More the Wasted Breed*, Osofisan’s mature art of theatricalism sets up the various tableaux that constitute the act of “talking black” by the dominated and oppressed to the oppressor. The result is as refreshing as it is full of hope; not the saccharined baseless hope that flows from pulpits, but a hard-earned hope after the struggle has been consciously planned and carried out. Even the priest, Togun, the former agent and acolyte of the dominating and exploiting goddess, Elusu, can now join with the liberated masses of people to declare, “And the sun, see! The sun is shining again! (Osofisan, *Morountodun* 111). In order to get a full impact of the dramaturgical effect of this strategy, it is necessary to recast the stages of the strategy as scripted deliberately and consciously by the playwright. The play, it must be noted, is about justice. In the beachside prologue to the action of the play, Olokun, god of the ocean, remonstrates with his vicious wife, Elusu, goddess of the smaller inland water on which the villagers fish:

*Olokun:* I don’t like it…I hope justice is on your side.

*Elusu:* Is that why you have brought me here, in this disgraceful human form?

*Olokun:* …I was coming home to rest. But all I hear is wailing. I am condemned always to be on the side of justice.  

(*Morountodun*, 88-89)

The action of the play may now be stated thus: Elusu, goddess of the inland waters comes seeking vengeance upon the fishing community which has withheld ritual offerings to her for a couple of years. This is because she herself has not been of much, if any, succor to them. There is suffering in the land. Matters come to a head, and Biokun seeks to restore ritual offerings to her. But his very conscientized friend Saluga appears at the scene and stops the ritual offering from being carried out. Elusu strikes him dead, but Olokun, her husband, intervenes and brings him back to life. A rigorous debate then ensues between the dominating and vicious goddess and the rebelling Saluga. He demolishes the arguments of the goddess with superior, human reasoning. Justice is restored and Saluga and his fellow villagers win back their freedom to live and recreate themselves. Justice, freedom, and hope are restored.

First, Osofisan’s theatricalism presents us with the long story, now cut short by Togun, a priest of the goddess and a willing collaborator in her exploitation of the villagers. This is the mythos of the cult of the goddess. Then follow the rites, reenacted, albeit in dumb show. Osofisan indicates in his scripted stage direction:
[A sudden transformation. The ACOLYTE flings her arms in the air and becomes possessed. Biokun does a slow whirling dance, picks up the pot again, and becomes the carrier. All the others, apart from Olokun who steps aside, go rigid, as in trance. The ACOLYTE’s possessed dance brings her across the path of Biokun. She clings to him.]

(Morountodun, 101)

Togun, the priest of Olokun and Elusu, takes the responsibility for filling in the gaps of this tortuous, fairytale logic of myth. In the process, Biokun is informed of his “murdered” mother and imposed destiny as the next in line of ritual “carriers” for the wellbeing of the community. Saluga rejects the very idea even on behalf of his friend. The goddess Elusu loses her patience with Saluga whose consciousness of the crisis is at its highest alert:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Elusu:} & \quad \text{This is enough! I have suffered his insolence enough!} \\
\text{Olokun:} & \quad \text{Patience...} \\
\text{Elusu:} & \quad \text{No! Who does he think he is that he can wash his mouth out so freely on the gods? He must pay, now!}
\end{align*}\]

(Morountodun, 106)

Saluga’s consciousness of the crisis is now the crux of the matter of the extended, juxtaposed tableaux of gods and men in active confrontation as, indeed, it is the crux of the action of the play itself. The playwright draws out in time the tableaux with the extended stage directions which we must reproduce here, almost in full.

Olokun moves to intervene but it is too late. Elusu extends her arms angrily forward like a sword. There is a crash of sound, like cymbals, and a flash of lightning. At the same moment, her mask cracks, and her garments begin to drop off, revealing a very pretty, light-skinned woman with strikingly long black hair, whose body... is covered with fish scales...Simultaneously SALUGA crashes on the ground, fighting wildly as if trapped in a closing net... (Morountodun, 106)

There is also a “similar transformation” which concurrently “has happened to OLD MAN” (the god, Olokun). The exploiting goddess Elusu has single-handedly made the brave and vocal Saluga “pay the price of folly.” This, in spite of her husband Olokun,’s protestation.

\[\begin{align*}
\text{ELUSU:} & \quad \text{[to SALUGA] Now look up, foolish young man.} \\
& \quad \text{And say whether you think it’s still a lie.[ SALUGA groans]} \\
\text{SALUGA:} & \quad \text{[groaning] I see you, god and goddess. Just as I have always imagined you to be. Fat and cruel.}
\end{align*}\]
The great debate has begun within the context of the theatrical strategy which we have discussed above. For his bravery, Saluga must “pay the ultimate penalty.” Osofisan extends the tableau in his stage direction here:

Again, she extends her arms. SALUGA gives a jerk, screams, and is still. Silence....

(Morountodun 107)

In silencing the outspoken and courageous Saluga, Biokun’s lips are let loose. He too, a former blind worshiper, now learns rebellion from the unjust action of the goddess:

BIOKUN: I was blind, just like my father. Grief blinded me. But my eyes are clear now. Saluga told the truth.

ELUSU: What do you mean?

BIOKUN: The people...abandoned your cult because you failed us. Because you take and take, and give nothing back ... they did not kill you, you killed yourself...What is the justice...You complain of pollution, but who brought the ships of merchandise from across the ocean to our shore? You complain of being abandoned, but who brought the predators, who impoverished our people and turned them into grovelling slaves? Only a happy people pay homage to their gods. We fed you with the best of our season...But instead, you brought us slavers...

(Morountodun, 107-108)

The “talking back” continues. Olokun observes with keenness and sympathy. And the dialectic crackles on. Olokun, a god, is now “filled with shame” while Elusu, the powerful goddess “sings, a dying song, and begins to withdraw as Saluga revives” (Morountodun, 110). The tableau fades slowly before us. We conclude by recalling what Biodun Jeyifo said elsewhere. The myth of the cult of Elusu of the past is made to confront contemporary sordid conditions of real life of ordinary peasants. The myth is blasted to smithereens. We, even we, recognize the re-creative power of “talking back” to whoever dominates, exploits, and dehumanizes us. We recognize that we, even we, are the active agents of our history. With our heads and our hands. We learn and grow and move positively.
forward with tragic caution and consequences, we restore hope to our collective future. Indeed, we come to recognize and so reject the sham tragedy in our lives. “How beautiful and how tragic,” declares the god Olokun at the close of Osofisan’s ennobling and enabling play. “Beautiful” for us, “tragic” for the exploiters, I suggest. This is what Osofisan’s action-language dialectic in his dramaturgy gives to us.

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Tones and the Revolution: Music, Metaphor, and Revolutionary Concord in The Plays of Femi Osofisan

Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju

Introduction

All that remains now is for you to sing –
Yes, sing and dance.
It is an irresistible power.
(Aafa, in Once upon Four Robbers 22)

The relationship between indigenous African theater aesthetics and Femi Osofisan’s dramaturgy has been explicitly stated by him, in addition to the evidence shown in his plays. For him, contemporary African theater must, like its indigenous precursor, exploit the dual functionality of theater, which is to entertain and educate. This position agrees both with the African notion of aesthetics which lays much (though not exclusive) store by functionality in the arts, and with the stated position of Bertolt Brecht whose theater provides additional a theoretical anchor for Osofisan’s dramaturgy. The ultimate social objective expressed in Osofisan’s theater is an egalitarian and possibly revolutionary restructuring of society, so that all become “hoers and reapers.” By extension, Osofisan through his dramaturgy, further argues that the artist must arrange and structure histrionic elements, package them to entertain and conscientize. Songs are central to this scheme. We argue in this study that two distinct, though not exclusive, models of songs emerge in his plays—the play as song, and song as the play. This chapter explores the dialectical intersection of these models; of tones and revolution; of metamorphosis of music into revolutionary codes; of synchronization of lyrics with the thematic essence of Osofisan’s plays; of ideocompensative infusions and the occasional dissonance.
The irresistible power of Femi Osofisan’s musico-dramaturgy has been told in numerous anecdotes as also in scholarly essays. A couple of such anecdotes is appropriate here to set the tone for this study: In 1986 after several grueling weeks of rehearsing and eventually mounting the premier production of Osofisan’s *Another Raft*, the stage manager of the production who was a student in the Masters class of the Theatre Arts Department landed in Jaja Clinic, the University of Ibadan Health Center, where she lay incommunicado for a while. She was still in this state when some anxious crew members of the production, led by the director Femi Osofisan himself, arrived at her bedside in the clinic. According to reports, when she started eventually to come round and still unaware of the audience around her, the first sound she mumbled from her deep subconscious was “*Kí ló tì jé*?” a refrain from one of the songs of the play! In 2006, in Reuben Abati’s tribute to Osofisan at 60, he also anecdotally recalled that, “the songs in his plays …were popular tunes in the corridors of the Department.” Abati was also at that time (1986) a postgraduate student of the department. Indeed anecdotes about the songs in Osofisan’s plays are as numerous there are productions of the plays, for the songs are a potent infusion and often the most remembered parts of the productions. The songs not only stir audience consciousness in the course of performances, they also tend to stick to the subconscious. The average audience member would take at least something away from Osofisan’s theater, and often it is the songs.

This outcome is the product of deliberate and painstaking craftsmanship. As Abati continues in his tribute, “Osofisan’s plays are suffused with timeless moments of theatricality and songs, and hence there were special rehearsals for songs, led by Ososfian himself and in those days on many occasions with the assistance of Tunji Oyelana who was the department’s artist-in-residence.” Earlier, Awodiya had noted Osofisan’s main contributions to Nigerian theater as including “his extra-ordinary theatrical fertility of forms,” including the numerous songs woven into this theatricality (224). Earlier still, this writer had observed the implication of this numero-dramaturgic interface: The fact that songs are numerous in an Osofisan play “strengthens the entertainment fabric of the play and reinforces the rapport between stage and audience….Above all, the songs are poignant in their thematic appeal, a potent medium of thematic exploration and explication in the play” (see Obisesan 87). Such appraisals of the manner in which Osofisan structures play after play with musical infusions to enhance their socio-ideological objective are copious in the literature; Osofisan himself repeatedly offers a useful personal corroboration of this theoretical perspective:

I am constantly reaching out for the popular indigenous forms, using things like popular songs and melodies, borrowing the tunes sometimes in order to change the lyrics, put in my own words. Popular
form can be, should in fact be, an instrument for positive advocacy
(interview with Morosseti).

Apparently in line with this dramaturgical objective, characters in Osofisan’s plays are often made to insinuate the potency of songs, as demonstrated in Aafa’s statement quoted above. In the other “magic boon” play, *Eshu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, Old Man also charges the minstrels to each “find a suffering man…and sing to him,” and, “whatever his pain, whatever his suffering, it will end!” (18-19). This centrality of songs to Osofisan’s dramaturgy is equally suggested by characters like Imaro in *Oriki of a Grasshopper* and Ayoka in *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*. For Imaro, freedom is a shield and, alternatively, a hard nut whose kernels are “ancient songs set ablaze” (45), a phrasing that was to provide the title for Sandra Richards’ relatively recent work on Osofisan’s dramaturgy. Also, as Ayoka explains in *Yungba-Yungba*, the ancients in the play chose to hold dance contests in place of an election by voting: “Our foremothers, skillful dancers and musicians themselves, saw how fun could be mixed with serious business” (24). This sets the stage for a drama of songs and dance in the play, and further demonstrates Osofisan’s penchant to present serious conflict and societal struggles through the instrumentality of song and dance.

However, this chapter endeavors to categorize the input of songs into Osofisan’s dramaturgy beyond the hackneyed and jejune statement that, “Osofisan uses songs in his plays.” In proposing a critical categorization of the nature of these songs and the precise manner in which they are made to serve both dramaturgical and ideological purposes in Osofisan’s drama, we reemphasize, first, that the deployment of music and dance in the service of socio-political and revolutionary themes is a significant measure of Osofisan’s indebtedness to his indigenous Yoruba culture and tradition of drama on the one hand, and to Brechtian dramaturgical postulates and praxis on the other hand. Just as the Yoruba have a greeting for every occasion, so do they deploy a song and a dance for every occasion, every happenstance. Elsewhere (Obisesan 46, 49) we had cited two quintessential notes on the peculiarity of this cultural link within African aesthetic configurations. The first citation was of an early comparison with European drama (cited in Graham-White 1974, 31) to the effect that, “rhythm supplies force to [African] performance as the plot does in European drama,” while the second was Soyinka’s (1976, 147) declaration that it is “unmusical…to separate Yoruba musical form from myth and poetry” since its language and poetry are of the same nature. As will be further elaborated below, this *tradition* trajectory has implications for the analysis of the impact of songs on Osofisan’s dramaturgy, his ideology, and his audience.

The tradition trajectory also has implications for the analysis of that other well-acknowledged influence on Osofisan as playwright, that is, the ideo-dramaturgic precepts and praxis of Bertolt Brecht. Brechtian methodology of interspers-
ing dialogue with songs and poetry in his drama was meant to attain the so called “V,” or “alienation,” effect. By this, presumably, the audience is emotionally detached from the play’s action and the alluring thrills of the drama; instead, it is expected to engage in an objective analysis of the historical, ideological, and possibly revolutionary implications of the drama. However, long before Brecht, traditional Yoruba African drama was already a mix of dialogue, songs, and dances. Osofisan’s indebtedness to Brecht can therefore be located, not necessarily in the method of interspersing songs with dialogue in his drama, but in the additional structural innovations, some of which will be elaborated in this study. Beyond this indebtedness to indigenous dramaturgy and possibly to Brecht we propose here a quasi formal grouping of songs and their pattern of deployment in the plays of Osofisan. As noted earlier, two categories or models seem distinct, namely the play as song, and song as the play, models.

THE PLAY AS SONG

(This is the experience, my dear friends
That we are recreating for you tonight.
A play sprinkled with songs.
Or songs illumined by a play.

(Songmaster, in The Midnight Blackout 2)

In the play as song model, dramatic sequence is “conducted” largely through the instrumentality of songs. Here we must immediately isolate for conspicuous mention a macro level categorization involving those plays in which song and dance are overtly insinuated as paramount dramaturgical motifs. These are especially plays like The Chattering and the Song, Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest, Eshu and the Vagabond Minstrels, and Fiddlers on a Midnight Lark. The titles alone provoke audience expectation of “a night of songs,” and hence appreciation of “the play as song.”

However, irrespective of the titles, our “the play as song” categorization also takes into account all those plays in which songs are used as structuring media. In such cases the songs formally structure the play either in a narrative fashion, or in an operatic fashion whereby the songs occur both as narrative songs and as aesthetic intermissions. The quintessential example of the former in Osofisan’s repertory is the opening narrative song and other mediating songs in Four Robbers. The actor narrator, Aafa, opens this play with the story-telling formula, Ààló o, and then proceeds to introduce the story of the play in a narrative song (“Ìtan mi dorí ò dori”—“An ancient tale I will tell you…”). Aafa also appears intermittently to comment on the progress of the play and fill in narrative gaps through the songs.
The latter group in which songs structure the drama in operatic fashion is exemplified mainly by the “midnight plays” where there is actually “a makeshift of a bandstand.” There is also a “Songmaster” (in Midnight Hotel and in Fiddlers on a Midnight Lark) who is otherwise a “Bandleader” (in The Midnight Blackout), and he doubles as narrator via musical interventions in the three plays. In Midnight Hotel, the playwright directs that the orchestra should “remain prominent and conspicuous throughout the play…” (5). Also in The Midnight Blackout, notwithstanding the constraints of space, the playwright manages to squeeze the bandstand in front of “a door [that] leads down into a garage” (4).

Next to the narrative function, the songs in the play as song category also serve a plot function in the sense that they form part of the plot and are a necessary part of the progression of the plot. Such songs catalyze or modify dramatic action and generally constitute part of the story. The most prominent examples of this are in Four Robbers and Esu where the songs are an integral part of the plays’ action. Indeed, the tone and effect of the songs determine the course of action in many sequences within the plays and also determine the eventual resolutions of the conflict in the plays. To this extent the songs enhance suspense in these plays as the audience watches out for the promised magical effect of the songs on the characters, on the events in the plays and, as will become evident, on the audience itself.

The structuring role of songs in the play as song model is rendered more conspicuous in those sequences in which songs are overtly used to begin and end the drama. This structuring is sometimes preceded by a formal announcement, e.g., “Let us begin…” or, “To start right away […]” (The Midnight Blackout 2); “Let us end the play with our final song” (Esu 71), or “Let me teach you a simple refrain” (Yungba-Yungba xvii). This is often said by a recognized official, e.g., Songmaster or Bandleader in the midnight plays—or, more typically, by one of the characters in the plays (Chief and Male Leper in Esu, Songmaster, Chief Jimoh, or Alatise in Midnight Hotel). Where an orchestra or Songmaster is present, these characters often invite them to join in the singing.

Apart from such formally announced renditions, characters also spontaneously intersperse the action and or dialogue with singing and dancing. This mode is particularly conspicuous in plays like Yungba-Yungba in which, ab initio, the play is designated as a sequence of songs and dances. However, this mode is generally on display in Ososifan’s dramaturgy. By dispersing the songs throughout the play, either in the narrative, orchestra, or scenario mode (see below), the episodic character of the plays is enhanced; the songs often stand like distinct episodes helping the playwright to connect his audience with the relevant themes. Presumably, the announcement and the other strategies being noted here enhance the “alienation effect” of the plays; but more on this later in the chapter.
At the micro (non-structural) level of categorization within this (the play as song) model, the songs may also be used explicitly to establish the mood of a play or may function as scenario songs. The former occurs conspicuously in *Esu* where the “Song of Agbada and Khaki” comments extraneously on contemporary dictatorship but otherwise merely sets the mood of theatricality for the play. For their part, scenario songs supplement, comment, or elaborate on specific scenarios within the play. They also advance characterization. For example, the song by each vagabond in *Esu* is tailor-made to suit the circumstance of each victim that the song is meant to heal. Similarly, in *Four Robbers*, the dirges in respect of the executed robber (“Eni lo sórun” 1; “O se kere” 10, etc.) are in sync with the scenario, while the songs “Àwa ti wà” and “Bí e bá gbó giri” (7) additionally advance the collective characterization of the robbers.

In those examples in which characters break spontaneously into songs, the songs may either be motivated by dramatic action or may be unmotivated. They are motivated by dramatic action when there is some discernible cause in the sequence, e.g., a celebration or a dirge, enhancement of characterization, or embellishment of the scenario. To cite a random example of the latter, in *Four Robbers*, Mama Alice, head of the market women, leads the “Song of the Marketplace” in the course of a dialogue with the soldiers on the women’s profitable and satisfying outing at the market. The motivation here is anaphoric and logically follows from the play’s action, that is, the song is used in this instance to embellish the scenario. On the other hand, the songs may be unmotivated when a character brings up the idea of a song out of the blue. There are many examples of this, but extreme instances occur in both *Midnight Hotel* and *Esu*. In such instances, there is a much higher potential to alienate both fellow characters and the audience. Hence there is always a retort at such moments to emphasize this alienation: “No, don’t sing…not here!” (*Midnight Hotel*, 21); “Look at you! Singing, at a time like this!” (*Esu*, 13), etc.

These parameters in the foregoing only briefly outline the manner in which Osofisan has constructed his plays as a song, through structural and non-structural means – as narrative; as plot; through formal and semiformal operatic settings; through formal annunciation or spontaneous insertions, be this motivated or unmotivated; as scenario or celebratory songs; in advancement of characterization or theme; etc. In all, the songs of the various categories highlighted above within the play as song model also serve generally to enhance the musical or celebratory atmosphere of the plays, hence contributing to their overall aesthetic appeal.

**SONG AS THE PLAY**

*And I shall sing, my love*  
*Of a shield called Freedom*
Against which the talons of eagles break;
Of a nut impervious
To the knocking of boots, in which
The kernels are ancient songs
Set ablaze;
Words felonious as the poet
And dangerous to the sword
Of tyrants…

(Imaro in The Oriki of a Grasshopper 45)

What we have called the song as the play model is insinuated by the structure as well as the form and content of the relevant songs. The songs in the model are those which by themselves, that is, by virtue of their content, per se, serve as guide to the revolutionary import of Osofisan’s plays. They also serve as a direct means of social conscientization, this being, theoretically at least, the major concern of Osofisan’s dramaturgy. Apart from such revealing contents, the relevant songs are structurally located at vantage points in the sequence, for example as opening, mid-, or end-songs. The latter location mimics the structure of the traditional Yoruba African folklore in which the lore’s overall message or moral is placed at the end, sometimes through an explicitly exhortative song. It is in this sense that such songs may be characterized as the play within the context of Osofisan’s dramaturgy.

This categorization is the more persuasive because there are many instances in which the location of such songs serves an ideo-compensative function within the dramaturgy. By this we mean that in cases where the play’s action itself does not seem to traverse the traditional Osofisan theme of revolution or social change, a song or part of it may be inserted to explain the metaphorical connections or to at least serve as some indication of this concern, and as a general contextual background. The Midnight Plays offer conspicuous examples of this compensative mechanism. In Midnight Hotel, the “Songmaster’s Welcome Song,” the “Song of Mr. Stupid,” and the “Song of the Faraway Land” are located at the beginning, middle, and end respectively, and they provide ideo-thematic compensation for a play that seems merely like an entertaining exhibition of ribaldry, cuckoldry, and sheer loose-society living. In The Midnight Blackout, the playwright uses the end-song (titled, “The Many Wives of a Ruler”) to explain the metaphorical connections between the play’s action and a socio-political concern:

The people are, in the Ruler’s care
Like wives in a marital affair. (111 – 112)

Such an explicit explanatory sequence within a latter-day Osofisan song/play (1994) is reminiscent of the “song of the crawling things” in his early (1977) The Chattering and the Song. In this 1977 song is also included the explanation that
the crawling thing “signifies our nation now.” However, the action in *Chattering* is by itself thematically vintage Osofisan; the song of the crawling things does not therefore belong within the *ideo-compensative* range. On the other hand, the play *Fiddlers on a Midnight Lark* (2006) boasts one of the least explicit connections with the traditional Osofisan themes of revolution and social change. Indeed, by this time, Osofisan, according to the play’s blurb, would appear to have abandoned any “pretense about the role of the artist in society.” Still, the play’s “Welcome Song” contains what may well be the only explicit indication that this playwright may have any ideo-political concerns at all. The song contains a reference to the oppressed masses of society as the wretched of the earth:

In this song we have an example of those tokenist revolutionary one-liners in Osofisan’s songs, which are well located structurally and may compensate for the apparent absence of a socio-political concern in the play itself. The point is that even such tokenist *ideo-compensative* insertions show that the category *song as the play* is a viable one in which a song or part of it serves as pointer to the playwright’s ideo-political orientation or concern which may or may not be evident in the play’s action.

Beyond such structurally marked *ideo-compensative* insertions, in advancing a *song as the play* category within Osofisan’s dramaturgy, we distinguish generally between those scenario and celebratory songs, or songs that generally enhance theatricality and aestheticism (which have been described in the foregoing in relation to the *play as song* model), and those theme songs within the second model which musically encompass and recreate the concrete thematic essence of Osofisan’s dramaturgy. These two categories (scenario songs and theme songs) undoubtedly coalesce at several points and there is no attempt here to treat the categories as mutually exclusive. However, within the *song as the play* model, we further distinguish between those theme songs in which general themes of evil, oppression, social vices, and inequality in society are outlined and those in which revolutionary action or social change is suggested or at least alluded to.

The former (songs with general themes of evil, oppression, social vices, and inequality in society, sometimes with direct topical references to oppressive military rule, and sometimes with recognized Nigerian acronyms such as SAP, etc.), account for the largest number of songs in Osofisan’s repertoire. To cite a few examples, we have references to:
“dangerous highwaymen,” “evil doing to amass poverty,” “wife stealers” “marriage breakers…” (narrative song in *Four Robbers*);

“crowd that’s born each day to sweep the rubbish….” (“Song of the Marketplace” in *Four Robbers*, 33-34);

“wars feed on hunger… and the voices of the wretched of the land….” (the song of the maiden and the music man in *Esu*, 12);

“the time is ripe only for the rich and ruthless…..” (“Song of Mr. Stupid,” *Midnight Hotel*, 53-54)

“for SAP and pry-vay-Tai-whetin, have turned romance to trade and betting….…” (interval song of “Love in the Age of SAP” in *The Midnight Blackout*, 44);

“came independence, and shortly after, Our customers and our staff began to slaughter one another with such abandon….…” (“Songmaster’s Welcome Song” in *The Midnight Hotel*, 6-7).

“Khaki and Agbada; De two de waka together; Khaki come to power; Imitate Agbada…; With immediate dispatch; He don chop de treasury; Food de dear for market, Man go suffer—suffer…” (opening song, “Song of Agbada and Khaki” in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, 2)

The latter, those in which revolutionary action or change is suggested or alluded to, occur in a number of plays. It is often in this category that the tones of the revolution ring loud and clear in Ososian’s dramaturgy, either as complement to thematically explicit action and dialogue or as compensation for the absence of such explicit statements. Even when taken out of the context of the play, the songs are capable of giving a general idea of its thematic structure. They are therefore a major way through which Ososian keeps his plots episodic as the lyrics shed light on the play, serving as the strings by which he ties his overall message together.

Such conscious constructions signify an intention to deploy music for revolutionary purpose. It is fairly easy therefore to track the cardinal principles of socialist struggle—egalitarianism, collectivism, hope, and revolutionary overthrow of bourgeois society—through Ososian’s ideo-musical insertions. A few examples will suffice. In *Morountodun*, which is one of his core revolutionary plays, perhaps the only song that is wholly devoted to the message of hope, arguably so, is the one taught by Titubi to the women in the farmer’s camp. The song is first sung as the women await a negotiation that might end the war and their suffering. Significantly and in line with the structural mechanism noted earlier,
the song is also located as an end-song in the play, even after the repeated crushing defeat of the farmers in their suicidal attack on government stronghold.

Be always like this day beside me
Wear hope like a jewel
It never fades (Morountodun, 71 & 79)

Similar songs of hope, for example that, “the season can change” (“Song of the Faraway Land” in Midnight Hotel, 92-93); “the blind will see and the deaf will hear”; “the doped will waken to consciousness”; “The ruler’s spell is a season’s haze; It scatters when Freedom shines its rays”; “For tyrants have their obituaries; The people’s song still outlast decrees” (Song of “The Many Wives of a Ruler” in Midnight Blackout, 111-112), etc., will be found in most of Osofisan’s plays.

Actual revolutionary overthrow of decadent, bourgeois society is indicated explicitly in such songs as the “Song of As Sneezed”; “We mus’ face dem and fight dem; Instal a law for justice…” (Aringindin, 11) and, more explicitly, in “Song of a Faraway Land”:

As the agents of terror seized the land
Bringing pain and sorrow to the land
Till the people woke up
And they got their guns
Against the liars and looters …
No people can have peace
No people can have rest
Till the struggle for freedom is won (Midnight Blackout, 93)

While the examples above give a small to medium view of Osofisan’s deployment of revolutionary codes in his songs, The Chattering and the Song has been and remains the perfect example, of the deployment of dialogue, songs, and metaphors in the service of a revolutionary vision of society. The macro metaphor in this play and in its songs is that of society as an egalitarian (family) farm: “all hands must toil both to cultivate it and to eat of its fruit” (Chattering, 53), a notion that is corroborated by the “Farmer’s Anthem” in the play (see Oloruntoba-Oju’s Language and Style, 88 for characterization of metaphors in Osofisan’s works as “ideational images,” which are further divided into macro and micro “ideational representations”).

The songs in The Chattering and the Song contain undying metaphors by which the playwright deconstructs the confrontation between the oppressed and the oppressors. The “Farmers’ Anthem” in the play reconstructs the world in terms of egalitarian involvement. The oppressors are the weeds on the farm, and collectively they must be gotten rid of.
When everyone’s a farmer
We’ll wipe out the pests
In the land
No more injustice
Labour’s for all
No more oppression
All hands to hoe (56-57).

In other scenarios, songs, and chants in the play the playwright pursues the image of collectivity (“Song of the Weaverbirds”), apathy (“Song of the Crawling Things”), hope and victory (“Farmer’s Anthem”), etc. In no other play of Osofisan’s since Chattering has there been such a comprehensive assemblage of complementary songs featuring metaphors and tones that reverberate in sync with the ideas of revolution or socialist alternative. Correspondingly, it is in this play that we are offered the most complete example of what we have referred to as the song as the play model. It is the perfect example of the metamorphosis of music into revolutionary codes, of revolutionary concord in Osofisan’s repertoire.

CONCORD AND DISCORD

Song may be elegant
But what of when hunger calls?
(Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest, 112)

You sing so well,
But don’t you see the hunger all around?
(Eshu and the Vagabond Minstrels, 12)

That is enough. Songs alone
Do not prove a man’s sincerity.
(Eshu and the Vagabond Minstrels, 18)

Imaro: But I know that, don’t I? I’ve celebrated it in songs.
Moni: That’s just it! Songs are not enough.
(Oriki of a Grasshopper, 42)

Just as Osofisan makes his characters to insinuate the power of songs as highlighted in the foregoing, so is he acutely aware of the inadequacy of songs within the context of societal struggles, as the quotes immediately above demonstrate. The ensuing paradox has been fodder for critical canon-bursts. It must be noted here that there is an obvious difference between the notion of songs and theatricality on the one hand and that of songs in real life struggles on the other.
Osofisan’s songs strengthen the entertainment fabric of his plays, as noted earlier, but they would not thereby fell the “wall of Jericho” in real life struggles; not even Osofisan himself or his numerous acolytes would ever make such a claim. However, the critical brickbats over the deployment music, songs, and tones in his dramaturgy deal with the relationship between this entertainment fabric of the dramaturgy and the course of “the revolution” or the “positive advocacy” that the playwright means it to serve.

In our reckoning, the ensuing debate is bifurcated. The first critical perspective engages the theoretical claims of “alienation” in specific regard to the deployment of songs in Osofisan’s dramaturgy and the related Brechtian antecedents. As we have noted in the foregoing, elements such as the episodic deployment of songs in Osofisan’s plays; the operatic mode of presentation in some of the plays, especially the midnight plays; the intrusive annunciation of the onset of songs in many instances; and the spontaneous (motivated and unmotivated) insertion of songs into the dramatic sequence all presumably enhance the Brechtian alienation effect. However, while Brecht’s alienation technique is famous for its global influence, including the much vaunted influence on Osofisan’s dramaturgy, it is equally notorious for its confounding failure in attaining its objective—audiences continue to be moved by pity and fear and to be empathically involved in his dramas.

It is arguable that this failure of the “alienation” technique is replicated in Osofisan’s praxis—many scenarios and songs in the plays frequently make some audience members to break down in tears just as some others frequently plunge them into extreme pleasure or enjoyment, both effects being antithetical to the plays’ theoretical objective. This latter effect of Osofisan’s songs is a common enough phenomenon that is borne out by the numerous post-production anec-dotes, some of which have been referred to earlier. One example of audiences being moved to tears, randomly citing from this writer’s observation, is the dirge in *Robbers*, which ironically caused tears (notwithstanding the robber, Major’s remonstration: “Sing on Alhaja, sing on, but we shall not mourn” [8]). Another example which is quite notorious in the course of productions is Omele’s song in *Esu*. In the preceding sequence of this play, Omele’s act of compassion has already reduced him to a wretch. And now as he braces himself for a further act of compassion that would turn him into a loathsome leper, and even though no one knows yet what to expect from this further act, his song (“When Others Run,” 52-53) unfailingly draws tears from audiences. The song is not only fatalistic in lyrical content (cf. the first line *Bó bá yá ó yá* (“if when the time comes”) and “*Ìgbà kan l’okùnrin n lo*” (“the valiant dies but once”), it is also sonorous in tone and elegiac in rendition.

However, there is a more important reason why the failure of the alienation technique in Brecht appears to echo so much in Osofisan’s dramaturgy. This
reason is that spontaneous outbursts of song, including theme songs, scenario songs, and celebratory songs is a normal feature of everyday African life and of African traditional drama. Richards noted that Osofisan is “heir” to two traditions of theatrical illusions (Bertolt Brecht and Georges Feydeau) and that his plays “ultimately jettisons theatrical illusion entirely in order to provoke debate…” (70); however, she also eventually observes the well established fact that:

In the African instance, daily life encompasses song and dance; hence, the presence of these elements in a dramatic setting does not necessarily warrant the categorization of nonrealistic or traditional theatre. (153)

Indeed, as we have noted elsewhere (Oloruntoba-Oju, Language and Style), Osofisan himself has often regarded songs and dances as a “spontaneous” expectation of African theater aesthetics. Hence, interspersing dialogues and actions of the drama with songs may not necessarily “alienate” the average African audience.

The crux of this critical perspective on Osofisan’s deployment of songs is that the pleasant melodies for which Osofisan’s plays are famous are even more unlikely to be alienating in the manner of Brechtian precept and praxis. This view engages, more fundamentally, the progressively intense theatricality of Osofisan’s dramaturgy, which apparently succeeds at the expense of his plays’ ideological content. Suffice it to reproduce here some of the statements of concern regarding the implication of this theatricality. First, Jeyifo expresses concerns about

the tension of [Osofisan’s] dramatic art: a consummate, some would say indulgent artistry…surfeit of songs…side by side with a passionate advocacy of social justice…to be obsessed with such issues is to considerably, if not fatally, complicate ones ideological convictions” (232).

Oloruntoba-Oju draws attention to the same possible implication:

The main charge is that the aesthetic concern may have overtaken the ideological in the output of pioneering emergent dramatists. Certainly, a “toning down” of revolutionary fervour is noticeable. This much Osofisan himself admits… Whether the practical manifestations of this “subtle shading” do not have adverse ideological implications is a question that has been asked (“The Language of Anger in African Theatre”, 58-59).

It would certainly appear that, from The Chattering and the Song onwards, there has been a greater attention to theatricality in Osofisan’s dramaturgy, leading to a profusion of scenario songs and others devoted to aestheticism, sometimes
with an embarrassing drowning of a larger socio-political analysis. Richards was to make a remark akin to this in her consideration of the “Song of the Lagos Woman” in Midnight Hotel:

neither the song that precedes this explanation nor in his conversation with Bicycle does Jimoh directly voice objections to the illegal privatization of national revenues, a process that seemingly he regards as an unalterable element of the contemporary urban landscape. Rather, he rails against women who in their alleged promiscuity and conspicuous consumption are perceived as the source of his male impoverishment. (70)

Richards’ larger contention here, as she proceeds to state, is about the play’s apparent gender insensitivity or inattention to gender issues; however, her statement about the absence of any ideo-thematic counter within the song itself is worthy of note within our context here.

CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the critical observations in the foregoing regarding the deployment of songs in Osofisan and its implication for his dramaturgy, especially on the ambivalence that this deployment appears to generate vis-à-vis the avowed, or generally assumed, objective of the dramaturgy for which objective the dramaturgy had drawn acclaim over the decades, Osofisan’s tuneful contribution to the Nigerian theater canon as analyzed in the foregoing continues to be without parallel. Even the critics cited in the foregoing admit that much. The music and tones of Osofisan’s theater may sometimes ring loud, and entertainment may increasingly have taken center stage to the detriment of the once-accustomed socialist ideology; but if one were to be attentive, the silently booming sound of the revolution would still be heard, sometimes distinctly.

NOTE

1. Incidentally, songs such as the robbers’ praise song, Àwa ti wà, etc., in Robbers function no less than their travails to raise empathy with the robbers. This perhaps contributes to the frequent sentimental vote that audiences cast for the robbers when Aafa calls for a plebiscite at the end of the play. As the robbers themselves had correctly narrated in the opening scene, and as Soyinka points out in another context in his preface to Opera Wonyosi, real life audiences characteristically sipped lollipops at the Bar Beach execution of armed robbers.
Tones and the Revolution

References


Section V

TRANSLATION, CULTURAL RETRIEVAL, AND MOBILITY OF ORAL TRADITION
INTRODUCTION

Femi Osofisan is one of the most notable contemporary African dramatists. A careful study of his plays reveals a strong persuasion about the potency of drama in addressing contemporary Africa’s multi-layered problems. One feature of his drama is the consistent exploration of African tradition and cultural matrices to make artistic statements. A visible imprint of African culture in Osofisan’s drama is the recurrent usage of the market trope. This chapter contends that the market as an idea or as a concrete social institution occupies a significant place in the construction of Osofisan’s plays, serving aesthetic, cultural, and ideological purposes. The need for a firm understanding of the trope and the reasons for the playwright’s fascination with it inform our analyses of Once upon Four Robbers, Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen, Yungba- Yungba and the Dance Contest, and Fires Burn and Die Hard. The market in these selected plays is a veritable site for interrogating the myriad of socio-political forces that account for Africa’s unending crises of development in post-independence years. It is also an arena for playing out the inevitable conflicts emerging from the unequal economic relations existing among individuals and social classes. From the textual analyses, it is established that the market motif is part of the artistic elements that shape Osofisan’s concept of popular drama, its nature, and its social functions.

Several scholarly efforts have offered illuminating insights into Femi Osofisan’s exploration of African (Yoruba) traditional lore and performance materials in his plays (see, for example, Awodiya 1993, 1996, 2002; Richards 1996; Raji 2003). Some of these materials include the usage of a performance mechanism that fuses storytelling with dance, music, and song. Osofisan also explores the Yoruba pantheon to comment on the paradox of existence as captured in the creative / destructive icons of Ogun, Esu, and Obatala, with Orunmila as the restorative principle. He revisits myth, legend, and the indigenous monarchical
system to interrogate the crises of governance in post-independence Africa. In his theater, one encounters a freewheeling revisionism of traditional religious practices to reflect the absurdities and contradictions inherent in Africa’s contemporary reality, as shown in *Who is Afraid of Solarin?*, *Another Raft*, and *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*.

However, the market is one of the elements of indigenous culture that feature in Osofisan’s plays; a recurrent element that deserves more attention. This chapter, therefore, focuses on the nature and significance of the market idea in its different manifestations from play to play. This is done with a view to deepening the hermeneutics of his drama. In its study of four plays—*Once upon Four Robbers* (subsequently referred to as *Four Robbers*), *Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen* (*Aringindin*), *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* (*Yungba-Yungba*), and *Fires Burn and Die Hard* (*Fires Burn*)—the study shows the recurring idea of the market and thematic possibilities generated through this recurrence. It argues that the market is another element of the playwright’s indebtedness to Yoruba tradition and culture. But besides this, the choice of the market trope is also informed by Osofisan’s ideological inclination which sees economic distribution as pivotal to the affairs of man in society. To this end, some pertinent questions are addressed: What is the concept of the market in Yoruba culture where Osofisan hails from? How has the dramatist appropriated the essence of the market as a socio-cultural and economic institution? How has he deployed the spiritual or symbolic icons that lie beyond the physical outlay of the marketplace? What are the artistic, political, and ideological implications of the market against the backdrop of crises of development confronting contemporary Africa?

THE MARKET, THE STAGE, AND THE SPACE BETWEEN

The market is a multi-dimensional concept and no single definition may exhaust its overall significance. From its etymology in Latin *mercatus* or *mercari*, market implies barter. In modern usage, it commonly refers to either a place or the method of contact between buyers and sellers who engage in mutual interactions. From these interactions, both parties are expected to be better off than they were before the market encounter, in terms of satisfying their needs. Perhaps it is appropriate at this juncture to submit that the space in between the market and the stage is the larger society; the world of everyday reality of Africa or the so-called Third World nations that constitute the immediate focus of Osofisan’s theater. This is the universe that largely supplies his compositional materials from play to play. There exist palpably considerable similarities between events in the market as reflected on the stage, and happenings in post-independence Africa. The market as a popular arena enables him to bring to bear on his drama, the
performance resources of African popular theater like music, dance, storytelling, digression, and other anti-illusionistic devices which some critics are wont to ascribe to Brechtian alienation techniques (*verfremdungseffekt*).

Whether in its provenance in medieval fairs in Europe or its conception among the Yoruba of Nigeria as a terrain of business between the human and the spirit world, the market across cultures and ages is commonly designated as a site of economic activities. Goods and services are freely exchanged, using barter or a generally accepted medium of exchange—money. The ultimate goal is to achieve a mutually pleasing relationship of exchange through competition of prices. Money is, therefore, the supreme lord of the market.

In Yoruba cosmology, the market draws its buyers and sellers freely from different planes of existence, including human beings, rich and poor; the flora and fauna; the deities and the dead, as well as surrealistic beings like ghommids and elves who assume human forms. This belief is demonstrated in the novels of D. O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola. For instance, in Fagunwa’s *Ògbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmalé* (translated by Wole Soyinka as *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*), Akara-ogun, the hero-narrator in his first sojourn in the forest encounters a creepy community of ghommids headed by Olu Igbo (Lord of the Forest) whose praise name is “the merchant prince of Ghommids.” He is hailed as peerless among traders. According to the narrator, “I had not slept very long when I awakened, and indeed it was the cries of ghommids coming to trade at the night market that woke me” (*The Forest* 15).

The beautiful, complete gentleman in Tutuola’s *The Palmwine Drinkard* is a creature of weird extraction, borrowing different parts of the human anatomy to participate in trading activities in the market as a human being. The creature takes away a beautiful but intransigent young lady from the market. The narrative is worth quoting:

> There was a big market in this town from where the daughter was captured, and the market day was fixed for every 5th day and the whole people of that town and from all the villages around the town and also spirits and curious creatures from various bushes and forests were coming to this market every 5th day to sell or buy articles. By 4 o’clock in the evening, the market would close for that day and then everybody would be returning to his or her destination or to where he or she came from. (17)

The Yoruba belief stated above accounts for the concept of freedom and pluralism often associated with the market—a sphere of free interaction between human beings and spirits, the living and the dead, forest and aquatic creatures, and so on. Apart from this, the market has its own spiritual essence guided by a deity called *ajé* (money or wealth). So, beyond the physical existence, the market
is inextricably associated with a spiritual essence. This is also bolstered by the fact that the space is another abode of Èsù, the trickster god. Apart from the crossroads, its first home, worshippers are sometimes advised to offer sacrifice to Èsù and place it in the center of the market. Some traditional medicines or charms bolster or lose their efficacy when taken to the market. In another sense, a mental ailment is believed to be curable in so far as the patient has not entered the market naked and got embraced by the spirit of the market.

The notion and significance of the market in Yoruba culture are further stressed in Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* which begins its action in the marketplace. In this mundane, yet numinous space, Soyinka unfolds the concept of transition and its threnodic essence among the people. The market is the connecting, though transitory path, between the realms of the living, the ancestors and the gods, as well as the unborn. This is where Elésin-oba begins his ritual of departure into the ancestral world to join his waiting master, the Aláàfin. The society, as represented by women of the market under the leadership of Iyaloja, witnesses his final leave-taking and the abortion of the process by intrusive colonial forces. It is also in the market that Elesin-Oba sows the seed for the future with his marriage and sexual consummation of the union with the young bride.

Soyinka depicts the market as the center point of life itself, serving as the threshold between existence and pre- or post-existence, the vital stop-gap in the coming-and-going cycle of life. The market opens and closes with predictable regularity. That is why market days, whether weekly, fortnightly, or monthly serve as calendar in the traditional Yoruba Society. The buyers and sellers return home only to reconvene another time. Perhaps, this transience or tentativeness informs the metaphorization of the human world as a market in the Yoruba aphorism: *Ayé l’ọjà, Òrun n’ilé* (“The world is a marketplace, heaven is the permanent home”).

In a way, the transience of the market parallels the business of the theater. The market opens and closes just like the play that begins and ends. Buyers and sellers return home just as the players and the audience do at the end of a performance. But in the intervals, buying and selling take place in the former, while conflicts are introduced, complicated, and resolved one way or the other in the latter.

The multiplicity of its access is another code of pluralism which is often captured in the epigrammatic expression: *ònà kan kò w’èjà* (“Many roads lead to the market”). This pluralism is demonstrated in the diversity of options or viewpoints about good governance and nation-building that Osofisan canvasses from play to play. Through dialogue, he presents for negotiation alternative(s) to the status quo. The community and the audience in his plays participate in the process of choices. Interestingly, in the course of negotiation, a network of interdependence is formed in the community of the market; hence, buyers and sellers
or in a similar vein, players and audience, are bound together by a fate (pleasant or unpalatable) under which sometimes it is difficult to extricate one from the other. This is registered in the kind of solidarity that the playwright summons into existence in the community of the marketplace. The people are pitched against a perceived common adversary like dictatorship as illustrated in *Aringindin* and *Yungba-Yungba*.

Beyond spiritual essence, the market is central to the life of the people. Just as the *Agora* was close to the Acropolis in the ancient Greek city of Athens, major markets in Yoruba towns, then and now, are situated near the palace of the town’s head, the Ọba. This is still the situation in modern Yoruba towns and cities like Ilesha, Ile Ife, Ede, Iseyin, Oyo, Ibadan, Akure, Ilorin, and so on. The Ọba wields political, economic, and spiritual powers. He is the leader of the market. Markets are established with due clearance from the gods, but the Ọba grants permission for its operation. In return, the marketers pay some toll to the Ọba in monetary terms or through some measure of goods brought for sale by the traders, usually collected by the Ọba’s messengers (Ogundeji, 2). Because of the gender order in the culture that makes trading in the market primarily a woman’s activity, while men are engaged in production, a woman is usually appointed as the head of the market. Hence, each market is headed by the Ịyálójà (mother of the market) who usually sits in the Ọba’s cabinet as women’s representative.

In spite of the monarch’s control of the market, the people still enjoy some freedom of decision; hence, there have been instances of disagreement between the palace and the markets over policies and conducts. Indeed, the market has served as the seedbed of rebellion against official actions that the people deem obnoxious in Yoruba history. Market women and their leaders, for instance, led the revolt that resulted in the exile of Ọba Ademola, the Alake of Egba (Abokuta) in 1948. ² Osofisan explores this measure of freedom of dissent which the market enjoys in *The Chattering and the Song* through the play-within-the play, in which Latoye, Basorun Gaa’s only surviving son, is accused of sabotage. He is branded an agitator who rouses people to revolt with his utterances. In fact, he is arrested at the market by agents of the state as he is inciting the people to riot over an increased tariff on salt.

The market comes in readily as a setting where the powerful ones are set against the disempowered, the rich against the poor folk, and the dictator against the rest of the society. These opposing forces are brought together in contestation for power. In resolving the conflict, however, the playwright’s sympathy is usually in favor of the underdog or the marginalized. Often, the drama ends with forces of tyranny and/or exploitation either dethroned after undergoing steady decline or suffering severe denigration. Even when the resolution is open-ended, necessitating the input of the audience through debate, the build-up of actions through dialogue and characterization would render the playwright’s preference unmistakable.
Therefore, the market paradigm in Osofisan’s dramaturgy transcends its common understanding as a geographical arena for vending goods and services, with buyers and sellers in relations of exchange. Rather, it is a site for re-enacting daily struggles for existence by various competing interests. Consequently, it parades the socio-political interactions and multi-dimensional conflicts that arise from such relationships in a manner typical of the larger human society. The interactions are guided by the principles of negotiation, bargaining, persuasion, and consensus or compromise concerning options and choices. Sometimes, the process of exchange in the market is accompanied with violence, violence being a stubborn sign of military dictatorship that is Nigeria’s political reality addressed in the plays.

On an international plane, the contradictions inherent in the new economic order of globalization also secure Osofisan’s attention. Globalization ordinarily aims at promoting democratic ideals of freedom through the liberalization and expansion of the political and economic space for greater participation of all people, all nations. However, in reality, the ideology of trade liberalization, deregulation, structural adjustment, and privatization of markets have only widened the gulf between the few industrialized countries and most countries of the Third World. The ascendancy of individualism under globalization results in the empowerment of few individuals and nations at the expense of the less privileged majority. The inherent inequality at individual or national levels is often advanced as the substratum of dramatic conflict. The market, in this sense, provides an alternative platform for the voiceless and the marginalized to freely articulate their yearnings.

In another vein, the market facilitates Osofisan’s concept of participatory African theater. The expected mass participation is better realized in the atmosphere of the market where the necessary gathering of people in some large number is guaranteed. The setting is appropriate for Osofisan’s knack for heaping a whole town on the stage in a bid to depict a community. The infinite pluralism of the market also enables him to negotiate diversities and differences, so that human beings are equalized by their economic needs. Poverty respects no racial, gender, religious, or cultural boundaries as shown in the plays’ polemics. So, the primacy of the economy as a determining factor in people’s behavior or social action is encapsulated in the trope of the market.

In Osofisan’s plays that are not set in the conventional marketplace there is yet a palpable ambience of the market. For instance, the city of Lagos where Midnight Hotel is set is a huge commercial center where “money maketh all things.” By extension, the Midnight Hotel is a veritable sex market where passion and opportunism are a recognizable medium of exchange with the buyers and sellers being members of the elite. The crossroads in Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels is another public space that is close to the market in meaning and cultural
significance. The crossroads in Yoruba cosmology is the abode of Esu, playing host to ritual offerings given to the deity. In the play, the commercialization of compassion by the minstrels (Epo Oyinbo, Jigi, Sinsin, and Redio) is played out within this single locale. Through the magical charms offered them by the Old Man, they are to exchange compassion for prosperity, a situation that enables the playwright to censure materialism. He contends that the desperation by people for quick wealth lies at the root of social problems like corruption, nepotism, fraud, election rigging, armed robbery, prostitution, kidnapping, hostage taking, and extortion. He tries to discourage the centering of money as the ultimate life goal as evident from the concluding song led by Orunmila:

All we have tried to say  
Through this gay story telling  
Is that compassion pays  
Kindness has its own reward;  
Life’s not all buying, selling,  
Cheating, amassing wealth;  
And greed is the way to death. (95)

Effective communication is essential in the market if the goal of exchange is to be realized. Consequently, intelligible and accessible communication is equally important for a dramatist who seeks to rouse people’s consciousness so that they can get out of complacency and begin to question their conditions with a view to effecting positive change. Osofisan’s choice of diction in Yoruba and English is determined by the popular sensibility. He settles for linguistic registers that are equivalent to what people use for transactions in the market. Sometimes English co-exists with Yoruba words in the dialogue in order to make the language accessible. He sometimes adopts Pidgin English where appropriate. Pidgin English in Nigeria serves among others, the purpose of economic interactions in public spheres like the market.

OSOFISAN’S DRAMA AND THE MARKET IDEA

In Osofisan’s drama, there is a fundamental belief in the possibility and inevitability of social change, away from the economic hardship and political instability of post-colonial existence. The process of achieving change involves practical struggle, conscientization, mass awareness, and ultimate collision with forces of oppression and exploitation. Drama, to him, is a means through which the urban poor, the unemployed, petty traders, market women, and other categories of the disadvantaged populace can be stirred in the direction of change. He clearly states this mission of drama when he remarks: “If we must change our societies, if the theatre must fulfill its vocation as an agent of progress, the
dramatists who create it have no option but to pitch their camp on the side of the common people, against the formidable agents of the ruling classes” (“Terror of Relevance” 88).

In a sense, the market in Osofisan’s drama is a reversal of the Athenian Agora. A big, spacious, and easily accessible open space, the Agora was first and foremost a public square, a meeting place for citizens in every ancient Greek city to discuss political affairs. It was close to the administrative buildings and religious temples. However, due to the large number of people that usually converged at this point, the Agora became a center of trading where people exchanged their surplus goods. In Osofisan’s drama, the market is first, a center of commerce where people congregate to trade. But since it attracts a significant part of the underprivileged population, it becomes an arena to raise issues of political pertinence. Consequently, economic transactions easily dissolve into political interactions. The foregoing observations are well illustrated in four plays which are examined below.

**MAGICAL MELODY OF THE MARKET IN ONCE UPON FOUR ROBBERS**

*Four Robbers* was premiered in March 1979, at a time when the military that had ruled Nigeria since 1966 was preparing to hand over power to a civilian regime. Osofisan’s concern is about the future of the democratic experiment since it is not constructed on any equitable economic structure. He opines that political democracy without economic democracy would not succeed. In any case, the repudiation of equity and economic justice in any society is an invitation to violence and disorder. The public execution of armed robbers at the Lagos Bar Beach and other public places as prescribed by the military regime in the 1970s is, to him, a “legalized slaughtering of erring members of the society” which is not likely to restore the society to its “primordial sanity” (from production program note). Crimes cannot be wiped out without first addressing their root causes in societal values which have been greatly perverted under military rule.

The play is divided into three parts, preceded by a Prologue and concluded with an Epilogue. The Prologue and the Epilogue take place in the theater; a transitory world of the audience and the artists where fiction fuses with reality. The main actions in the three parts are set in the market. According to the stage direction:

A market in a small town, with stalls and various items. The time is dawn. Centre-stage is a set of barrels, arranged one upon another, behind a white stake. Now people begin to gather in various groups. (4)
Osofisan slightly adjusts reality and makes the execution to hold, not at the Lagos Bar Beach, but at another public place where a crowd is expected to gather—the market.

The Prologue opens with the African storytelling tradition with the participatory mechanism of call and response. Aafa, the narrator, paints a grim picture of society, one that inevitably breeds robbers, smugglers, fraudsters, and other criminals as a result of its inordinate reverence for money. The primacy accorded material wealth in societal order of values is aptly depicted in the market. Aafa’s modern tale about modern man is worthy of note:

Ah please save us from them
From these your modern men
Money-making has made them mad
Money, empty money.
Money-hunting, evil doing.
Evil-doing to amass property
Building upon buildings… (99)

That the town and the market are unnamed (in Four Robbers and other plays focused on in this essay) allows for some elastic reference or relevance of Osofisan’s messages beyond the immediate time and society.

A convicted armed robber is brought to the market at early dawn for public execution. The convict is, coincidentally, the leader of a gang of robbers who are the main focus of the play. They are: Alhaja, the wife of the executed gang leader; Major; Hassan; and Angola. The execution is witnessed by a large crowd. The goal is to provide a deterrent to others. But to show its futility, the execution merely stirs in the hearts of the robbers the urge to revenge and commit greater crimes. “They will pay for this, they or their children” (5), vows Hassan.

The gang leader’s death destabilizes members of the gang and they are almost dispersing, every man for himself. Nonetheless, they find a source of hope and another binding cord of strength in the gift of magical power offered them by Aafa. The sleep-inducing power whose efficacy lies in song and dance is to rescue them from poverty—to take them out of gutters into “the most glittering palaces” (26). Each of the robbers will chant or sing his or her part in his or her own voice. Whoever hears will join in singing and dancing and go back home to sleep till the following morning. But Aafa extracts three promises from them, a breach of which will render the power ineffective: they are never to rob from the poor, never to rob in private homes but in public places, and never to take human lives.

The robbers try the magic immediately in the market and it works. They collect money and goods from unresisting traders who are singing and dancing to the melody of a soporific music that would later spell their misery when their
eyes are clear. A fortnight later, the market reopens with soldiers on guard to tackle the mysterious robbers. The traders have all made huge profits that day to compensate for the last raid, and they are savoring the blessings of the “goddess of the market” when the robbers strike again with songs. They collect peacefully all the proceeds of the day’s sales from the dancing and singing women. The soldiers are not spared the hypnosis as Major collects one of their guns. However, he is overtaken by greed and self-preservative ethos of the tortoise as he turns the gun against his colleagues, asking them to surrender the whole loot to him alone. He is about to escape with the loot when the soldiers return. They arrest him, while his betrayed colleagues flee. Major is consequently tried, convicted, and he is to face death by firing squad. Alhaja in disguise tries to get him freed by the soldiers who are to carry out the execution. She sways their sympathy in his favor, claiming that he is a victim of miscarriage of justice. While Hassan supports her move to free Major, Angola objects, reasoning that Major deserves his fate. The attempt to set him free fails. Major and the apprehended soldiers are brought to the market for execution.

The final scene brings together soldiers, robbers, and the market folk. In a common anagnorisis, there is a revelation of identity which shows Hassan as a brother of Ahmed, the sergeant, and Bintu, one of the traders. They are born to the same family, each making his/her own existential choice at one time or the other. The situation creates a dichotomy between the state and its victims, each side freely advancing its points in a debate. As the Sergeant puts it, “it’s only our beliefs that bind us together or rip us apart. Hassan and I are on opposite sides of the street …” (93). At the exact moment when the order is given for execution, Angola changes his mind. He comes in to rescue his colleagues by singing the magical chants. Others join him and the hypnotic dance begins again, embracing soldiers, robbers, convicts, executioners, market women, and other spectators. The confusion sets the stage for the open ended resolution of the play—whether it should end in triumph for the state (with soldiers as its agents) or in favor of the robbers. Members of the audience are to make the choice.

Through the robbers and the soldiers, the play presents a contest between arts and politics as the state attempts to combat song (arts) with gun which stands for the reigning military political order. However, one is mindful of the fact that on both sides, there is a perversion. The song (art) is used for a questionable end— robbery—while the soldiers are corrupt, proving to be no better than the robbers whom they are sent to capture. They serve more as agents of insecurity, rather than as a bulwark or rampart against robbery. In a curious irony, the soldiers on the order of the Sergeant confiscate the robbers’ loot, showing a situation of robbers in pursuit of robbers. It is like rescuing a prey from the hawk and handing it over to the eagle. The folly and futility of the state trying to combat robbery (by song) with violence (by guns) are clearly established when the market women and the
soldiers guarding them plunge into dance once again as the robbers repeat their luscious harvest of the traders’ profits, as before, unhindered. Osofisan explores this dichotomy in a greater dimension in *Twingle-Twangle: A Twynning Tayle*.

The metaphorization of the reigning economic order as that of the market is accented by Hassan when he cynically concludes that, “(t)he world is a market, we come to slaughter one another and sell the parts …” (91). Perhaps Osofisan anticipates the current wave of globalization and the attendant inequality among nations as well as the ascendancy of capitalism in an earlier remark by Hassan: “From one bloody corner to another, the world getting narrower, shrinking around us, just to give a few bastard more room to fart” (89). The inequality among individuals in the universe of the play parallels that which exists between the few industrialized and so-called Third World nations, especially in Africa. Unfortunately, the economy of the latter are tied to and are shaped by the former.

The traders as a social category are not spared condemnation, just like the robbers and the soldiers. They partly cause the economic hardship experienced by people by effecting astronomical increases in prices of goods, thereby causing inflation. They also hoard goods in order to maximize profit. However, their own side of the debate is also presented. Their hankering after huge profit is motivated by the absence of a welfare system that would compel the state to provide a significant part of their basic needs. They have huge bills to settle on daily living which would have to come from the profit made in the market. “So, who will pay the bill, if the market doesn’t?” asks Mama Alice, the leader of the market women (92). Their existence is predicated on profit, and that is why she describes the market as “our sanctuary.” The dog-eat-dog profiteering that sets the traders against members of their own class is presented as the fall-out of the economic (dis)order that exempts the state from investing in people’s welfare. “The Song of the Market” expresses the women’s viewpoint:

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The work of profit
brought us to this world,
this life that is a market.
Some sell with ease and flourish
and some are clients
who pay their greed in gold!…
The lust of profit
keeps us in this world
this life that is a market… (45-46)
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They are seen as collaborators with the exploiting class as their desires is to be part of the rich few who are seen each day “whipping the world with lashes and strutting round like lords” (46-47).
No character is fully developed in the action. The play parades individuals who are not significant on their own, but only through their social affiliations. They are mostly mono-dimensional characters who display single dominant traits. Thus, their anonymity sinks well into the multitude of the market—Aafa, Sergeant, Corporal, Soldier I, Soldier II, Mama Alice, Mama Toun, Traders, and Customers. The traders represent the ordinary people, but they also exhibit the exploitative tendencies of the bourgeoisies. The soldiers represent the government of the day, being agents of coercion and repression. But, in a way, they are like the rest of society, suffering economic deprivation. So, Osofisan captures contradictions inherent in the society through them.

The contradiction is further exemplified in other characters. Aafa is a human being, yet he is endowed with metaphysical powers. The divine element in him saves him from being robbed. As the agent of fate for the robbers, traders, and soldiers one can see in his mischief the Esu (trickster) archetype. For instance, it is in the character of Esu to spawn a mischief on Major and impel him to his doom by overreaching himself. The humiliation of his arrest and conviction is to puncture the balloon of hubris. Yet, Aafa is a Muslim cleric who wields òpèlè, the Ifá divination chain, and chants ìyèrè (Ifá poetry) as well as ògèdè (incantation). In Alhaja, one finds a Machiavellian mistress who is canny and crafty. She engages in prostitution if that would yield money and influence. The piety that her title “Alhaja” connotes is obviously lacking as she boasts to Aafa, “I have known conflicts, old man. Look in the police records. Violence, I feed on it…Don’t think you can frighten me” (26). On the other hand, she is altruistic and forgiving. She is like Brecht’s Mother Courage, daring all obstacles, and braving all odds to save the life of her comrade in crime, Major. This is in spite of Major’s act of perfidy that brings him disaster in the first place. Hassan is a product of a religious home, yet, he takes to armed robbery. This portrays the collapse of family ethos and the limits of religiosity.

On a general note, although the robbers are repulsive, one finds admirable the spirit of collectivism exhibited in the operation of the magical power. Similarly, solidarity, a necessary ingredient of social change, is often found in practice among the market women. So, Osofisan dramatizes in Four Robbers what he describes as, “certain fundamental tensions about our society” (Awodiya, Excursions in Drama and Literature 98) using the “parabolic format” in which the market is a charming metaphor.

POWER AND THE MARKET METAPHOR IN ARINGINDIN AND THE NIGHT WATCHMAN

The economic milieu of the market in the universe of Four Robbers equally serves as the background of actions in Aringindin. The scene of action is “a town
square, surrounded by a number of stores, all of which have been broken into” (1). There is much tension and insecurity in this unnamed community headed by Baale. Because of the pivotal role of the market in the life of the community, the latest robbery incident attracts the prompt attention of Baale, members of his cabinet, and the town’s elite, like Aringindin, Kansilor (Councilor), Doki (Doctor), and Tisa (Teacher). Understandably, the market is not far from the palace as Baale and his Chiefs easily walk to it.

The recent raid by robbers, the third in two weeks, was more violent as they murdered Lamidi the night guard. The traditional authority in the town represented by Baale and his Council of Chiefs has no answer to the menace of robbers, but the urgent need to tackle the problem of insecurity throws up three contending solutions. Baale canvasses faith in and reliance on oracular intervention secured through rituals and sacrifices. The second option, which is the law by modern government, has also proved ineffective. The policemen who are to enforce the law have been encumbered by corruption and ignorance, thereby becoming another problem to be solved, like armed robbery. Just like what obtains in Four Robbers, the playwright blurs the distinctions in Aringindin between law enforcement agents and criminals whom they are supposed to apprehend. “Robbers, nightwatchmen / It’s only a question of clothes” (69), says Aringindin.

The third option championed by Aringindin (with active support from Kansilor) involves raising a group of armed men to serve as night guards (vigilante, in local parlance). The last (third) option is rejected by the Baale-in-council, because of its implications for order and stability as violence cannot cure violence, but will only court anarchy. A tiny but arm-bearing segment of the population may, one day, undermine the authority of Baale and imperil the security of the unarmed majority. It is like unwittingly surrendering the town to tyranny.

With the recent raid exposing the frailty of other options, Baale succumbs to pressure and endorses Aringindin’s suggestion. A band of arm-bearing night-watchmen under Aringindin’s leadership is formed. No sooner is this done than tyranny begins to envelope the polity. The town is gradually turned into “a virtual prison yard.” As Tisa reveals, Aringindin restores security to the community by combating the robbers, but the community is paying heavily for this with its liberty:

We sleep safely, but everywhere
Aringindin’s decrees
surround us like iron fences! (52)

People’s properties are seized arbitrarily by the vigilante in the name of an “emergency situation” or “official service” (38). Levies are imposed willfully. But Tisa removes the veils of deceit from Aringindin and Kansilor who plan to dethrone Baale the following day, take over power, and foist absolute rule on
the town. The revelation comes during a public ceremony in the market which Kansilor organizes to prepare Aringindin for ascendancy. In the ensuing confusion, robbers attack again in broad daylight. They kill Tisa and abduct Yobiyoyn, his fiancé. They humiliate Baale who later abdicates the throne. With the exit of Baale, no force remains to challenge Aringindin’s rise to power.

When Aringindin and the robbers regroup, they bring along the abducted Yobiyoyn who is also Kansilor’s daughter. It is revealed that the robbers are indeed, Aringindin’s men. Perhaps, the heightened insecurity has been sponsored ab initio by Aringindin to justify his emergence. He confesses that he adopts the option when Tisa and Oluode frustrates his earlier coup plan. Yobiyoyn, however, doubts Aringindin’s claim that her father is involved in the plan. She bets that her father as a democrat would not collaborate with a monster and a tyrant like Aringindin. She loses the bet because her father arrives and confirms Aringindin’s claim. The play ends tragically when Yobiyoyn, not wanting to succumb to Aringindin’s victory that gives her hand to him in marriage, seizes his gun, “shoots him first and shoots herself”(76).\(^5\) If one takes aside the tragic temper of the conclusion, the vengeful bullet of Yobiyoyn ends Aringindin’s life as well as his reign of terror. In the latter version of the play, Aringindin’s tyrannical reign is toppled by collective action involving the whole community, not by just an individual.

The market is used in the play as an arena for different political options to vie for attention, with certain characters articulating one position or another. Essentially, the play speaks to a community in transition, from one-man, absolute rule to a political order that accommodates wider participation of the people in governance. Tisa is the voice of the new order, though he is prematurely silenced. His ideas are pursued further by Yobiyoyn, his fiancé. Kansilor typifies those vices associated with the Nigerian political class: fickle-mindedness, sycophancy, self-centeredness, treachery, and inconsistency. Baale represents the vanishing power of a traditional monarchical institution. The institution is shown as anachronistic in the face of a democratic mode of governance. It is only proper that it surrenders its authority in the marketplace, a public assembly where its final humiliation is witnessed by all to deepen the effect of its collapse. Unfortunately, what it surrenders to is more heinous and incongruous acts; hence the need for further struggle to liberate the polity through collective action instead of looking up to a man or a small group with a messianic mission. This is succinctly captured in the reworked version of the denouement. In summary, it is noteworthy that Osofisan uses the ephemeral nature of the marketplace and the fleeting character of the marketing business to capture the transience of political power, especially that type that is attained and sustained by coercion.
Osofisan poses more sharply the debate between authoritarian rule and democracy in *Yungba-Yungba*, with the market retaining its physical and polemical import, just as the trope underscores the play’s popular ardor. It dramatizes a historical negotiation between an old and conservative dictator and the young generation that seeks democratic change. Iyeneri, who represents a monolithic power center, engages the Yungba-Yungba group in a battle of wit. While the former is striving to retain the politico-religious power which she has usurped and monopolized, the latter is seeking to open up the power space to accommodate wider participation from the people. Thus, the Yungba-Yungba girls are masked symbols of collective aspirations for equity, order, and stability. Through the group, a common humanity with common grievances and aspirations is created with the goals well reinforced in the play’s production mechanism. At the end, the play affirms the inevitable ascendency of the *demos* who hitherto occupy the fringe of political power.

The purification festival is essentially to get rid of impurities of the out-going year and clear the path for a new year. This will secure a cosmic harmony between the human community and the spiritual world. But the play does not represent only a Yoruba purification festival. It also raises pertinent questions about the democratic imperative in the Post-Cold War era. These include the quest for self determination and people’s sovereignty at a time when authoritarian regimes are facing serious challenges in many countries across the globe.

The main actions in *Yungba-Yungba* take place “in the open space between the traditional market of wooden stalls and counters and the river, leading to the shrine of the water goddess” (viii). The open space between the market and the stream is the arena of free socio-economic relationships which necessitate the arts of politics.

The market and the stream are suitable locations for a play that draws its entire *dramatis personae* from womenfolk. The market and the stream are places frequently visited by women for means of livelihood. They trade at the market and draw water from the stream for domestic chores. This is apart from the spiritual significance of both places in the community’s attempt to rejuvenate itself through the purification ceremony attached to the annual festival of the river goddess. The setting represents, for Iyeneri, the threshold between the stream where she exercises religious power and the town where she wields political power as the representative of women in the Baale’s council. In the marketplace she also exerts a considerable influence, and that strengthens the totalitarian tendency that the playwright deplores in her. As attested by Aro Orisa, due to her enormous influence in the market, the economy of the town will wane if she
yields power to other people as demanded by the Yungba-Yungba girls and their supporters:

I am thinking of the women, of the happiness in the land. And all our neighbours too, just think of it! Our trading partners in all those markets! Was it not you who helped to negotiate all our terms of exchange and our splendid bargains! If tomorrow they suddenly hear that you have left, what will happen to our profits? And just on the verge of prosperity? (59)

It is clear from the above that beneath Iyeneri’s opposition to change is economic consideration—profit. Incidentally, the market is the abode of that profit.

The anonymous community is preparing for its festival in honor of the river goddess when the play begins. It observes a period of general cleansing of the environment and a week of peace during which everyone lives in harmony with the rest of the community. Its climax is the night of courtship featuring a dance contest among ladies from the three traditional households—Arooroton, Jeosun-won, and Mayesoge. The success of the current celebration is, however, being threatened by a set of masked youths called Yungba-Yungba (dream of sweetness). The group made up of Ayoka, Dunbarin, and Laboopo is protesting against Iyeneri who is still holding onto the post a decade after she won it, contrary to the traditionally allowed tenure of one season. The group, therefore, demands her abdication to allow for a successor who will emerge through a free and open contest, so as to return the festival to its democratic origin.

The group gets support from other women who have hitherto endorsed or tolerated the status quo due to cowardice, ignorance, complicity, or sheer indifference. A delegation of six girls including the three Yungba-Yungba girls is selected to present the women’s demand before Iyeneri. Unfortunately, she shoves aside their demands, justifying her position with historical references. To accede to their request is to return the community to the old bitter rivalry which the festival used to attract before her intervention, she argues. Her tenure as the priestess for a decade has stemmed the anarchy of previous years. The stage is set for a confrontation between a dictatorial order and its antagonists. With active connivance of Aro-Orisa, her attendant, Iyeneri schemes to retain her office at all cost. She plots Ayoka’s elimination through spiritual means. She also plays upon the natural ambition of contestants and the primordial rivalry among the three competing families. The aim is to provoke violent confrontation among the contestants which would stalemate the competition. She would then intervene like the Greek *deus ex machina*, condemn the rupturing of social harmony, suspend the competition in order to avert a further slide into anarchy, and hold on to power.

True to Iyeneri’s calculations, members of the three families renew their old hatred. Each household engages in “behind the scene” arrangements to ensure
victory for its representative. Jeosunwon settles for bribery to be offered to the judges. Mayesoge plans to spy on their opponents to know their dance patterns so that they can confuse and distract them. Arooroton elects to use magical charms to hypnotize their rivals. The hostility is expressed through song and dance. The audience witnesses such a bitter struggle for victory, making the dance competition similar to the rancorous politics in real life, a game in which losers are “brutally pushed aside without a voice, without a right to even demand their dues” (44).

When Iyeneri is later exposed as the force behind the resurgence of hostility and the poisonous hand that causes Ayoka’s insanity, the youths insist on her ouster from the shrine. Now confronted with the futility of her ruthlessness, she admits her guilt and steps down. Her resignation signals the return of the old democratic norms associated with the festival as expressed in the open dance competition and the carnivalesque atmosphere that overwhelms the stage and the auditorium in the Epilogue. To sum up, the market in Yungba-Yungba serves as the canvass on which Osofisan inscribes his vision of empowerment for the common people through a participatory mode of governance.

BURNING IDEAS OF REINVENTING THE STATE IN FIRES BURN AND DIE HARD

The trope of the market is a fundamental element of discourse in Fires Burn. Though its action takes place in the house of the market leader, and not directly at the marketplace like other plays above, it shares their thematic concerns. The central subject of this one-act play with six characters is the commissioning ceremony of the newly constructed market to replace the burnt one. The old market has been destroyed by an inferno whose source is still shrouded in mystery. The commissioning is to be performed the next day by the Governor. When the play begins, preparation is already at a high point among the market women who are not physically present, but maintain an audible presence off-stage. Amidst euphoria and optimism, they have been preparing for the occasion for the past week. They are set to go to the town in procession for the grand opening ceremony when their enthusiasm is suddenly dampened. Two officials from the Governor’s office—Dr. Ibrahim and Peju—arrive the house of Alhaja Olowoseun, the President of the Market Women’s Association, with a message to the effect that the much-advertized opening of the market would not be held tomorrow after all.

Alhaja and other market women have invested great hopes in the new market and their enthusiasm is captured in the dialogue between her and Temi, the treasurer of the association. The burnt market has caused serious dislocation in the economic life of the traders and their families. This is portrayed in the cat-and-mouse relationship that exists between Temi and Kayus her husband. Unable to fathom the logic of the indefinite postponement, Alhaja responds with waning zest:
How shall we eat? How shall we feed our children? Since they gave us the date about the opening, we have all moved our goods into the new market. Everything our women have to sell is locked up now in those stalls. Does the Governor expect us to starve until he is ready for us? (130)

Her frustration is shared by Temi. In Temi’s view, to suspend the commissioning is to dash to pieces all the dreams they have spent months and years nurturing. In the mounting tension and suspense, the reason for the postponement is disclosed. The decision is taken by the Governor based on the advice of the Chiefs and Elders of the town. Chief Ogunye, the blind Ifa Priest is brought in to elaborate on the Governor’s decision. According to him, it is to avert the disaster that is likely to occur if the opening is done and the risk of opening is said to be greater than the dangers of closure. It is further revealed that the fire that consumed the old market was a willful act of arson committed by one of the market women and not an accident as widely reported and believed. The oracle discloses that the gods of the market are angry and they are not comfortable with the same woman moving into the new market along with others without any act of remorse. The oracle warns therefore, that disaster may strike again if the culprit is not identified and made to go through a process of purgation. Here, the market assumes a spiritual identity controlled by metaphysical forces beyond the physical.

From both ways, disaster is assured in the opinion of the traders. If the market is kept closed, they have to contend with untold privation and humiliation. Their goods will continue to be trapped in the market as the Governor will not allow them to be retrieved. If they open without identifying the culprit, they will be courting catastrophe, according to the oracle. Meanwhile, the task of identifying the culprit or making the person to confess is proving quite difficult.

The solution offered by the oracle is that the Market leader should summon all women and get the culprit identified. If she confesses, she will be made to undergo appropriate cleansing rituals in order to save the whole community from further disaster. In the alternative, if the culprit is not identified, it is proposed that either Alhaja Olowoseun (President) or Temi (Treasurer), as officers of Market Women’s Association, can stand in for the unidentified offender and make the required sacrifice on her behalf. This implies that whoever volunteers will have to forfeit her shop and all the goods therein for seven years, during which she will not set foot in the market. She will also perform acts of public penance which involve dancing naked around the town with ashes rubbed all over her body. The punishment for confession is less severe than when someone volunteers as a replacement.

The quandary motivates Temi to offer herself as a replacement for the unfound sinner. She would not mind to undergo the harrowing rituals involved; a singular act of self-sacrifice similar to that of Emma and Olunde in Soyinka’s
The Strong Breed and Death and the King’s Horseman respectively. Rather than allowing her to suffer for an offence she has not committed, Alhaja Olowoseun surprisingly confesses that she “was the woman who set fire to the market.” It is ironic that the woman hailed as “the mother of the market” and “the heart and soul of the market” (141) is the one who sets the market ablaze; all because of her immoderate thirst for money. According to her, she sets her own stall on fire to forestall her likely arrest and prosecution. Her son Leke has suddenly discovered that she harbors contraband goods in her stall, and he is going to report to the Police, thus her decision to get rid of the illegal wares by burning the whole stall. But the fire rages beyond her stall and engulfs the whole market. Having confessed like a tragic heroine, she decides to undergo the punishment, a reversal of fortune of some sort, for her crime as demanded by the oracle. Thus, the consequences of the fire outlive its origin in “a rag and the oil lamp,” just as the reckless and irresponsible conduct of post-independence African leaders have far-reaching effects on their people.

As earlier observed, the play also demonstrates the centrality of the market trope in Osofisan’s drama. Apart from the fact that the source of conflict is the fate of the new market, Alhaja Olowoseun, who is the leader of the market women, is the principal character in the conflict. She has endangered the economic well-being of the town by her action and she has to be purged of her crime before the community will regain its equilibrium. In this regard, she is like Iyeneri in Yungba-Yungba. In her obsession with money, she emblematizes the vices of greed, primitive accumulation, and self-centeredness which a capitalist economy and an authoritarian polity are often accused of. Her name, “Alhaja,” is merely an ego-boosting appellation. It is an identity she wears to mark her social status, not necessarily a pointer to her piety as a devoted Muslim who has performed the holy pilgrimage to Mecca as required by Islam, being one of the five pillars of the religion. Like Alhaja in Four Robbers, she subverts the ordinary expectation about her title, pointing at a wide gap between appearance and reality which is one enduring concern of Osofisan’s drama.

The conversation between Alhaja and Temi clearly shows the significance of the market in the life of the community and in the thematic focus of the play. Indeed, Alhaja captures the position of the market in traditional and modern Yoruba societies when she submits:

Our people have always been a trading people. Our towns flourish, or die, on the fortunes and misfortunes of commerce. And that is why the Oba and his chiefs, by our tradition, are the custodians of the market. If not for all these your new ideas, funny ideas, the new market should have been built exactly where the old one stood before the fire…that is, right on the doorsteps of the palace itself! (131)
To delay the commissioning, therefore, is to “hold up the very life source of our people.”

In defense of her offer to replace the culprit, Temi equally pays tribute to commerce, market, money, and profit in the life of the community:

They describe us well, when they say that we women live and die on buying and selling. Even our parents give us out over a bargain, haggling over the price of our dowry. As soon as we are old enough to run, they put a tray over our head, and send us out into the street.

(139-40)

The market is not only a veritable home, but also a “hive of comfort and companionship for all who were born female” (141). But as it is canvassed in other plays, the old has to give way for the new order to flourish. By implication, the present socio-political and economic structure of Nigeria, like that of many African nations, is defective. To reform or reinvent it, the old order represented by Alhaja Olowoseun has to go. Her exit is effectively negotiated in the play through the coming-and-going idiom of the market.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has shown that the market trope is a recurring element in the dramaturgy of Osofisan. The market as a geographical space for interactions between buying and selling is well explored in setting, characterization, and conflict generation. It is also treated as a cultural space with a spiritual essence beyond the physical ambience. Essentially, it is a strategic location adopted to enact the conflicts and contradictions emerging from the patterns of inequality in economic and political spheres of contemporary Africa.

The metaphor of the market, as this essay contends, is one vital index of Osofisan’s exploration of indigenous cultural resources in shaping dramatic aesthetics. It is also a marker of the playwright’s ideological persuasion which prioritizes the structure of the economy in determining the quality of governance. He therefore traces the sources of Africa’s crises of development to the inequality in the distribution of national resources, a system that privileges the few with capital over the majority who lack it. There is, on display, an ideological haggling between the poor and their exploiters. The interactions of these opposing forces take place within the overall ambience of the market as evident in the discourse of four plays discussed in this chapter.

The trope also reinforces the popularity and accessibility of Osofisan’s drama. Like Niyi Osundare, who conceives poetry as a song for the popular realm like the market,6 his is a drama of the marketplace that achieves its popular appeal through simple staging mechanisms and accessible codes of communication. The
market also gives accent to the heuristic character of his theater which compels the audience to gradually find out the nature and extent of social anomy and how to effect transformation. Osofisan presents many mirrors of reality, and this reality is never regarded as unalterable. He also expresses the anger, despair, dreams, and hopes of the underprivileged who find a common ground in the market daily. But the market here is not the huge and extensive shopping malls in the city centers. It is the common market with wooden stalls, counters, and kiosks typical of the countryside or the city fringes. In conclusion, therefore, one can remark that the market in Osofisan’s theater opens the window to reflect many horizons of order, where life possibilities can be viewed and weighed in their multi-colored patterns. Thus, apart from myth, legend, folktale, and the Yoruba pantheon no other element persuasively captures the dramatist’s consistent negotiation of the old and the modern, freedom, and repression better than the trope of the market.

NOTES

1. Among the Yoruba, the market as a popular sphere that draws all and sundry to itself has its provenance in a couple of verses in Ifa divination corpus which is the source of ancient knowledge in the culture. For instance, in Odi Meji, Akesan the lord of the market consulted Ifa so that his desires for fame and wide acclaim could be realized. He offered the prescribed sacrifices. He started to grow in status and stature. Not only was he rich, his wife was made a chief. In another verse in Eji ogbe, Oko (farm), Ona (road), Ile (home) and Oja (market) were friends. They were all concerned simply with popularity and they expressed this desire to their diviner (Babalawo). They were asked to offer sacrifice so that they could retain goods and people that they would attract in prosperity. They all declined except Ile (Home). That is why whatever man is able to achieve on the farm, on the road, and in the market, he will bring them home. It is as a result of the refusal of the market to heed the voice of the oracle, that whatever profit people make in the market, or whatever merchandise is purchased, they are not left in the market. They are rather brought home. Besides, no matter how long buyers and sellers stay in the market, trading must end and people will desert the market for their homes.

2. See the account of this revolt by Egba women in history as captured by Wole Soyinka in his childhood autobiography, Ake: the Years of Childhood (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1981).

3. For a detailed discussion about the role and place of Pidgin English in Nigeria, see Ben Ohi Elugbe and Augusta Phil Omamor, Nigerian Pidgin: Background and Prospects (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991).

4. The story is sourced in a Yoruba folktale involving the tortoise and the rest of the animal community.

5. This tragic ending has been modified in a later version of the play which was published in the collection Major Plays 2 under the Opon Ifa Readers series. In the Epilogue of this version, Yobioyin agrees to go along with the plan to give her in
marriage to Aringindin. But it ends in disaster for the dictator and the nightwatchmen. The people of the community have the last laugh. The play ends with an open call for a political system in which everybody is allowed to have a part: “a government in which every voice is represented, whether old or young, male or female, worshipper or non-believer” (189).


REFERENCES


Chapter 25

MYTH, META-AESTHETICISM, AND THE CHALLENGE OF FEMI OSOFISAN’S DRAMATURGY

Gbemisola Adeoti

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical basis of Femi Osofisan’s theater, that is, its embracing a socialist/collective approach to societal problems and rejecting animist/metaphysical answers to the human predicament, is well established. In the process, myth is demystified; history is de-historicized and re-contextualized in Osofisan’s dramaturgy. But to what extent is this ideo-dramaturgical objective accomplished in his plays and what are the emerging challenges? This chapter attempts to navigate the myth and the reality of Osofisan’s dramaturgy. The study proposes that the playwright consistently employs a triple *annunciation-aesthetization-denunciation* procedure, leading to an effect that is often meta-historicist, meta-mythologist, and meta-aesthetic. However, as the chapter demonstrates, Osofisan’s dramaturgy presents hidden dilemmas. Indeed the dramaturgy frequently appears to subvert its basic assumptions and spring its own myths, with concomitant challenges not only for the playwright himself but also for scholars of his dramaturgy and of revolutionary theater in Nigeria. The aim of the chapter is to provoke a broadened view of such challenges.

Our overall grasp of the motivation, structure, and praxis of the theaters of English expression in Nigeria is enhanced by the fact that the frontline practitioners of these theaters—such as Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Zulu Sofola (late), Bode Sowande, and Femi Osofisan—have themselves over the decades provided theoretical guidance to their theatrical innovations, and have often contextualized them in relation to existing traditional theatrical and aesthetic canons. For instance, Femi Osofisan in particular has repeatedly articulated his own position on what he considers to be the appropriate modality for the deployment of traditional myths as well as past and contemporary history in African drama. His most elaborate articulation of his preference in this regard can be found in his articles,
especially “Ritual and the Revolutionary Ethos,” and also in his interviews, for example with Obafemi and with Morosseti.

Osofisan’s self-articulated argument, which antagonized the then dominant positions on myth and drama in Africa as earlier elaborated by Wole Soyinka (Myth, Literature and the African World-view), J.C. De Graft (Roots in African Drama), and to some extent, as we will elaborate, Isidore Okpewho (The Epic in Africa), among others, is that myth and history must be mediated by the revolutionary artist in order to properly serve as a tool for conscientizing and re-shaping society. The earlier praxis had appeared to be an authenticating presentation of the past and its myths. Such authentication, which I described as “affirmation of mythology” in another work (Oloruntoba-Oju, “Universal Mythology in African Drama”), is considered apparent in Soyinka’s representative phrasing in which tragedy, the most semiotic emblem of the human predicament:

is the most insistent voice that bids us return to our sources. There illusively, hovers the key to the human paradox, to man’s experience of being and non-being... (140)

However, Osofisan would argue then that an unmediated deployment of myth and history in contemporary African drama is an ideological throwback, “a dance...backwards into the womb of primeval chaos” in which “archetypal myths [are] resuscitated, the symbols renewed, and the community reconciled with [its decadent] history” (“Ritual and the Revolutionary Ethos,” 388). Osofisan’s preferred alternative, even while agreeing with the need to consult our sources, is to subvert myth by deploying it “not as myth now but as metaphor” and to mediate history towards a renewal of self and culture:

We must know where we are coming from in order to know where we are going. But knowing where we are coming from does not mean we should start worshipping slavishly what we are departing from... I go back to tradition in order to renew myself and also try to renew the culture. (Obafemi “Cultural Heritage” 389)

This argument covers the twin analytic matrices—ideological purport and representational mode—of revolutionary theater. Its import on the one hand is that myth and history should not be presented as if they were sacrosanct but must be bent to a revolutionary vision whose sole aim would be a radical change in the fortunes of the downtrodden of society and ultimately an egalitarian restructuring of society. Correspondingly, presentational aesthetics should follow a didactic, functionalist, and non-naturalistic mode in order to promote a non-illusory appreciation of the content of the theater.
Though extremely popular with audiences in the late seventies up to the late eighties, these thematic and histrionic postulates of Osofisan’s theater have not always gone unchallenged. Some of the most boisterous challenges came from Wole Soyinka himself who rose up to the defense of his own theatrical practice against the then fire-eating Marxist criticism of Biodun Jeyifo, Femi Osofisan, and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, among others (see especially Soyinka’s “Aesthetic illusions” and “Who is Afraid of Elesin Oba?”). Soyinka would argue mainly that Osofisan was wrong in not seeing his (Soyinka’s) deployment of the “Ogun-nian paradigm” also as a metaphor like Osofisan’s own self-acknowledged and manifest deployment of the “Orunmila paradigm” in his own plays.

From the point of view of this study, the major challenge of Osofisan’s dramaturgy has been his deployment of traditional popular forms, which he himself has recently described as “the very basis of my aesthetics” (see Morosseti), and his simultaneous attempts to turn traditional paradigms on themselves, “to subvert them,” as he himself asserted (Obafemi, “Cultural Heritage” 34). Two pivotal questions enable us to hone the indices of this challenge, that is: just how well are the entrenched myths or histories displaced within Osofisan’s theater, and, how well does the revolutionary purport of this theater translate beyond histrionics? In other words, beyond entertainment or rhetoric, what is the ultimate utilitarian value of this theater? The following sections illustrate the undulating manifestations of these challenges in Osofisan’s dramaturgy, using his award winning Morountodun as illustrative fragment.

META-AESTHETICISM, META-HISTORICISM, AND META-MYTHOLOGISM

With the benefit of scholarly hindsight, the first of the challenges highlighted above has been the easier one within the context of Osofisan’s dramaturgy. What we find in Ososifan’s drama such as Morountodun is a conscious attempt to displace the mythical paradigm and historical records in an attempt to bend both history and myth to serve his vision for humanity. The success of this attempt may well be open to questions, but the attempt itself is quite manifest in his entire theatrical output. For a checklist, the plays in which elements of traditional myths enter Osofisan’s plays include, especially, the magic boon plays (Once upon Four Robbers and Eshu and the Vagabond Minstrels) and others in which legendary/mythical personages appear in his plays in one form or the other such as Morountodun, No More the Wasted Breed, Farewell to a Cannibal Rage, and Many Colours Make the Thunder King. Past and contemporary histories also enter Osofisan’s works in plays like The Chattering and the Song (based on the reign of Alafin Abiodun in the old Oyo Empire); Morountodun (based on the Nigerian agbekoya uprising), in addition to generalized but phenomenal contem-
porary happenings being made subject of plays (for example, Nigerian Bar Beach execution of armed robbers in *Once upon Four Robbers*). Osofisan’s repertory is thus an important resource, among others, for the examination of mediation (of history and myth) strategies in Nigerian theater of English expression and in his own dramaturgy.

The traditional construction and appreciation of myths and the modalities by which they are represented in secondary literary forms had long been established in the literature. For example, as we have noted elsewhere (Oloruntoba-Oju, “Pragmatics and Myth in Nigerian Drama.”), William Bascom’s work on myth, especially his categorization of the functions of myth in African tales into amusement, validation of culture, education, and aetiology functions was used extensively as resource by Okpewho in analyzing the manifestations of myth in African works. Okpewho’s own classification of such realization is a four-way paradigm that includes “tradition preserved,” “tradition observed,” “tradition refined,” and “tradition revised.” The paradigm that seems closest to theoretical postulates on Osofisan’s dramaturgy is the last, “tradition revised,” whereby both myth and history are revisioned. Perhaps the best examples of the latter are to be found in *The Chattering and the Song* and *Morountodun*. In the former, the history of the old Oyo Empire in Yoruba land of Nigeria is revisioned, while in *Morountodun*, both the established history of the agbekoya uprising referred to above and the legend of Moremi, “the courageous woman of Ile-Ife” who gave her life and her son’s in the process of serving her community, are subverted. Assuming for now that the subversion attempt in such plays actually succeeds in its objectives, the question, how exactly does the playwright do it, or what is the process by which the subversion is attempted, becomes pertinent. I propose in this study that Osofisan employs a triple interacting dramaturgic procedure which culminates in the effects described in the title above as meta-aestheticism, meta-historicism, and meta-mythologism. The procedure is described below in terms of annunciation, meta-aestheticism, and denunciation.

**ANNUNCIATION**

The first leg in this procedure is annunciation of the relevant history or myth through direct, unambiguous verbal referents. The references to the reign of Alafin Abiodun in the history of Oyo Empire immediately comes to mind; however, the most persuasive examples in Osofisan’s repertory are from *Morountodun*, in statements such as the following:

The play [is set] in the year 1969, the month of September. [It] deals with…the war that was later to be popularly known as Agbekoya
uprising, in which ordinary farmers, in the West of the country, rose
up to confront the state. (5-6.)

You taught me her story mama…Moremi, the brave woman of Ile-Ife,
who saved the race. (20)

Moremi was not afraid!…She was a woman, like me. And she waited
alone for the Igbo warriors. All her people went into hiding, but she
alone stood and waited. (30)

Such direct verbal reference is one of the cues by which Osofisan locates the actual
historical event or mythical antecedent that is to become the subject of subversion
or revision in the play. Incidentally, another playwright, Bode Sowande, had used
the same historical *agbekoya* incident as backdrop for revolutionary action in his
most influential play, *Farewell to Babylon*, which fortuitously provides a platform
for a comparative consideration of the different realizations of historical events
and characters by the two playwrights. While a comprehensive comparison of
the two playwrights is not the aim here, it is noteworthy within the context that
Sowande does not cite the antecedent *agbekoya* history through verbal referents
in his play, even though his realization of the female mole who infiltrated the
ranks of the revolutionary farmers in actual history is fairly close to the original
(which is not to say that there are no deviations in other aspects of the play
either). By contrast, as we have seen above, Osofisan locates the related historical
and mythical antecedents through direct verbal referents in his plays and then
provides a plank for their subversion. The effect of the absence of such verbal
referents can also be seen in the fact that in Osofisan’s own *Chattering* which also
depicts a farmers’ movement, any relationship between the play and the *agbekoya*
history can only be arrived at inductively, and by the cognoscenti. Again, by
contrast, where such a relationship is more explicitly stated, as in *Morountodun*,
this makes the intertextual history accessible to the average member of the audi-
ence in the play.

While the focus is on verbal referents here, it should be pointed out that
there are other complementary dramaturgical means by which the old historical
and mythical models are propped up prior to their subversion or demolition in
Osofisan’s works. In this regard one would here draw attention to an item that is
previously unmentioned in Osofisan scholarship, which is the totemic modeling.
A conspicuous example here is the totemic elevation of the Moremi model in
the earlier part of *Morountodun*. Here the totemic modeling is achieved through
the use of the Moremi necklace, “with its pretty dagger” which Alhaja, Titubi’s
mother, sells “by the hundreds” (20). The pendant was the rave of the moment.
Titubi herself wore it proudly, and the pendant is to trigger the eventual appar-
tion of Moremi and dramatization of her legend in the play. When Titubi is
“captured” by the peasants, the playwright also causes them to refer to “her fancy necklace...they call it Moremi” (43). Hence in addition to the verbal referents referred to, such dramaturgic totems are also deployed in the annunciation of historical/mythical models prior to their subversion in Osofisan’s plays.

META-AESTHETICISM

By meta-aestheticism within the present context, I mean the conversion of historical or mythical material to a distinguishable aesthetic form within the overall dramatic aesthetics, that is, the *histrionicizing* or dramatization of history or myth as a recurrent feature of Osofisan’s dramaturgy. In other words, the relevant history or myth is deliberately presented in the form of drama within the overall drama. Such dramatization is to be distinguished from a mere narrative or verbal reference to the historical or mythical material, which may not necessarily aestheticize the material beyond such a plain recount. Hence a notable aestheticizing strategy is the play-in-a-play mode employed in the relevant plays, in this case Osofisan’s *Chattering*, and his *Morountodun*. Both plays respectively reconstruct scenarios from the reign of Alafin Abiodun and from the fateful heroism of the legendary Moremi, and the relevant scenarios are played out as independent dramas within the plays. It needs be emphasized that one is not merely drawing attention to the obvious here. While reference has often been made to the presence of such a play-in-a-play in these works, the emphasis here is what the play-in-a-play *does* in this context, which is to *aestheticize* plain historical or mythical materials (or perhaps to re-aestheticize them, since history or myth may be regarded as aesthetic forms already in themselves). For further emphasis, absorbing such materials into drama is already an aestheticizing procedure, but by further investing them with a distinguishable aesthetic form within the drama instead of merely referring to them, the scenarios are made to enter the realm of the meta-aesthetic.

A related dramaturgical feature here is that this meta-aestheticism is rendered explicit by a further deliberate annunciation of its independent histrionic status by the characters in the plays. In other words, the characters actually announce the onset of the play-in-a-play mode; they declare that a dramatization of the historical or mythical material is about to commence. This is quite explicit in *Chattering* where, within the ongoing drama, Yajin requests “a play, a little scenario” as her wedding present. The “scenario” then takes the audience back into history and in the process serves both dramaturgical and ideological functions. Similarly, the legendary heroism of Moremi is replayed within the ongoing drama in *Morountodun* as earlier noted. The onset of this replay is not explicitly announced as done in the *Chattering* example but audience expectation of such a replay is just as effectively activated by Titubi. The playwright exploits the semiotic convention
of drama and theater and the interplay between words and technical effect to insinuate the onset of a flashback:

ah Moremi! What were your thoughts at that lonely moment? Can I read your mind…Maybe it would strengthen me…

[Light changes occur, slowly, dimming gradually on the cell and brightening simultaneously on a small market square…Titubi…remains visible throughout the following scene]. (20-21)

As will be shown in the next section, the characters involved also draw attention to their own mediation of these historical and mythical materials (for example, in Chattering, Leje deviates from the established plot of the play-in-a-play, causing Yajin to remonstrate that: “that is not part of the play”). Such annunciation and explicit mediation of historical material heighten meta-aesthetic effect in the drama.

**RENUNCIATION/DENUNCIATION**

The third leg in the dramaturgic procedure leading to meta-aestheticism, meta-historicism, and meta-mythologism is the explicit subversion of history and myth which occurs in Osofisan’s dramaturgy again via a technique of direct verbal intervention. The earlier annunciation/proclamation is countered this time with a verbal renunciation/denunciation of the purport of established history and myth. The temper is frequently revisionist. For example, while in actual history Alafin Abiodun of Oyo Empire was noted for benevolence and good governance, having himself survived persecution, Osofisan’s Chattering presents him as no less an exploitative despot than other monarchs presented as dictators by history:

You and your people, you are the soil on which
The Alafin’s tree is nourished, tended until it is
Overladen with fruits! And yet, when you stretch out your hands, there are no fruits for you. (42)

As noted earlier, this renunciation/denunciation mode fits into Okpewho’s “tradition revised” paradigm. The renunciation/denunciation mode is even more direct in Morountodun. After her “rebirth,” Titubi renounces the old Moremi model: “I am not Moremi. Moremi served the state, was the state…” (58). This renunciation/denunciation is startling considering the manner in which the Moremi model had been set up through elaborate verbal annunciation and conspicuous totemism as earlier noted. By such renunciation, Titubi, who is later to be renamed Morountodun (“I have found a sweet thing”), becomes a standard
bearer for the new female heroism presented in Osofisan’s revolutionary drama: a heroine who is not serving the bourgeois state as a decadent, oppressive regime, and who is not serving self or serving bourgeois sentiments or instincts, but one who places herself at the service of a new egalitarian collective.

From these examples, Osofisan’s place as revolutionary dramatist who upturns myth and history and also upturns established ideological and dramaturgical categories would seem assured. Mainstream theater scholarship devoted to Osofisan’s dramaturgy, from Obafemi through Awodiya to Richards as examples are suffused with summative reaffirmation of this position that in Osofisan’s works:

"audiences see parallels with their contemporary realities. But more importantly they are encouraged to observe the manner in which their reality is constructed and to speculate on ways it can be changed… Osofisan offers a merger of ritual and revolutionary ethos capable of affectively confronting many of the historic challenges of our day."

(Richards, 149)

If this is so, what then could possibly be the challenges of and to this self-assured dramaturgy? The following section is meant to draw attention to, and elaborate on, contrasting perspectives.

IS DISPLACEMENT OF MYTH AND HISTORY A MYTH OF OSOFISAN’S DRAMATURGY?

By far the largest share of knocks from critics, friends, and acolytes have been directed at Osofisan, not surprisingly, since he seems to be the leader of the emergent drama camp. He has, over the years, had to offer a defense against charges of apostasy (See, for instance, his “Of Alienation and Me,” The Nigerian Guardian, July 5 1987).

The question of just how well Osofisan has managed to subvert myth and history and also subvert the dominant dramaturgy of the preceding generation of dramatists—Soyinka, Clark, and Sofola—is only one of the challenges that have confronted Osofisan’s dramaturgy over time. This question in particular has been asked frequently, sometimes subtly, sometimes explicitly. Elsewhere, we have noted the related but subtle reference by Isidore Okpewho to Osofisan in his work on myths. While not specifically mentioning Osofisan, Okpewho argued that myth is myth and is always capable of mystifying, notwithstanding sundry claims to the use of myth as “metaphor,” etc. (204). Such subtle challenges are interesting when it is recalled that Soyinka had also argued, as noted earlier, that
his own dramaturgical deployment of the “Ogunnian myth” should be seen as metaphor or as allegory.

The real challenge here is to determine whether the triple “subversive” procedure identified above (annunciation/proclamation-aestheticisation/demystification-denunciation) actually succeeds in dislodging the consciousness of myth from the mind of the average audience member. This issue is as problematic in those plays where characters are made to explicitly denounce history or myth, as analyzed in the foregoing, as it is problematic in those plays of Osofisan in which myth and magic are only barely mediated, if at all. An example of the latter category is the “magic boon” plays, Four Robbers and Eshu. For example, nowhere in Four Robbers is the assumed magical potency of Aafa’s “gift” to the robbers actually debunked; the magic is seen and heard to work to the very end. The fact that this magic would only work if the robbers use it in concert certainly comes off as an allegory of the value of collectivity in socialist struggles; however, this does not detract from the fact that the drama does not necessarily attack the plausibility of the very concept of magic, a concept that is otherwise antithetical to a materialist perception of society.

Interestingly, Oloruntoba-Oju in “Brecht, Osofisan, Eshu...and Mists” had similarly observed, after the premier production of another magic boon play, Osofisan’s Eshu and the Vagabond Minstrels, that, overall, the sense of mystification, so captivating in the production, does not quite depart from the drama. This position is obviously contestable, considering the painstaking measures by the playwright in the published version to “steer away from sentimentality” (author’s preface), and the end-song titled, “Esu Does Not Exist,” which tries to subvert the myth of the gods by declaring their presence in the play as a metaphor. Still, whether these extra-dramatic interventions do erase the mesmeric effect of the entire drama is debatable. Oloruntoba-Oju, cited above, asked the following rhetorically in personal communication:

> How would it sound, if after an evangelical play in which miracles are seen performed, the actors announce that it was all a joke and that there is neither a God nor are there angels? Well, for the believers, that might simply be taken as just another joke that the author has added to the play; the ‘profanity’ would be excused as a laughable part of an otherwise laudable and enjoyable play. (“Brecht, Osofisan, Eshu...and Mists”)

Perhaps only a deliberate and concerted audience-response study can help determine the actual effect of the use of myth or magic in those plays of Osofisan in which the subversion of myth is a declared ideo-dramaturgic intent. In the event, a more clear-cut distinction between myth as myth and myth as metaphor is a distinct challenge of Osofisan’s dramaturgy.
Similarly, notwithstanding the explicit and implicit denunciation of myth, some of Osofisan’s dramatic outcomes tend to come at loggerheads with a number of ideological postulates that presumably power the dramaturgy. For example, while change and the possibility of revolutionary change is an ideological purport, the sense of fatalism is frequently and contradictorily present in some of the plays’ outcomes. As pointed out in the literature, albeit in other contexts, the trope “nothing changing,” “only the same tale of oppression,” etc. is recurrent in Osofisan’s plays with striking similarities in expression, especially between *Four Robbers* and *Chattering* (Oloruntoba-Oju, “Universal Mythology in African Drama” 91-2). Beyond such verbiage however, as noted above, some dramatic outcomes, especially in the core revolutionary plays (*Four Robbers, Chattering, Morountodun, Aringindin, Red is the Freedom Road* [my categorization]), give the sense of either “nothing changing” or of the ambivalence of history.

The challenge here is that the optimism which is the basis of revolutionary struggles (*victoria a certa*) appears frequently under attack in the plays. The revolutionary leaders are rounded up at the end of *Chattering*, even if the playwright, in the closing stage direction, forbids any mourning. In *Morountodun* the war never ends for those who are born poor: the revolutionary warriors are vanquished; peace came only at the negotiating table in the end; but even at that the relief is perhaps only temporary “until the next cry of desperation,” as Marshall had ominously noted in his self-acknowledged dreamy monologue (78). In *Four Robbers* the ending is ambivalent between victory for the robbers who are representing the people and victory for the oppressors; the answer is left to a popular vote, that is, left to chance, especially in a sociopolitical environment where votes are so susceptible to the machinations of the powers that be (although it must be acknowledged that many of the productions do attract a vote for the robbers). In *Aringindi* the people’s own revolutionaries turn predators; while Aringidin is killed, the original problem that gave rise to his era remains. The play does not really end, according to its author in the closing stage direction.

Osofisan would later explain in an interview that, “history is always changing, everything’s contingent, there is never any end really, everything keeps shifting” (Morosetti 2007). However, the evidence of the plays seems contrary; as shown above the evidence is that of nothing changing, especially for those who are born poor. Richards was also to note “evidences [of] an even more profound pessimism,” in Osofisan’s *Oriki of a Grasshopper* compared with his earlier plays, and that “the bleakness is neither socially determined nor susceptible to sociopolitical solutions. Rather, the process of entropy is fundamental to the human condition” (31). Again there is a challenge here, which is how to reconcile the ideological base of Osofisan’s dramaturgy with such apparent pessimism. It would not be an adequate answer here that the playwright is merely being realistic in his presentation, since the ostensible mandate of socialist realism and of revolutionary drama
is, through positive, optimistic projections, to forge and force the consciousness of new possibilities beyond drab and decadent reality.

Another source of challenge has been the exact nature of the heroism depicted in Osofisan’s plays. The playwright’s reputation as a revolutionary dramatist has rested partly on the acclaimed subversion of the Promethean, individualist notion of heroism in his drama, in favor of a collective heroism led by ordinary folks. However, some of his protagonists have turned out to be no less heroic as they manage to emerge, dazzling conquerors and superstars, from the collective mass. Examples include the four robbers in *Once upon Four Robbers* and Titubi and Marshall in *Morountodun*. Marshall, field commander of the farmers in the play, stands tall and imposing in action and in words. Apart from his stony visage, “You’re too brutal…;” “I’m a commander of war” (73), his often poetic diction marks him out from the rest of the military crowd represented by the likes of Bgune and Kokondi, and even outclasses that of the ancient Baba, father figure for the revolutionaries. Marshall’s heroism also approaches the tragic, following his quixotic plunge into blazing enemy territory and his consequent demise along with his comrades at arms, presaged in Baba’s solemn: “They will not come back,” and confirmed in the Director’s narrative intoning, “[they] did not come back” (78-79).

Titubi also, although a far cry from the overwhelming presence that characterizes the classic tragic heroine, still emerges as a legend in the play, a female promethean heroically braving life’s odds, putting her life especially at risk to serve a cause. Her own declaration after her neo-Moremi feat is instructively Caesarian in construction, “I went, and I returned, triumphant, like a legend” (60). Such heroic representations may certainly be considered less representative of proletariat culture than, for example, the Brechtian depiction of the simple Shen Te/Shui Ta in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, or the struggling and straggling Mother Courage in Brecht’s *Mother Courage and her Children*. Both of them remain ordinary mortals and can hardly be mistaken for heroes/”sheroes” in the conventional bourgeois sense.

One should note here that the reputation of Titubi as a heroine has been attacked in literature, for example, by Richards who opines that her being renamed by Marshall downgrades not only her stature but also the revolutionary purport of the play. Also compare the extensive gender-based analysis by Ajayi. Indeed, one can be pardoned for saying that the Titubi who struts on to the stage in the play’s opening moments, and who eventually dares death as spy in the farmer’s war camp, is distinctively different from the Titubi who breaks down in sobs, hands her gun over to Marshall and apparently submits to overwhelming romantic emotions. It is also the case that where Titubi occasionally shows weakness, Marshall in contrast shows a constant, unflinching strength. Nonetheless it is important not to confuse the concept of female hero with that of feminist “shero.” In the latter,
gender antagonism is a deliberate construct and sometimes a nagging issue, while the former accommodates expressions of femininity within the rubric of female heroism. In this wise, the legendary stature of Titubi continues to be guaranteed. This heroism or legendarism, however, may be seen as a challenge to a concept of egalitarianism and the collectivity paradigm in revolutionary struggles.

Other issues that have led to controversy and heightened the challenges of Osofisan’s dramaturgy include those concerning the concrete utilitarian value of dramatic aesthetics in general and purported revolutionary aesthetics in particular. An early challenger here has again been Wole Soyinka. Osofisan had contended (in “Ritual and the Revolutionary Ethos”) that the concern of Soyinka’s characters with metaphysical profundities precludes them from organizing themselves “into a fighting group, for active combat”—to which Soyinka would retort, “Efficient fighting forces on the pages of drama?” (Soyinka, “Who is Afraid of Elesin Oba?” 120).

Soyinka’s rhetorically posed challenge occurred against the background of his own intervention in real-life struggles to contain the destructive forces of society, even though egalitarianism is not a stated philosophy of his. To be sure, Soyinka’s own promethean/Ogunnian model is elaborately reflected in his personal life—he has been incarcerated; he had ventured individually into a volatile war front to try to mediate; he has floated opposition parties and has too many times confronted the powers that be—hence it can be genuinely difficult to understand how his drama, or any drama for that matter, could preclude real-life engagements, and, conversely, how the drama could promote real-life engagements.

Soyinka’s own contention in the essay cited above is that the “explication of social history and attitudes” can be expressed “symbolically” without necessarily compromising real-life struggles, and that the author’s role is only “complementary” to that of other forces of society. And this is a proposition that Osofisan seems increasingly to have come to terms with over time, as some of his more recent interviews show no form is ever neutral after all; only the author may be naïve or innocent. And, further:

I don’t think the writer can do more than this, that is, provide for us the vision of our possibilities in the past, the present, and the future. The concrete action after that is ours, that of every individual in the society. All a playwright can do is present the true picture of life around us, in as forceful and appealing manner as he can, calling upon the immense powers of his imagination, and map out the possible roads ahead of us, and the rest is ours to go and decide. (See interview with Morosetti)

The challenge here is to reconcile this position with the purported revolutionary potential of Osofisan’s dramaturgy and earlier critical “posturing” on its
utilitarian value. Complicating the challenge is Osofisan’s recent apparent attack on committed art (where “commitment” is narrowly defined as an ideological commitment that translates to an ideology-based art, which Osofisan’s dramaturgy presumably is). Such unwavering commitment to ideology by the artist or critic had been upbraided in caustic terms by Soyinka in his old quarrels with ideologues of the left, a group to which Osofisan then belonged. It is interesting to recall Soyinka’s scathing statement against a situation “where rote is replacing perception and penetrating insights, where brilliant essays [and plays?] are being flawed by contrived insertions of Pavlovian codes from elementary Marxist texts” (“Who is Afraid of Elesin Oba?” 124). It is interesting because some of Osofisan’s recent statements may seem a distinct echo of this challenge and may therefore point at a change in ideological perspective:

I have always had problems with critics who are locked into a rigid, unbending view of history, whose minds have been frozen by ideology, and have stopped being human beings and turned instead into parrots and marionettes. But that is where the artist has his triumph in the end over ideologues and thugs. (see interview with Morosetti)

Again a distinct challenge here is to attempt to marry the apparent contradictory theoretical postulates in the earlier Osofisan, once described by Jeyifo as “unquestionably a man of the left…” (230), with the latter Osofisan and the possible effect of this on the appreciation of Osofisan’s dramaturgy in particular and revolutionary theater in Nigeria in general. Clearly, some of the challenges highlighted above are not just for Osofisan as dramatist, but for scholars of his dramaturgy and of current and future trends in Nigerian drama and theater.

CONCLUSION

What we have proposed in the foregoing is, on the one hand, a framework for the analysis of subversive trends in Osofisan’s dramaturgy beyond the accustomed general statement that his drama “subverts” old myths, history, and tenets of bourgeois theater. In this regard we have demonstrated the playwright’s consistency in deploying a triple procedure of annunciation-aestheticisation-denunciation of history and myth in his drama, which procedure culminates in a corresponding triple effect described in the foregoing as meta-historicist, meta-mythologist, and meta-aesthetic. On the other hand we have also proposed that, as ideology-based art, Osofisan’s dramaturgical praxis has over the years posed tremendous challenges, especially in those areas in which the praxis does not appear to be in sync with some of the theoretical postulates that purportedly power the praxis. Some of those areas and the corresponding challenges have been highlighted in the foregoing. While these challenges are real in my reckoning, they do not detract
from Osofisan’s place in the history of Nigerian theater of English expression as a leading figure in the group of emergent dramatists who challenged the old dominant order of the preceding generation of dramatists and presented revolutionary dramaturgical possibilities to enthusiastic Nigerian audiences.

REFERENCES


Art disputes reality, but does not hide from it... Art leads us to the origins of rebellion to the extent that it tries to give its form to an exclusive value which the future perpetually promises, but of which the artist has presentiment and wishes to match from the grasp of history. (Albert Camus, 258)

INTRODUCTION

The study of the truth," asserts Aristotle, "is in one way easy, in another difficult" (56). This implies that no single person can adequately grasp it. However, there are unending attempts to grasp it, occasionally stumbling on it, or arriving at it premeditatedly. "Truth," he suggests, "is the aim of a contemplative study" in the realization of cause and effect. Aristotle concludes that, "Everything has as much truth as it has being." Thus the search for truth, transient or ultimate, can be as ephemeral as it is delicate, albeit the indelibility of that truth. For, as Joseph Campbell observes, what would be the meaning of the word truth to a scientist is far from being the meaning of truth for a religious mystic or fanatic. Nonetheless, the search for it in man’s constant quest to come to terms with cosmic and cosmological forces continues unabated. Man cannot refrain from searching for truth even in a world bedeviled with falsehood, double-talk, and double-stance like ours. Truth gives meaning and exaltation to man’s otherwise seemingly nihilistic existence. The quest for truth, no matter how tortuous, like that of Oedipus or Hamlet, makes their tragedies such invaluable moral and spiritual treasures. Comedies have their own measures
of truth equally directed at inculcating moral and philosophical rectitude. No less are melodramas. In this regard, the values of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, Molere’s *The Miser*, Shaw’s *Arms and the Man*, or Osofisan’s *Who’s Afraid of Solarin*, to mention just a few, is undoubted. Thus, the fact that a play has a happy ending whether that end is a deserved reward of honesty, uprightness of heroism, or punishment for villainy is a glorification of the truth, and the indestructibility of that truth enunciated.

**THE MYTHIC**

This reasoning introduces us to the evaluation of the quintessence of the mythic and the mythological vis-à-vis the mytho-historical and the mytho-religious and their appreciation or criticism. The mythic imagination and heroic archetypes are very closely related to the elements of truth, vis-à-vis appearance and reality. The same is applicable to the realm of theater and life, fiction and fact. “Myths,” as Camus asserts, “are made for the imagination to breathe life into them.” For instance, his *Myth of Sisyphus* encapsulates a constant negation of man’s efforts to grapple with his destiny. The more Sisyphus struggles to ward off his obstacles toward a fuller realization of his potential, the more precipitous are his recurrent failures. In man’s imagination and consciousness, the tragedy of Sisyphus epitomizes the negation and ineffectiveness of the gods in human affairs.³ The mythic, Mircea Eliade suggests, reveals the structure of reality and “the multiple modalities of being in the world.” Myths are the exemplary models for human endeavors, disclosing the actual stories, which concern themselves intimately with realities. Eliade says that “the myth defines itself by its own intrinsic mode of existence.” He elaborates:

It can be grasped, as a myth, in as far as it reveals something as having been fully manifested, and this manifestation is at the same time creative and exemplary, since it is the foundation of a structure of reality as well as a kind of behavior. (15)

There could be great confusion between myth and history. Eliade suggest that myth always narrates something as having really happened, as an event that took place…the creation of world…of the most insignificant animal or vegetable specie or of an institution.⁴

**DEFINITIONS**

However, the Random House College Dictionary defines myth variously: it is “a traditional or legendary story usually concerned with deities or demigods
and the creation of the world and its inhabitants.” It is “a story or belief that attempts to express or explain basic truth; an allegory or parable.” Myth is “a belief or a subject of belief whose truth or reality is acceptable uncritically.”

According to Ninian Smart, “to categorize something as a myth is not to assert that it is false,” though in modern context, unfortunately, the tendency has been to label the mythic as connoting a false story or account. As Smart also observes, it is now fashionable to think that one’s own myth is a true story while the other person’s myth is false or fanciful. On the secular realm, some myths are historical narratives, while on the sacred and the numinous, myths have to do with the relationship between the transcendent, the supernatural, and the metaphysical. Smart defines myth materially as, “stories concerning divinities, typically in relationship to men and the world.” Moremi myth is almost all-embracing. It can be more comprehensively classified as mytho-historical, mytho-religious and mytho-ritual.

MYTH OF YORUBA ORIGIN

The foregoing also introduces us to the story of Moremi, a religio-secular heroine, whose feat, whether on the historical angle, or the religious, or ritual perspectives, is intimately linked with the success story of Ile-Ife not as the cradle of only the Yoruba civilization, but of the whole world. Kemi Atanda Ilori comments:

If, as is argued by many folklorists today, myth is the kernel of historical truth, then the Yoruba myth of origin is a safe though cloudy message to the genesis of an illustrious people, whose primeval times were not only close to but even shared affinity with the supernatural, the unimaginable and unfathomable.

However, if the origin of the Yoruba “nation” is shrouded in obscurity, as Adebayo Okunade agrees with Ilori, the story of Moremi may be no more than an imaginative construct; in consequence, it is really a historical imaginary, conceived to bolster up a people’s collective ego or national pride. Okunade seems to agree with this assertion: “In the case of the origin of the Yorubas, the various accounts which are myths rather than history are diverse.”

LEGEND OF MOREMI

The often-repeated legend of Moremi is worth recounting comprehensively to enable us to closely evaluate the manipulation of its myth by Duro Ladipo and Femi Osofisan in their landmark dramatizations of this inspiring story of
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Ile-Ife. She was of stupendous beauty and virtue, having only one son, Ela or Oluorogbo.

Constantly harassed for years by a tribe called Igbos, the autochthon created by Obatala’s rebellious act, the Ifes were in dire need of a savior to exorcise the devilry of the Igbos, thought to be gods or demigods. The Ifes could not withstand the Igbos because the former thought that they had incurred the anger of their gods rendering them easily susceptible to plunder by their enemies. All the Ifes’ attempts to propitiate and appeal to their gods to rescue them proved futile. Fired with zeal and patriotism, Moremi undertook to do all she could to liberate her race from such political rather than religio-mystical incubi. Bent on discovering the real secrets of the Igbos, Moremi repaired to Esinmirin stream, where she vowed to its goddess that if she succeeded in her venture, she would make an endearing sacrifice affordable to the deity. She planned to expose herself to the raiders who would capture her and take her to the Igbo country where she hoped to extract the secrets of Igbo success. Accordingly, Moremi was captured in the subsequent raids and presented as booty to the Igbo King who was charmed beyond words by her beauty and courage. Then, she learnt their secrets, including how to conquer them. Moremi subsequently stole back to Ife, where she led the Ifes against the Igbos whom the Ifes defeated, but benevolently made peace with, resettling them within the city walls.

Having metaphorically solved the riddle of her people’s sphinx, Moremi had no alternative, but to sacrifice her only son Ela in fulfillment of the treaty with the deity. In this way, Moremi assumed the great status of a mytho-historical and mytho-heroine among the Ifes, partly serving their earthly cum ontological needs as a people capable of producing a savior-leader, and partly fulfilling their spiritual purgation in conformity with their ontological arguments.

OSOFISANISM

In dramatizing the myth of Moremi, in his award-winning Morountodun, Ososfisan attempts to resourcefully manipulate many resources of stagecraft in presenting what can be conveniently termed his pedagogy of the oppressed, wherein he also tries to articulate very aggressively his gospel of the poor, at the same time laying the foundation for an anti-capitalist ideology. Using the dramatic medium of communication as an idealistic tribunal, his handling of myths and anti-myths, theater and anti-theater, he attempts to weld the historical and the ahistorical, the religious and the irreligious through the platform of Marxist polemics. Like Brecht’s and Pirandello’s, Ososfisan’s anti-realistic method of narrative tries to weld resourcefully the illusionary and disillusionary approach to dramatize what appears to be real-life happenings. Here, the use of literature as a medium of establishing a workable, proletariat, ideological base as a medium of propaganda
and conscience-provoking instrument of change, appears to be at its ideal stage of formulation in Africa. He attempts to use the medium of theater and drama, both passionately and dispassionately as religious and non-religious experiences.

**ARTISTIC TIME**

It is significant to remark that every poet or literary artist in attempting to make history through creating afresh, equally attempts to abolish time and abolish history. This method seems particularly suitable in an effort to historicize, mythicize history, an approach resourcefully manipulated by Osofisan in recasting the mytho-historical and mytho-ritual synthesis of Moremi in *Morountodun*. Here, he establishes his own *illud tempus*, what Benjamin Gray calls “the cosmogonic time,” which is contemporaneous with the tentative moment of artistic creation. In it, the artist assumes the role of a prehistoric originator or creator. *Morountodun* starts in 1969, contemporaneous with the peak of the Nigerian Civil War. It is a re-enactment of what he calls “the agbekoya uprising,” a massive revolution in which ordinary farmers in Western Nigeria aggressively confronted the establishment. Casting the play in the form of direct agitation propaganda, the playwright asserts, “we decided to go and rouse people up by doing a play on the subject…we decided to do a play about it, and take it round to open places.”

Thus, in his passionate campaign against morbid materialism and rabid nouveau-riche propensities of Nigerians’ infantile capitalism, Osofisan is paradoxically arousing the workers’ consciousness to rise up en masse and fight against mass poverty, against exploitation of the impoverished, and against all forces of reaction aimed at perpetuating the sterile status quo: “Who does not want money?/…Stand! Stand!/ Fight for your right/ To rise in life” (7). He caps his agitation propaganda gospel with pungent incitement:


Graphically contrasting with the masses’ protest is the juxtaposition of a typically bourgeois atmosphere attempting to counter what Titubi, our would-be heroine calls “Lies! Insults! In the newspapers! On the radio. On television.” Titubi and her supporters are introduced:

> A little group, superbly dressed, with lots of jewellery and make-up, and wearing conspicuously the ‘Moremi necklace’ then in vogue—a little dagger, surrounded with golden nuggets…leading them is Titubi, a pretty, sensual and…self-conscious woman (7).
Titubi’s counter-revolutionary posture is easily evident: She protests the slanderous focus of the guerrilla plays, asserting respect for the law, no matter its donkey-orientation:

You mount these stupid plays, calling everybody a thief, simply because we work and sweat and use our brain...I have money and I can enslave you with it! I can buy all of your ringworm-infested actors if I choose… (9).

The main areas of conflict thus established, Superintendent Salami provides more information on Titubi’s bourgeois background. She is the spoilt daughter of Alhaja Kabirat, head of the market women. Salami’s arguments and challenge set the pace for the ideological sensibilities garnered by Morountodun:

So you are Titubi, the Amazon going to war! You’re wealthy, your mother owns the town, and you’re going to defend with your very life all that possession...if you really want to save your fatarshed class, why haven’t you offered your services to crush this peasant revolt?...the farmers and villagers around us have risen in open rebellion and are marching down upon the city?…Go Titu-Titu, the magnificent Moremi of the sixties!... (12-14)

PREFIGUREMENT

Remarkably, Titubi has not only been described as “an Amazon going to war,” but also, personified as “Moremi of the Sixties!” The personification of Titubi as an Amazon going to war is of great significance. The analogy pits the myth of Moremi, whom Titubi also prefigures, with the classical myth of a race of female warriors reputedly dwelling near the Black Sea and elsewhere. In this way, Titubi, as “Moremi Personified” should respond to the challenge before her with the spirit of belonging to fabled tribes of warriors in South America and the Black Sea. Mythically, these tribes of female warriors hardly fail in their revengeful undertakings. Thus provoked, Titubi undertakes to single-handedly fight the peasants, by attempting to capture Marshal, the peasant leader, a task which the whole State Police Force has failed to do. All that the Police can do to assist her to achieve her feat is to arrange for her capture by the peasant rebels, a recast of the mytho-ritual history of Moremi. Henceforth, as Osofisan establishes, History or Chance or Fortune has taken over the stage.

In a series of plays-within-the-play rehashing the Brechtian and Pirandellian concepts of fiction versus reality characters versus actors, or actual identities, appearance versus phantom vis-à-vis theater and actual life events, the stage is set for Titubi’s capture in an atmosphere reminiscent of the Moremi mytho-history.
Initially, it is in defense of her class, the mercantile class, that Titubi volunteers to help suppress the revolt. Adorned with the Moremi necklace, a fashion in vogue, Titubi enjoys the vicarious thrills of Moremi, a religious experience that seemingly endows her with an added spiritual reincarnation of the heroine. Like Moremi, therefore, she undertakes to save her “fatarshed” class. Moremi mytho-historically saved the Ifes from the avenging spirits of the Igbos whose land they seized and occupied by force.\(^{13}\)

**THE MISSION POSSIBLE**

Thrilled thus by the mythical heroism of Moremi, egged on by the representatives of the law, Titubi defies her mother’s opposition to risk her own life just to save her capitalist class. The reputed invincibility of the peasants, a recast of the “invincibility” of the mythical Igbos, cannot deter her. Like the peasants in Gerhart Hauptmann’s *The Weavers*, the peasants in *Morountodun* are strong and seemingly unconquerable, “because they are solidly united by the greatest force in the world-hunger.” What is more, they have risen to say, “No, no more,” because they want to save their children constantly ravaged by “Kwashiorkor.” As for Titubi, on the contrary, her strength of will seems to have been reinforced by the fact that she is richly endowed, pretty, sensuous, daring, and with quite a reputation with men.” Such promiscuous attributes would likely charm the peasant leader Marshal, who would be rendered susceptible to capture as occurred mythically between Moremi and the Igbo King. This can be regarded as an ideal reincarnation!

**PRECEDENCE**

In another play-within-the-play, Titubi, watched by the superintendent, enacts how she intends to present herself before the peasants as their prisoner, hiding her real intentions and identity in the process. Like Medea, a Greek classical mythological heroine of Euripides’ play, *Medea*, Titubi would present herself as a murderer of her own children before the peasants, requesting them to redress her heinous crimes. The use of this classical myth of the tragedy of Medea appropriately supports the dimensions of the Moremi mytho-history as a kind of precedence. In order to provide an adequate base for her courage, and also to be more vicariously representative of the modern Moremi, Titubi prays and invokes the ancient heroine directly, not to “unsex” her as Lady Macbeth did in the hour of a dangerous feat, but to give her added courage to dare and succeed as Moremi before her had dared and succeeded.
Moremi was not afraid!...Fear go away! Doubt and trembling, retreat, retreat from me!...She was a woman, like me. And she waited all alone, for the Igbo warriors! All her people went into hiding, but she alone stood and waited. I can feel her heart beating, like mine...But how lucky you were, Moremi! How I envy you!...Moremi! What were your thoughts...Can I read your mind?...Maybe it would strengthen me... (Morountodun 30-31)

A flash-back, replaying a historical event nearer the cradle of the Yoruba civilization at Ile-Ife, is dreamily enacted.

FLASHBACK

Reminiscent of a dream scene, the flashback within the play is costumed in the style of dressing and make-up, also suggestive of historical context dating several decades ago. The flashback is meant to hearten Titubi who has just invoked the heroic spirit of her mytho-historical figure or heroine. Three main levels of re-enactment can be identified in this dreamlike scene. There is the plain level of play acting wherein the actors play themselves pirandellianly as characters recounting mytho-historical happenings, serving as support for the national psyche of a particular race, here the Ifes. On another level, the flashback serves as the realm of dream, the subconscious state aimed at strengthening the otherwise faint resolve of Titubi as Moremi personified. On the third and final level, there is an attempt to juxtapose the theatrical make-belief (illusion), eliciting a willing suspension of disbelief, with a concrete occurrence, or its representation, capable of provoking fake admiration or actual vicarious admiration. In the flashback, Moremi recounts:

Fear was...a faraway land. When I went to Esinmirin to make my pledge, my heart was as stout as the iroko tree. Right up till the last moment of my departure, when I held my son Oluorogbo to my breast and bade him farewell. (31-32)

In a further juxtaposition of reality vis-à-vis a representation of reality, Moremi recounts:

The priests led me darkly, into the grove for the appropriate ceremonies and then slowly, we danced past the shrine of my husband’s grandfather Oduduo. You know going from god to god, looking into their impressive eyes, then walking the streets...through the throngs of silent form, the people watching, immobile... (32)
ILLUSION

Illusionistically, such externalization of the psychic world or worldview of the Yoruba pantheons concretely-represented finely-carved statues could exude shivering religious experience, inculcating a kind of religious control. Surviving human fear and natural trembling, Moremi seemed to have been transfigured by the pantheon world in the shrine, leading to her perceived physical and spiritual transformation. But like many religious experiences, Moremi soon discovered that her experience was trompe-l’oeil, deceptive, and unreliable. Consequently, she soon casts off her ephemeral religious experience, donning in its place “irreligiosity” and copious “blasphemy,” asserting that the gods, are ineffective and neglectful of human needs. Repudiating the gods, she asserts, still, that she must be the clay needed by the race to rebuild itself, adding that only those who dare to risk their lives come to value it later. Moremi’s heroic attributes are carefully enumerated.

The lure of death seems to have fastened to you unrelentingly like a leach.
Your hunger for fame is limitless...You must step in even where the gods have failed. You must be god-head itself. (33)

Asserting that she is jealous of the gods, Moremi confesses that when she sees the stars, she longs to touch them. Osofisan’s blasphemous or apostate Moremi further asserts, like Nietzsche, that the gods are indifferent to man, with their backs turned away. In that regard, all prayers are futile, all festivals and sacrifices to the gods only wasted efforts. It is then left for the land to be reborn by the daring act of a woman (33-34). Osofisan’s use of blasphemous Moremi is clear enough. It is aimed at demythologizing man’s excess reliance on the divinity for the solutions to worldly problems. Man’s solution to his problems should be man himself, who is the main cause of his own problems.

MAN-CENTERED SOLUTION

Defying all oppositions like Titubi, Moremi restates her resolve and self-confidence: only “Moremi is prepared to stake her life, to take the risk of captivity in order to be able to, at last penetrate into the enemy camp and learn their magic” (37). To further hearten Titubi, Osofisan portrays the legendary Moremi as no less sensuous than she; she was human. She was susceptible to the crime of adultery, very much like the promiscuous Titubi.
Translating, Cultural Retrieval, and Mobility of Oral Tradition

**MOREMI’S HEROISM**

However, in a celebrative mood, a musical scene within the play, Moremi is serenaded, highlighting her heroism and the subsequent rewards: it is a salute to the courage of women, who also exude great capacity for love. She is also serenaded as a great sacrifice that wards off death. Compared to Ikoyi, another historical figure who fearlessly faced the invading British in the battle for the capture of Lagos (Nigeria), Moremi is prefigured as the big offering that prevents disease. She dared death, to bring peace to the world. She braved war, to bring mytho-historical peace, and therefore psychic and spiritual peace to Ile-Ife, as recurrent in other races or communities of people. We learn with Titubi that Moremi was richly rewarded for her act of heroism. She has been deified and is worshipped yearly. She has also been mythicized as a sun that shines to brighten a people’s passionate attachment to the ritual of sacrifice and psychic obsessions. That, in all its forms, is Osofisan’s dramatization of the mytho-historical, mytho-ritual, and mytho-religious synthesis of the Moremi story.

**RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM**

Although Osofisan, unlike Ladipo, appears to have downplayed the core of the religious symbolism in Moremi myth by not emphasizing the mytho-religious covenant between Moremi and the river goddess, the religious elements are adequately implied. Ulli Beier stressed the religious factor of the story:

> Oluorogbo, the sacrificed child, becomes the symbol of peace. Not of the peace concluded between the Ifes and the Igbos, but above all, of the peace that has been established between the Ifes and the gods of the land. Oluorogbo has become the messenger between heaven and earth. (xi)

Beier concludes that “Moremi shows a fine insight into the workings of the Yoruba religion.”

Beside the historico-political functions served, therefore, by the mythic synthesis of Moremi heroism, it also provides a definite pattern of redemptive functions in Yoruba cosmology and syncretism. Unquestionably, other tribal groups in Africa have equivalent mythologies providing such multi-values such as hope, and soothing man’s anguish and anxieties. For some men, history is religion, for others, politics. These assertions seem to tally with Feuerbach’s conception of religion as “a gigantic projection of human concerns onto the cosmos: What religion is ‘Really about’ is about life, human reality, human fears, and hopes.”

Bolaji Idowu states the same concept differently in reference to African myths:
From the characters of our myths, they appear to be, in the main, explanatory answers to questions posed by man by the very facts of his confrontation with the physical universe and his awareness of the world...though unseen, is yet sufficiently palpable to be real to him.\textsuperscript{17}

These assertions seem, in their turns, to reaffirm the belief among many that religion itself, in all its manifestations, is the myth among myths—the super-myth propping up man’s psychological walls behind the forces of unknown cosmos and cosmic imbalance.

**MASSES’ REVOLUTION**

However, the Moremi myth only serves Osofisan as a solid cyclorama or backdrop to fashion his belief in the potentialities of revolution by the masses. Such revolution dynamically crafted in theatrical medium can motivate the down-trodden workers to rise en-masse, challenging and weakening the oppressive and suppressive forces of the bourgeois and official injustices. Meanwhile, Titubi, as Moremi reincarnated, is now among the peasants who have captured her as prearranged. The peasant revolt is currently at its lowest ebb, a likely point of surrender to the establishment. But only Marshal, who would rather fight till death than negotiate, has prevented his forces from surrendering. To him, “the war will never end.”

**HEROIC RETURN**

The immediate cause of the revolt is succinctly stated: “We said we couldn’t pay the tax, that harvests were poor, that we could hardly feed our children. And what happened? The government said, all right we’ll change the tax collectors” (51-52). Momentarily, another play within the play, reminiscent of the Brechtian montage or Elizabethan clown show is staged, in which salami and Corporal clown as Alhaja expressed her anxiety for Titubi’s safety. The tide of war has turned again:

> You lament you daughter. We lament the land. We weep for the lack of peace, for the violence in the air. We weep that rebels beyond our power fall upon us at will and make mockery of our manhood. Our towns are unsafe. Food no longer reaches the markets, taxes are unpaid. (58)

In a master stroke of a well-made play, just to resolve the long tension, the play suddenly climaxes. It is the almost magical return of our heroine, Titubi. As
if dropped from the sky, she reappears and announces her successful return, with Marshal as booty for the state. She asserts: “I went, and I returned, triumphant. Like legend” (60).

HEROIC TRANSFORMATION

Though Titubi has earned the legendary feat of Moremi as promised, she has undergone a paradoxically secular-cum-spiritual metamorphosis. In a series of plays-within-the-play and flashbacks, Osofisan, in dramatic narrative, portrays the nature of such class and personality transformation of Titubi. We see her actively in the peasants’ life struggles, vicariously sharing their drudgery, their sweat, risking her health in the process. She has been adequately exposed now to the peasants and the stories of their exploitation by the robbers and looters in government. The government officials extort bribes from them. They seize the farmers’ produce from them at ridiculous prices. The peasants have neither good water to drink nor electricity. Their protests are rewarded with further physical tortures.

APPEAL TO CONSCIENCE

With well-crafted juxtaposition of class-conscious living standards, Osofisan compares and contrasts the typical bourgeois lifestyle with that of the proletariat:

I saw myself growing up, knowing no such suffering as these. With always so much to eat, even servants feed their dogs…yet here, farmers cannot eat their own products, for they need the money from the market. They tend the yam but dare not taste. They raise chickens, but must be content with winds in their stomachs. And then, when they return, weary from the market, the tax man is waiting with his bills… (65)

Titubi then addresses her mother thought-provokingly:

In our house, Mama, we wake to the chorus of jingling coins. And when we sleep, coiled, springs, soft foams and felt receive our bodies gently. But I have lived in the forest among simple folk, sharing their pain and anguish…and I chose… (66)

In conclusion, Titubi deeply regrets her past life and feels very ashamed that she was part of such a life. The target of propagating such multi-leveled dramatic pedagogy of the oppressed can be easily identified. On one level is its agitation—propaganda orientated to incite and excite the peasants toward self-improvement protests and revolution; on the second level is also its persuasion—studied and
conscience-pricking ingredients to provoke the conscience-stricken middle class to sympathize with the poor and help to ameliorate man’s beastliness to man. This second level of appeal makes it possible for Titubi to be converted to the side of the oppressed, whom she first undertook to fight against. Her example here is meant to set such revolution raging in the hearts of those who can be easily provoked to positively change. On the third level is its ability to inculcate modesty toward placing premium more on humanity than on materialism. It is partly to reinforce all these elements more convincingly that Titubi attempts to demythologize her role as “Moremi reincarnated.” She also debunks the “infal-
libility of the state:

I knew at last that I had won. I knew I had to kill the ghost of Moremi in my belly. I am not Moremi. Moremi served the State, was the State, was the spirit of the ruling class. But it is not true that the State is always right (70).

Osofisan’s feat in Morountodun has been to establish a convincing class-conscious base for indigenous mass revolution against our multifaceted socio-political injustices. It is, no doubt, a truth-conscious quest. Among the forceful truths that have emerged is the fact that Moremi’s mytho-heroism was far from people-oriented. Her success was really to perpetuate the injustices of the powerful against the weak and the exploited.

GODDESS OF BEAUTY

Similarly, his attempt to debunk materialism while also articulating the ephemeral nature of life seem quite convincing. Titubi addresses her mother religiously: “Mama, our life itself is not important. Nor these glittering tinsels we decorate…” Equally convincing is the pith of Osofisan’s socialistic gospel, namely the eventual triumph of the proletariat: “There is no way you can win a war against a people whose cause is just…” (73). However, the naivety and the impracticability of such seeming truths are also quite glaring. The prevailing atmosphere of unease following the peasants’ success signals the ominous temporality of the truth and the revolution itself. However, the truce following the temporary success of the peasant is long and convincing enough to call for a celebration and a fleeting, flirting romance between Titubi and Marshal, signifying a salute to Titubi’s transformation among the peasants. “For her, war is not to kill, but to heal” the wounded and the stricken. Her baptism is, therefore, that of love, beauty, and tenderness as symbolized in her new name: “MOROUNTODUN,” which in turn, signifies the goddess of beauty (75)—“I have found a sweet thing,” a term interpreted by feminists as degrading to womanhood and feminism.
But for Marshal, the armistice is meaningless because it seems to compromise the all-important future. So, for him, the struggle must continue, because the enemy camp is seemingly insincere, perhaps only buying time to rebuild their spent force toward a more deadly blow on the masses. Marshal’s strategy is summarily articulated:

tomorrow, when they think we are idling here, washing our wounds and hanging our shredded hopes to dry, we are going to appear there…and hit them. Now that we have ammunition, Bang! Right where their heart is. The very building which houses their commander and his odious officer. (77)

Marshal’s plan is to completely annihilate the central police station forever, including all prisons wherein the establishments castrate the poor. Only then can true, enduring freedom arrive, he concludes. Only after then, he assures, will the children of the poor “have a decent chance to grow up like human beings” rather than scrounging for leftovers in the sewers of history,” like animals. But this is all day-dreaming and wishful thinking. He has to be prodded into the actual human world of reality rather than of myth, wherein activity is befuddled.

DISILLUSIONISM

However, between dream and its realization fall the shadows. In an attempt to articulate this phenomenon, Osofisan’s art of theatricalization through disillusionism appears unique. To conclude the story of the masses’ revolt, Marshal’s bravado and plan fail suicidally as foretold. Nonetheless, peace finally comes, not through violence, but quiescently after each side has burnt itself out. Consequently, Osofisan’s dramatic technique of calling a theater through demythologization and disillusionism appears to very closely rival the Brechtian, and a Pirandellian juxtaposition of the mask and the face. Unquestionably, such a method of staging both alienates and dis-alienates uniquely. Such a juxtaposition tends to enliven imagination, perhaps more consciously than the Brechtian alienation dynamics. Such techniques can easily magnify the problems posed in the play, thus challenging the individual audience’s resourcefulness in devising its own means to a possible solution. This approach appears particularly suitable to the portrayals and criticisms of myths so revolutionized. The curtain-call speech at the end of Morountodun is a thought-provokingly typical example:
Yes, that’s History for you…But still, you must not imagine that what we presented here tonight was the truth. This is theatre, don’t forget, a house of dream and phantom struggles. (63)

All the elements of challenge implied in this scene is geared toward real agitation to meaningful actions on varied levels, “The real struggle, the real truth, is out there, among you, on the streets, in your homes; in your daily living and dying…” (65).

Osofisan also contrasts the illusion of theatrical make-believe or suspension of disbelief among the stage actors with the reality among the audience, “We are actors, and whatever we present here is mere artifice, assembled for your entertainment” (73). He emphasizes the malleability of the play, and in consequence of the myth, which provides the motifs, as exemplified by its malleability in the lands of various narrators or artists: “Tomorrow the play may even be different…,” he asserts (p. 79).

Performance-wise, Antonin Artaud also stressed the evanescence of theater and myth when he asserted:

The theatre will aim at being truly an act subject to every twist and every turn of circumstance, and chance will always have its say...a play will always be random and liable to revision, so that a spectator who goes back to see the play again a few nights later never sees the same performance.\(^{18}\)

It is like saying that one cannot step into the same river twice, for by the second jump, the earlier volume of water has flown far past. This phenomenon epitomizes the malleability of the mythic imagination and the heroic archetypes who act out these histrionic sensibilities. It also stresses the potentialities of transforming myths to realities, a reincarnation of mythology to materiality, Moremi to Titubi.

**CONCLUSION**

In some ways, myths are like truths. They can be designed and colored to appear in varying shapes and sizes; they can also be experienced differently by different peoples. Just as one philosopher’s truth may be another’s falsehood, so may one man’s myth be another’s materiality. This manifestation makes portrayals and criticisms of myths difficult to interpret precisely, particularly from the perspectives of dim history and religions.

Nonetheless, the values of myths vis-à-vis mytho-historic and mytho-religious synthesis like Moremi myth appear very glaring. Analogous to religions whose supernaturally-oriented human angles of Christ’s or Mohammed’s stories, for instance, have been fashioned or inspired to guide human morality for har-
monious co-existence, myths whether religiously-oriented or historically-oriented are of great benefit to humanity. Myths bolster man’s recurrent anxieties in the world of uncertainties, soothing him or challenging him, and enabling him to cope with his psychological buffets in the cosmic tussles.

Characteristically, Moremi of the ancient Yoruba myth, or Titubi as a reincarnation of Moremi, or as “Moremi depersonified,” is a great archetypical heroine. Her life is an example and model of self-sacrifice for a great cause, passionately internalized and externalized, sacrificing, or risking her own life so as to guarantee newer hopes of life for other humanity. It goes without further emphasis that myth and reality like abstract philosophy and religion start on the same premise of cosmic and psychic order and disorder, and support each other in soothing man’s angst.

All in all, perhaps like Brecht and Marx and Lenin, Osofisan sounds rather too simplistic and seemingly impracticable for real life situations and realization. But myths, the greatest single motifs for the historionics or the literary archetypes are rather simplistic and sensational, nonetheless targeted toward a greater purpose in life. Thus, like the mythic, Osofisan’s approach is not really to produce the transient effects of magic-wand realization, nonetheless prescriptive toward enduring amelioration of human conditions.

If this qualifies such approach to be classed as shamanistic, why not, if targeted toward a greater purpose? If one of the aims of literature is to “charm” the human mind toward a cultivation of a greater thirst for better life through appeals to individuals or a collective consciousness, or conscience, or humanity, so that man can be greater than he currently is, what does it matter, if his approach is meaningful, if it falls into “shamanism” or “Chinweiture”? Reiteratingly, literature, _inter alia_, aims at man’s greater realization of his utmost potentials. It attempts to do this through mythification, idealization or eventualization, using all the possible resources of education, entertainment, and appeals to materiality. Thus whether through the mythic or the archetypical multiculturalism, wherein appeal is made to man’s wildest imagination, latitude and longitude is the ideal. To descend to mere personality cynicisms and polemics as characterized by the Soyinka versus Chinweizu, or Chinweizu versus Osofisan, wars of words and character assassinations, as can be recalled, does not serve the need of literature, but only helps to confuse the budding critics and literati. Criticism should be made of much sterner stuff.

Our poets, playwrights, and novelists should feel free to mythicize histories or historicize myths, debunk religions or the nakedness of vicious politics as much as they see it, and can resourcefully handle them. Only they must do so meaningfully. The world shall, undoubtedly, be the richer for their total efforts. This is where Osofisan’s “twentieth-century classicism” has laid its firm foundation for the twenty-first century, as exemplified by his _Morountodun_. The same
can be roundly said of his *Restless Run of Locusts* (1975), *Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest* (1993) protesting the plague of sit-tightism vis-à-vis the transition quagmire in Africa’s milito-democratic governance, and all it portends; *The Chattering and the Song* (1976) encapsulating betrayal, including of friendship, within a tangled romance, etc. Osofisan’s ever-rising profile has, no doubt, now reached Nobel Laureate potential, casting him among the most creative and prolific playwright adaptors of modern classics. Such modern classic African plays reideologically adapted by Osofisan include *Another Raft* (1989), adapted from J. P. Clark-Bekederemo’s *The Raft* (1964); and Wole Soyinka’s *Strong Breed* (1963), rendered in Osofisan’s *No More the Wasted Breed* (1983). His iconoclastic adaptation of Nikolai Gogol’s *The General Inspector* (1947), sharing the same theme with Joseph Priestlay’s *The Inspector Calls* (1958?), is rendered in *Who’s Afraid of Solarin* (1978), the title of which is subtly derived from Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1968), an absurdist fantasia. Osofisan’s third millennium adaptation of Attic or Greek tragedies include his *Tegonni: An African Antigone* (2007) from Sophocles’ *Antigone* (422) wherein he subtly manipulates the theme of Morountodun’s Moremi-Titubi reincarnation synergy to accomplish his protest dramaturgy. Here, Artaudian dramatic sensibilities are successfully experimental, ala Peter Brook, cross-bred with the Brechtian-Pirandelloan formula which, as I always assert, is coincidental with African theater’s total performance motifs, including the use of theater as a tribunal (apology to Mordecai Gorelli). The hidden Euripidean craftmanship of Osofisan appears to have berthed, as quite graphically articulated in his the *Women of Owu* (2006), an unique original adaptation of Euripides’ *The Trojan Women* (416 BC). Here Osofisan’s demonstration of the theme of collective heroism has also come out quite successfully, setting a good model of African adaptation of classic dramas for the third millennium. This effort is uniquely different from Soyinka’s pace-setting adaptation of Euripides’s *The Bacchae* (420?) in his *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communal Rite* (1972), and recent outings seen in *King Baabu* (2001), an adaptation of Alfred Jarry’s *King Ubu* (*Ubu Roi*, 1896), itself a parody of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1605); modern Faustian or Mephistophelian forces made manifest in Sani Abacha, among other dictators in the African continent in particular. *King Baabu*, we must also observe, takes more satric or parodist jabs than can be gleaned from his *Opera Wonyosi* (1981, adapted from Soyinka), from a very biting cloning of Brecht’s *The Threepenny Opera* (1981), itself a Marxist rendering of John Gay’s *The Beggars Opera* (1928).

From the foregoing, it can be asserted that reincarnation of myths or their ritual coordinates is like the adaptation of texts in all its ramifications. They can serve the need of arts or literature, invaluably in terms of their regenerative potentialities, among other recreative endeavors. Thus Osofisan’s rising profile significantly derives its creative impetus from the regenerative dynamics of myths,
like that of Moremi and its relative ingredients that flavor it to an award-winning status, as a great work of a master craftsman.

**NOTES**

10. “Morountodun” is the major play of the collection of plays in *Morountodun and Other Plays* which won The First Prize of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Annual Conference, held at the University of Benin, 1983 (see *ANA Review*, Vol. 1, No.1, 1985).
14. Controversially, there seems to be really no specific date as to when the Yoruba Kingdom emerged. Various speculative dates do exist, however, ranging from between the end of eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century A.D.

20. See *The Sunday Guardian*, particularly articles on the 1986 issues of 6 Feb., p.5; 23 Feb 23, p.6, March 2nd, p.5, March 9, p.9, March 16, p.6 and *The Sunday Guardian*, April 13 and April 27, respectively.

REFERENCES


TRANSLATION, CULTURAL RETRIEVAL, AND MOBILITY OF ORAL TRADITION

Femi Oṣọfisan’s *Who Is Afraid of Solarin?*, an adaptation of Gogol’s *The Inspectors General* is a celebration, on the one hand, of the patriotic commitment and zeal represented in Tai Solarin, an educationist and former Public Complaints Commissioner for Òyó, Ògùn, and Òndó State of Nigeria in the Second Republic. On the other hand, it is a biting satire on the moral atrophy of public office holders in postcolonial Nigeria in particular, and Africa in general. It was first performed in 1977 at the Art’s Theatre of the University of Ibadan. Though the plot in both Gogol’s *The Inspectors General* and Femi Oṣọfisan’s *Who Is Afraid of Solarin?* remains largely the same, the detail, because of the peculiar cultural and linguistic settings among other things, are quite different. What Oṣọfisan does in his adaptation of Gogol’s play is strikingly similar to what Ola Rotimi does to Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* in *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. In the case of Ola Rotimi, it is an adaptation informed by the Yorùbá traditional hermeneutics and the philosophical concept of the tragic in *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, while Nigeria remains the larger cultural context. However, while Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* and Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not to Blame* belong to what could be termed as high (serious) tragedy, with each having a sustained grave action that runs through the plot, *The Inspector General* and *Who Is Afraid of Solarin?* are both comedies. They are cast in satirical mode with heavy reliance on the burlesque for deliberate dramatic effect. Predictably, the content and subject matter of Gogol’s and Oṣọfisan’s plays, nevertheless, are topically severe and relevant to their respective societies.
In this chapter I intend to share what I consider worthwhile experiences in the course of translating Oṣọfisan’s *Who is Afraid of Ṣolarin?* to Yorùbá as *Yéèpà Šólàárin ń Bọ*. In addition, I intend to show how other peculiarities of the primary text (English), such as its elements and unusual socio-linguistic setting, have largely conditioned our deliberate choice of, and approach to, our interpretation and subsequent translation of Oṣọfisan’s *Who Is Afraid of Ṣolarin?* Finally, the background history which informed our embarking on the translation exercise, its social significance, and the politics of popular acceptability, are among other pedagogic considerations, we hope to give attention to in the essay.

Though written in the English language, the immediate cultural setting of *Who Is Afraid of Ṣolarin?* is Yorùbá. It is therefore expected that this cultural setting will inform the linguistic structures of the play, especially since culture and language are quintessentially interwoven. Oṣọfisan, a Yorùbá, even though he could write differently in standard English, has deliberately chosen to write the play using the characters’ varying degrees of the English language competence and performance to differentiate between one character and another. Similarly, Oṣọfisan’s choice of language is largely informed, and deliberately too, by his Yorùbá mother tongue. Our translation into Yorùbá attempts locating the work in its original and most appropriate socio-linguistic context. *Yéèpà Šólàárin ń Bọ* is indeed an interpretation which reverts to the original Yorùbá socio-linguistic milieu to guarantee intelligibility. The histrionics of *Who Is Afraid of Ṣolarin?* and *Yéèpà Šólàárin ń Bọ* is the unfortunate tragic reality of our existence conditioned by our colonial history and our lack of patriotic zeal to liberate ourselves.

Ordinarily the procedure of translating the text or any literary text for that matter ought to emanate from the indigenous experience to a foreign language where the original language of that work has its normal socio-cultural background. The reversion in our translation of *Who Is Afraid of Ṣolarin?* into Yorùbá is therefore informed by sociological considerations to make the text accessible to its immediate or primary audience who are largely non-literate or only partially literate in the English language. The original text which is in English is, no doubt, inaccessible to this indigenous population which constitutes the mass of the people for which the message in intended.

The sociological consideration is itself impassioned by the playwright’s ideological inclination. This has wielded much influence in the play’s topicality as a materialist text. We consider the time chosen for embarking on the translation very appropriate in Nigeria’s political history. It coincided with the politicians’ preparation for the 1987 gubernatorial election during the infamous Babangida’s aborted transitional program to democratic rule. The play is a satire on the dislocated values and blurred social vision of the government officials, at the local government level, graphically represented in the malapropitic use of the English language. Regardless of its hilarity, the comedic elements are meant to consci-
entize the masses of the people so that they would not be taken for a ride by politicians who usually promise good things for the people in their manifestoes but do things grossly against the interest of the masses after getting elected. The play in Yorùbá has the potential of achieving this ideological goal more than its English version because of its apparent closeness and accessibility to the popular audience.

The translation was done jointly by the playwright Femi Ọṣọfisan and this writer between December, 1987 and February, 1988. Despite the rigors of the project, the playwright and I had to cope with our normal schedules as teachers and researchers. In addition, I was finishing my doctoral research then. These factors were responsible for our inability to meet at regular intervals. We, however, intensified our efforts during the Christmas and New Year holidays (1987/88). Part of our efforts included the production of both the primary (English) as well as the secondary (Yorùbá) texts for proper assessment of their success on stage and their impact on the audience. The productions were between July 5 and 10, 1988. The English version was made to alternate with the Yorùbá edition throughout the six nights. Femi Ọṣọfisan, assisted by two others, including myself, directed and produced the plays.

As expected, the dramatis personae are made up of people who are semiliterate in English. This is why the socio-linguistic background of the play remains essentially bilingual. Even characters that appear literate in English in the play mix both English and Yorùbá together in their non-formal speeches. Code-mixing and code-switching are features of language contact such as we have in the Nigeria. But the English version of this play, because of its chosen linguistic medium, is grossly limited and handicapped in the portrayal of the natural linguistic context. The semi-literate characters in the primary text (English) have their malapropitic expressions mainly revealed in their malformed linguistic constructions and wrong applications of diction. For example, on learning that the Public Complaints Commissioner has arrived, the Councilor for Education and the Councilor for Cooperative decide to proceed on leave purposely to escape being probed for obvious official misconduct.

The Chairman, Chief Gbọnmiayélòbíojò, in an attempt to stop them, “whips out a cutlass,” threatening them and insisting that none of them should go out of the room until they have all sworn an oath to keep all their secrets. He exclaims:

“Stop there, both of you! I forgot to mention it, but no one’s going to move one pinch from this place until Bàbá Fáwọmi comes”¹¹ (11)

The wrong usage lies in the application of pinch instead of inch. In another example, the chairman, while holding a cutlass and running after the fleeing councilors who do not want to accompany him to meet the Public Complaints Commissioner at Pastor Fágbèmi’s house, instructs Polycap:
Arrest them! **Manicure** one of them at least!
Polycap stop them! (32)

The intended verb is certainly not **manicure** in the context used. **Capture** seems to be a more appropriate word here. Even the Chief Magistrate who is expected to be “learned” also uses such wrongly-applied words at times. The use of **spy** instead of **suspect** in the following statement by him is a good example:

There must be a hidden motive in all this. I **spy** the hand of God. (12)

This is also in reference to the arrival of the Public Complaint’s Commissioner. In addition to the use of malapropisms Oṣọfisan also uses Pidgin English to further distinguish the completely non-literate characters such as Polycap and Tolú from others. Hence Polycap, when partially woken up from a deep sleep, says:

I sorry too much sah. I go put am for number two gear. (8)

The pidgin form used by Tolu, the chairman’s wife, is marked by heavy syllabization, a feature of the Yorùbá language. This tends to show the extent of her non-literacy in English. For example, when Iṣọla Oriẹbọra, the impersonator of the Public Complaint’s Commissioner, kneels down before Tolú, apparently to win her love, the latter reacts:

“**Esikissi** sah! **Esi-kissi** sah, you **willi**; dirty your **turouser**…!” (61)

The insertion of the vowel /i/ and /u/ between consonant clusters and after final consonants in “**Essikisi**,” “**willi**,” and “**turouser**” respectively are the graphic indicators of the syllabizations.

There is no doubt that Oṣọfisan has succeeded in the dramatic use of language for character delineation and comic effect through humor. He is, however, not as consistent as one would probably have expected him to be. The problem we suspect is accentuated if not created by the fact that the play which depicts an indigenous Yorùbá setting is written in English. While Polycap and Tolú are minor characters with very few lines, a major character, Bábá Fáwọmí the Ifá priest and a major character with many lines, who is expected to be non-literate like them according to his social status, is not so depicted through his use of language. Lèmọmù and Lámídù, the professional beggars in the play, may also be seen as functionally belonging to the same class as Polycap, Tolú, and Bábá Fáwọmí. Linguistically, however, like Bábá Fáwọmí, the two beggars fit properly into the group of the chairman and his councilors in the primary text. These incongruities are drastically minimized in our translation of the play into Yorùbá.
This is facilitated, as already indicated, by the Yorùbá/English bilingual situation which constitutes the natural linguistic background of the play.

Though Yorùbá remains the predominant language in our translation, we made provisions for English code-mixing and code-switching at both the syntactic and lexical levels where we consider such structures expedient. Such a linguistic situation is acute in the speeches of the chairman, his councilors, Ìṣọlá Oríèbòra, Pastor Ifágbèmí, and his daughter Cecilia. It is however sparsely used in the lines of Bábá Fáwọmi, Tolú, and the two beggars. The only line Tolú has to render in her brand of English language is:

I yam Tolú a trial will convince you, (84)

which she memorizes and recites with a heavy Yorùbá accent when she is expected to seduce Ìṣọlá Oríèbòra. The case of Polycap is handled in the premier performance of the translated version by making him speak Yorùbá with a non-native tongue usually referred to as “Ìsòbò by the Yorùbá” (i.e., Urhobo of the Delta State of Nigeria and their South East neighbors). This tends to agree with his Roman Catholic Christian name, not common among the Yorùbá but believed to be common among the Urhobo and their neighbors who are mainly Roman Catholics.

The bilingual situation, apart from contributing to the character peculiarities and delineation in the play also enhances the hyper-exaggerative mode appropriate for its farcical form. The comic effect of the use of bilingualism in our Yorùbá translation, no doubt, constitutes a fresh innovation in the play that further enhances its form and topicality.

Adeniran has implicitly shown in his examination of the motivations for the code mixing and code switching in the translated or secondary text of the play that the bilingual situations in the play are handled properly. He clearly shows that the code-switching and code-mixing are employed in serving referential, meta-linguistic, expressive, imperative, and phatic communicative purposes. His view on the referential code-mixing/code-switching will suffice here in illustrating the appropriateness of the use of the bilingual parts of the play to enhance the understanding of its message. Here is one of his three examples:

Aláfōwọsowọpọ: Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni, mo ti gbọ. Wọ́n ni ìjọba fẹ́ gẹ̀ aláwáhí móò wá. Ó buryá jáyi. Òrí rédīò ní wọ́n ní fón rere rẹ̀ láárà̀ yìí.

Edukě̀sọ̀n: ...Ṣe wọ́n ọ́ wá lè fí tó wá lètì kí wọ́n tó lọ̀ máá kígbé lóójí rédīò ní?

Aláfōwọsowọpọ: ...Ṣe bí òrí rédīò nàà lo ti gbọ pé wọ́n fí ē jẹ̀ dàírèkítò bùùrì. O ọ̀ mà bínú kò ọ́ nígbà yèn o. (2)
Councilor for Cooperative: Yes, they say they’re taking away our car allowance. It’s a disgrace. It was all in the news this morning.

Councilor of Education: ...they didn’t even have the manners to inform us first before blaring it on the radio.

Councilor for Cooperative: ...after all your appointment as a Director of the Breweries came to you first on the radio (6)

Adeniran shows that the use of the (highlighted) code-mixed items which are loaned into the Yorùbá language are most appropriate for conveying the message being rendered by

trying to substitute other Yorùbá alternatives for them. For aláwánsì mòtò (“car allowance”), he tried to substitute owó tí ijoba fún òṣisẹ tí ó ní ọkò, tí ó sì fì ní ìṣẹ ijoba (“money that government gives a car owner who regularly uses his car in government service”). This alternative, according to Adeniran, is inaccurate, misleading, uneconomical, and never used. The use of èrò asòròmágbebí instead of rédò, though accurate, to him will be circuitous and farfetched, and moreover he says it is hardly used. Let us quickly note here that èrò asòròmágbebí, which roughly transliterates as the “machine that speaks without receiving a reply” used to be an acceptable descriptive name for radio. In the light of improved technology that makes phoning in during radio programs a possible type of immediate feed-back, the descriptive term becomes even more inaccurate and therefore more unsuitable than before. Lastly, the use of olùdarí ilé iṣẹ tí ní pọn ọtì (“director of the factory where liquor is brewed”) instead of dàìrèkítò bíùrí is seen as only nearly accurate, farfetched, and hardly ever used.

From Adeniran’s analysis we are left in no doubt that the retention of the bilingual usages in our translation is effective on the communicative level. Let us now turn to the dramatic function of the usage in enhancing the farcical mode of the play. We have pointed out the examples of the comedic use of inappropriate words early in this paper and we mentioned that they are employed to amplify the farcical aspects of the play.

Some of the English lexical items and phrases attached to certain characters for the purpose of making them look ridiculous are, for example, not translated. They are left in the dialogues as part of the code-mixing and code-switching characteristic of the different dramatis personae. In the Chief Judge’s speech there is a frequent occurrence of “In my court…”; in the chairman’s it is “uneasy lies the head…”; in the Chief Medical Officer’s it is “excuse me…”; and in Cecilia’s it is always “sorry…” with the accompanying action of dusting of a speck from either a piece of furniture or the dress of another person. These peculiarities in the
characters’ speeches are deliberately left untranslated to retain the playwright’s original intention for dramatic effect through code mixing and code switching.

Such a bilingual feature is also made to bear upon situations where a character piles up series of bombastic words as in the speech of Mrs. Àbènì Málọ, the Price Control Officer, while fictionalizing the rivalry between the two major political figures of the First Republic, Awolọwọ and Azikiwe, in an attempt to impress her colleagues. Being carried away she jumps on a chair while she continues to explain.

Bẹ̀ẹ̀ ni Zik ọ dèwọ rárá, tó ṣàá n kígbé: “Serendipism...! Democraticism...! Scholasticism...! ...Absolutism ...! Transitionalism...! For Ziksm is no Jingoism...!

And Zik is unrelenting. “Serendipism...! Democraticism...! Scholasticism...! ...Absolutism...! Transitionalism...! For Ziksm is no Jingoism...! (14)

Though the fact that in her narration she is supposed to be quoting Zik directly allows for living the high-sounding words untranslated, it is preferred in the present form, interlarding it with Yorùbá because of the comic effect which is revealed properly in the full context of the actions. The ridiculous extent of the situation lies in the irrelevance of the whole speech in the general context of the prevailing discourse. It is based on a misunderstanding of the situation on the part of Madam Àbènì Málọ, the speaker, to further heighten the comic effect and sustain the suspense. Another good example of such piling up of high sounding words left untranslated as an instance of mixing codes is found in the speech of Ìṣọlá Oríẹbọra while verbalizing, in a soliloquy, the recording in his diary of his experience about Cecilia who wants to marry him. It should be noted that the device of talking directly to his diary is a dramatic means of revealing the true character of Ìṣọlá Oríẹbọra who is impersonating the complaint commissioner.

Ṣùgbọn ọmọgé tí ó fò mi yìí - àà òyìnbó ni máa fi júwe è fún è. Ó beautiful, ô gracious, ô pretty, ô comely, ô wà stunning, ô wà devastating, splendid, harmonious. Àà ọ sè kí n máa sọ lo? Gorgeous, amorous, radiant, captivating, ornamental, magnificent, àà, ô delicious! Delicious, Cecilimisa-Missaaah ... (82)

But I am being courted by no less a person than the beautiful, gracious, attractive, comely, stunning, devastating, splendid, harmonious. Ah, shall I go on? Gorgeous, amorous, radiant, captivating, ornamental, magnificent and delicious! Delicious, Cecilimisa-Missaaah... (59)
Two devices are employed here because of the length of the English items in order to make the speech flow naturally. The introduction of the sentence, Ọyínbọ ni màá fì jùwé è fún è (“I will describe her to you in English”) is the first of the devices. The statement as shown in the English gloss above is absent in the primary text. The second is the special effort made to superimpose a Yorùbá syntactic frame upon the first few English adjectives used in describing Cecilia, thus making the code-switching flow smoothly. If retranslated, “Ọ beautiful, ó gracious, ó pretty…” will read “she is beautiful, she is gracious, she is pretty…” which is structurally not exactly the same as the original. The purpose of this is also to encourage Hillary. The author subtly encourages direct audience participation. For example, during performance, the Nigerian audience is most likely to respond to the question “shall I go on…?” with a shout of “more! More! More!” or “Go on! Go on! Go on!” to show that they are enjoying the scene. Such a response is certain among the Nigerian University student audience.

In order not to lose completely the English sense of some dramatic contexts and, to further make the characters look ludicrous, some of them are also made, in the translated version, to interpret or translate what they say. When such a character says something in English, s/he translates it to Yorùbá by her/himself, and when s/he first says it in Yorùbá s/he also gives the English version. It is the bilingual context of the secondary text that allows for this dramatic manipulation.

At the opening part of the play for example, when Chairman tries to inform the Councilors about the emergency situation at hand, because of the reported arrival of the Public Complaints Commissioners in the territory and because they do not seem to have taken him serious, he bursts out in fury on the Price Control Officer, Madam Àbèní Máiłọ in particular, and all of them in general:

\[ \text{Ṣé ẹ ti se tān Madam? Jɛsù gbà mí, mò ń gbìyànjú láti sọ fún yín pé a ti wọ ìjàŋbọ́n. terrible mess, ẹ ẹ kò bi ara si mi… (7)} \]

Have you finished, Madam? For Christ’s sake, I’m trying to tell you that we’re in a terrible mess but you won’t listen… (7)

In the above speech by Chairman “terrible mess” is a direct translation of “ìjàŋbọ́n”.

Madam Máiłọ, in her lengthy speech in which she fictionalizes, the rivalry between the two political giants of the first republic, is also twice made to translate into English what she says in Yorùbá:

\[ \text{Ọrò îṣèlú niyí, Chief Gbọ̀nmínayélòbíójó! Ìṣèlú Àgbáyé, International Politics!} \[\text{[...]} \] \text{Èhèn, kí lèyí o, àà ẹ wọ wọ́n ɛyin ọ̀rẹ mí bí Àwò ń sè tú wọ́n ká sójú ọ̀run, àwọn ọkò olóró abé ọmí, tí wọ́n ní pè ní nuclear submarines (14)} \]
Politics, Chief Gbonmiayelobiojo! International politics!...Ah, look at them my friends, how they dominate the air, Awo’s stock of nuclear submarines. (14)

In the above “International Politics” is the direct translation of Ḩṣèlú Àgbáyé, while nuclear submarines is the translation of “àwọn ọkọ olóró abé omi”. It should be noted that “tí wọn ní pè ní” (“which is called”) is used in introducing the translation of the second item to allow for free flow of speech and avoid monotony while at the same time enhancing the comic effect. Similarly the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Bọdunrin Alade Martins, is made to translate “Beaded crowns” into Yorùbá while responding sarcastically to the request by the chairman that the patients in the local hospital should have their bath and “put on some decent night gowns…” Dr. Martins exclaims:

Night gowns nikan ni! beaded crowns, adé ilékè loò bá ní ká máá dé fún wọn (ó ń wúkọ) (13)

Night gowns! Why don’t you recommended a beaded crown for each of them (coughs) (17)

The semantic repetition in the translation or interpretation of oneself is apparent from the above examples. Though it allows for emphasis, it, at the same time, gives room for the ludicrous look painted of the characters within the contexts of their relevant, specific, and overall actions. The internal frustration experienced by the Chairman is underlined through the repetition while the special efforts to impress his listeners as a learned fellow who had been to the university is emphasized in Madam Málọ́’s (Price Control Officer’s) own repetitions. It is the sarcasm in Dr. Martin’s speech that gets reinforced by the repetitious translation of himself. The repetitious translations of oneself, as the original English excerpts reveal, are newly introduced into the secondary text. The bilingual approach adopted in the secondary text has no doubt added to the literary depth and freshness of the play in this respect.

In spite of all the additional devices built into the play to sustain its artistic quality, the translated edition had a poor reception during its premier performance. According to Adeleke’s survey, the highest attendance attained at the performance of the Yorùbá version was seventy-four, while that of the English one was one hundred forty-five (46-47). Though other reasons such as poor timing and inadequate publicity are given for the generally poor turnout, the university audience for which the Yorùbá version of the play was first performed, because of its general orientation towards, and primary preference for, literary works in
English, may not be the best to depend upon for a final assessment of the secondary-text play production.

A more likely realistic audience for this Yorùbá secondary version lies outside the university: among the various government and factory workers, traders, market women, and artisans that are minimally bilingual in English and Yorùbá. The primary and secondary school pupils are also included in this group. This type of audience would no doubt easily identify with the characters in the play. This, however, should not necessarily be seen as excluding the Yorùbá monolinguals totally from the membership of its audience, particularly as Yorùbá is the predominant medium of the secondary text, and it would be possible for such an audience to follow the trend of the plot without much difficulty.

Another aspect of the translation’s reception that needs be mentioned is that of getting it accepted for publication. The manuscript of the secondary text was sent to one of the well-established publishers that has a good reputation for publishing Yorùbá literature soon after its premier performance. It was, however, rejected and sent back eighteen months later with a letter stating that it could not be published because a reviewer’s comments were not favorable about it. There are two possible reasons for this rejection. The first, which the publisher tactfully did not want to disclose but which we suspect was primary, was economic. Most of the publishing companies have virtually stopped publishing new titles in Yorùbá except for the primary and secondary school levels of our educational system. The school audience yielded more profits for the publishers than the tertiary ones, hence the preference for the former. The profits can be very high for texts selected for public examinations. Textbooks in the English language have a greater advantage than those in indigenous languages because of their wider national coverage.

The immediate reaction of many to the bilingual situation adopted in Yéèpà Sólàárín ì Bọ is likely to be prejudiced by nationalistic zeal. Such code-mixing and code-switching as are employed in the secondary text are usually condemned by some from such perspectives as a bad habit tantamount to outrageous indulgence and sheer laziness on the part of the bilingual speakers and which should not be encouraged for any reason whatsoever. What is normally recommended in this case is coordinate bilingualism, which is, however, uncommon and difficult if not impossible to attain by semi-literates who constitute the dramatis personae of the play as well as a large proportion of the mass audience. The translation of the play is particularly informed by the desire to be nearer the people through the choice of an appropriate socio-lingual milieu that fits into the farcical dramatic mode of the play. It is therefore an irony that the same factors which are meant to enhance popular acceptability of the play also constitute factors that disqualify it from getting published.
To the best of our knowledge there is no dramatic text in Yorùbá that employs that literary form of farce at such a magnitude as is found in Yéèpà Ōṣòláárín í Bò. No doubt the unusually mixed linguistic style in the play is alien to the school curriculum. The rejection by the publishers to bring out the secondary text for the school audience might also have been influenced by this same prejudice. We, however, think such a dramatic form as is employed in the play can be easily accommodated at the tertiary level where exposure to a wide range of literary form is not only desirable but essentially integral. If this can be successfully done, the text may yet find its way to the other strata of our educational system. The introduction of this play to the school system in general through the tertiary level, if encouraged, will also initiate a healthy relationship between literary activities in both indigenous and English languages. This is because we foresee a time when the Yorùbá literary dramatists will also be adopting the farcical dramatic form at such degrees as obtains in Yéèpà Ōṣòláárín í Bò. Such already existed in the Yoruba popular theater of the Moses Ọláiyá Adéjùmò (Bàbá Sàlá) sub-tradition of the Ogunde dramatic tradition.

**Note**

1. What we present here, and throughout the chapter, are not direct translations but excerpts from appropriate portions of the original English text of the play.

**References**


Translation is the interpreting of the meaning of a text and the subsequent production of an equivalent text, communicating the same message in another language. The text to be translated is the source text (ST) and the translation, the target text (TT). According to Nida, “translation consists of providing, in the receptor language, the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style” (23). Translation therefore is not merely linguistics conversion or transformation between languages, but it involves accommodation in scope of culture, politics, aesthetics, and many other factors. Accommodation in this sense is taken as a synonym of adaptation, which means changes are made such that the target text produced is in line with the spirit of the original. A text that is not obviously a translation in the traditional sense because of the additions or loss of information, explanation, rewriting or recreation, is thus created.

There are three fundamental issues a translation must aim at. First, it should give a complete transcript of the ideas and sentiments in the original passage; second, it should maintain the character of the style; and third, it should have the ease and flow of the original text. In order to have a good translation, the translator, in addition to having an in-depth understanding of the source text, must decide whether to translate only “what is there” or whether to look deeper, into the external links of the text, the time and place it reflects, and whether or not, and how, to rewrite it when transplanting it into the target culture. He must often also decide how to handle quotes in the source text and the source of those
quotes. In this respect, the translator often functions as a critic, a philologist, and an editor of the translated work.

With the above explanations of what translation is, and what a translator does, in mind, this chapter attempts to investigate how far Adémólá Árémú has been faithful to Osòfisan in translating Red Is the Freedom Road into Ònà Òmíníra Ònà Èjè. But, we need to point out a fundamental issue concerning the source text. Red Is the Freedom Road, though written in English, is basically a text whose root, concept, storyline, and other materials are originally from the Yorùbá cultural set-up. It is a common practice for African writers to exploit their cultures to create literary works in English. Unfortunately, this practice has greatly impoverished the culture, robbing it of a necessary feedback. Therefore, if such culture is not to petrify and die, serious cultural conservation measures, including translations into African languages as attempted by Árémú in Ònà Òmíníra Ònà Èjè must be embarked upon. Ònà Òmíníra Ònà Èjè is therefore Árémú’s effort to retrieve the Yoruba original story back to the Yoruba audience “with all its vital organs still intact despite the suffocating influence of an unfriendly environment it has been made to inhabit” (Ìṣòlá, 4). This effort can be seen as another type of back translation. What Árémú has done is just to translate back into the language of the original concept.

DISCUSSIONS AND COMMENT

Árémú uses a combination of approaches in rendering the story in Red Is the Freedom Road into Yorùbá language. Nevertheless, all the various approaches are woven together in the translation efforts.

CASTS

The description of Àkànjí and Èbídùn, given in the source text are ignored in the translation and the slaves attending to Èbídùn are not identified. While the source text listed names of actors orderly showing the roles of each at a glance, the translation only listed the names without assigning roles to any of them. Moreover, some names such as Arigbidi, Ogunwolu, Asiwaju, Sogaolu, and Kikankoro are left out in the translation. These actors are taken together as “Àwọn Òmọ Ogun” (soldiers). Likewise, “Royal Attendants” and “Drummers” are left out of the list of cast, “Àwọn Ôsèrè” of the translated work.

SETTING
The ‘Ìfáàrà’ is introduced into the translation. Here Ìbídùn sings about Àkànjí, his love, the covenant between the two of them, and the suffering they are going through. She calls for his presence with the song. This is an addition into the story by the translator aiming at intimating the reader with what they should expect next, which is where the story starts in the source text. Apart from this, all other settings are the same for both the source text and the target text.

Retrieval/Accommodation Approach

As said in the introduction above, Ọ̀nlà Ọmìníra Ọ̀nlà Òjè could be viewed as a back translation work. For this reason, Àrèmú makes use of what I termed the retrieval or accommodation method in the work. According to Ìṣìlá, “retrieval is a struggle to recognize the original Yorùbá expression or experience that has been ‘mentally translated’ into English” (7). Where direct translation will not bring out the sense, Àrèmú makes use of a sense-transferring approach, whereby he goes far from the real meaning to interpret, and in many cases these bring about some changes in the original concepts. Not only this, as someone versed in Yorùbá language and culture, Àrèmú searches deep into the culture to bring out what would stand out acceptable to the audience in his effort to translate into Yorùbá, such that the target text wears totally different vocabularies in meaning. In the process of doing this, he makes use of appropriate idioms, proverbs, euphemisms, and so on to project the thoughts and meaning. Numerous embellishments come in while he also gives detailed explanations of issues instead of translating directly. At the same time, numerous omissions of lines are noticed from the source text into the target text. A few examples will suffice here out of the many we have in the target text.

1. When Àkànjí was confirming his recognition of Ìbídùn, we have this:

Akanji: (Wearily) You’re Ìbídùn, and I am your husband. Now stop crying and talk. How did you get here? (ST 97)

TT: Mọ-nà-nà-kàì! Èèyàn a wa máa fùjú débi kòwọ́ o má mọnà ènu bì?
Taa ni yóó sọ póún ò mọ ìwọ Ìbídùn àtèmi ọkọ rẹ? Àní kí o sinmì èkùn sísun, kí o sòhùn ó bá dé. (TT 2)

Ibidun: Day after day I look for you. Night after night. All along the usual places, both nighttime and daytime. And now I find you, you rebuff me. (ST: 98-99)

TT: Tòsán-tòrù ni mọ fi sàfèrí rẹ bèè, tí mọ fi wá ọ kíri, lókè, ní pépetè, nibi gegele. Ibo lèmì Ìbídùn ọ wá ọ dé? Gbogbo igbò ni mọ fòrì já kírì lòsàn-àn àtòrù, tèmì tòmì lójú bíi Egbére. Mọ tún jàjà rì ọ tún, káká kó o yò mó mì, kó o gbé mì móra, kó o sìké mì, òrò láábi lo tún só lènu. (TT: 3)
2. 

Ibidun: How I search for you! My heart swelled with the news till I nearly burst. (ST: 99)  
TT: Ò mà ọ. báwo ni ibá ọ. dùn tó, ká ní bó ọ. mí ló ń ọ. Tí mà ń tara pòró pé kí n rólóró mi bá jíròrò lóri iroyin gbogbo tó ń tawọ-tasẹ núnú mi. (TT: 3)

3. 

Ibidun: So you think now I’ve found you, I’ll let you go again?... (ST: 100)  
TT: Hâàà. O sì rò pé mà á lajú mi sílè kí tàlùbò kó wò ọ. Mà á tún fi ọ sílè kó o Ṽo… (TT: 5)

Also, when Àkànjí tries to persuade Ìbídùn to let him go, he says:

Akanji: Ibidun, it’s not possible. I can’t explain now, but trust me. I shall come back. (ST: 100)

To retrieve this, Àrèmú had to introduce numerous embellishments to capture Ìbídùn’s mind to let Àkànjí go peacefully:

TT: Ìbídùn, sùúrù ni kí o kó o. Enikan kí i kánjú lábè gbígboná. Ohun a bá fẹsọ mú ní i ńyọ sí rere. Ö ńọ látì šálàyé. Se ní kó o gbà mi gbọ, kó o šokàn giri aya akin. Láipẹ mà á padà wá, torí bẹwúrẹ bá jẹ lọ ńkùn tó jẹ lọ ńsà, ó di dandan kó padà wale. Bèè ayúnlo, ayúnbò lowo ńroko enu. (TT: 5)

4. The last example we wish to cite is:

Akanji: Listen, time is short. There’s a lot to tell, no time to say them. Only tell the men that I shall not desert them. Till the end. (ST: 100)  
TT: Gbọ mi Ìbídùn. Ò kuku wu ni ká jera pé lénu, àmò ọñfà ọñà ọfn ọ jẹ. Òpọ ọọ ló ní fi dúgbẹ-dúgbẹ nikùn, àmò ńyẹ ọ sí fùn lábàrè. Wò mí, Àkànjí ò kuku gò, ó lóhun tó sọmọ akín dòdè ń jú yín. Gbẹnu mi so fawọn ńkùn ńgùn gbogbo tó ń bẹ lọko èrú, pémi Àkànjí fí wón sòkàn. Odò mí ọ lè gbágbé oríṣun rè láèlàè. (TT: 5)

We also noticed areas of total retrieval such as:
5.  
1st Soldier: Especially not by a slave. (ST: 102)  
TT: Ègbin oniyòrò, ègbin gbùn-ún. (TT: 7)

6.  
Akanji: Go away now. You will ruin everything! (ST: 102)  
TT: Jé n gbóràn o jàre! Akóbáni obínrin. (TT: 7)

Another interesting recovery is content specific. When Ìbídùn was challenging the decision of Àkànjí to keep the vows with their masters, she reminded him of all the evils that the enemies have done:

7.  
Ìbídùn: …Who killed your father,… (ST: 102)  
TT: …Ení tó tábọn pa ó ní baba,… (TT: 8)

The instrument used for the killing was not mentioned in the ST, but since it was wartime it is right to think of the use of a gun, hence the TT points this out.

At times, appropriate idioms or proverbs are used to retrieve the saying:

8.  
Soldier: Of course, lead on, Bàṣọrun. Lead and we shall follow. (ST: 113)  
TT: Mọnà-ń-kàì! Kí legbò ń se tó lóun ò fàárò wa’mi? (TT: 24)

At the cultural element level, in the areas of greetings, a very important retrieval and correction is noticed in the TT. The ST made use of Kabiyesí (ST: 112) to greet people other than the king. Àrémú corrects this impression by using kára ó le (TT: 22), which is the appropriate greeting term for chiefs and elderly people in Yoruba society. Kábiyésí is reserved specifically for Yoruba paramount rulers.

Another commendable example is translating “greetings!” (ST: 101) exchanged by the two soldiers not to pèlé but gbérè (TT: 6), which is an appropriate term in the Yorùbá military setting. An interesting one occurs in Situation 2 of the play (ST: 106-107) when Ìbídùn was bidding farewell to Mother. No serious translation effort is made here (TT: 15-16); rather, the recovery of the saying is literary. The sequence is not followed. Also, the use of flowers on occasion like that is not symbolic in Yorùbá culture. Hence, Àrémú goes into the culture for symbolic materials like kola nuts to replace such use.
Ibidun: Mother, do not despise us. In this foreign land, far away from home and hope, this is all we can do. We shall trust your body to the river, praying the current shall take you home, where all your ancestors wait for you. Mother, do not despise us. Please let these flowers accompany you. They will act on the way as your maidens, and carry our songs on their back. Had we salt, we would have given you. But we have only our bitter tongues, and they are only good for cursing. Had we honey, we would have given you. But we have only our wounded selves, torn apart like plucked roots. Oh had we kola-nuts, mother, we would have fed you. But we have only our empty hands, hands all gaunt and hollow. Neither palm-oil nor sugar cane, and no neighbours to borrow from. But only this our love abides, this love and this affection. This loss that has written grief on our face all over, in letters which even a white man can read. Mother, do not despise us.

Mother, when you reach the city walls, at Mokorode where the reeds are as large as an open palm, and their roots are full of fishes, Mother, when you reach Mokorode, mention your last name at once, so that strong hands will carry you, and the water birds as you pass will be silent. Farewell, mother. (ST: 106-107)
It is noted from the TT that the retrieval approach runs through all its pages such that the production is longer than the original.

**DIRECT TRANSLATION**

Àrèmù translates directly on many occasions without omitting or embellishing anything in the translation. For example:

10.

Ibidun: Leave me alone. Don’t touch me. I can stand. (ST: 98)

TT: *Fi mi sîlè. Má fọwọ kàn mì, mo lè dá dúró.* (TT: 3)

Akanji: What do you want, Ibidun? (ST: 98)

TT: *Kín lò ṣè Ìbídùn?* (TT: 3)

Ibidun: So you still recognize me! (ST: 98)

TT: *Ìyẹn nipé o sì dá mì mò?* (TT: 3)

**USE OF IDIOMS AND PROVERBS**

Idioms and proverbs are very difficult to translate because of their unpredictable meanings. Àrèmù does two things to render such expressions in Yorùbá. First, he searches for equivalent idioms in Yorùbá as in the instances below. When Ìbídùn and her attendants are discussing about their present condition in the play:

11.

Doyin: The sweetness of honey is not determined by the pot which carries it. (ST: 107)

TT: *Aṣọ tílá kó lèèyàn tílá.* (TT: 16)

12.

A Soldier:…Our shame is on the tree top. (ST: 113)

TT: …*Abéré ti bó lówọ adéñè wa.* (TT: 24)

Second, where no equivalent idiom will suffice, Àrèmù gives explanations. For instance, when discussing the rigidity of soldiers in exhibiting their training, the following revelation comes out:
13.

1st Soldier: For history is a pathway of ants. (ST: 115)
TT:  Wò mí, kò sóhun tuntun kan lâbê òrùn mó. Ìtàn ìnì í fì igbà kan yàtò. Ohun tójù ti rí, lá máa rí tíí láé. (TT 14)

2nd Soldier: Leading to a meager anthill.
TT:  Ìtàn àná kò ní í fìgbà kan yàtò sí tòní, ọ̀nà tó máa gbà wàyé ló lè sèyàtò. (TT 16)

Another example occurs during the discussion between Ìbídùn and her attendants. One of them, Jumoke narrates a tale of the lion without its mane (ST: 108) to justify Àkànjí’s action to his mother; Àrèmú only explains the meaning of the riddle by giving an explanation of the implication of such an action; he makes no effort to translate:

14.

Jumoke: The same tale as before. One day the lion was found without his mane. All the animals asked: “But why? What for?” later they heard the rumour of incursion, and how the one with the mane was doomed, being king. It was easy to see why the lion cut his mane. (ST: 108)
TT:  Àjé ké lánàá, ọmọ kú lónìí, ta ni ò ṣàìmè pàjèè àná ló pòmò je? Ó lu ìyá rè pa láàárò, ó di Bàṣórùn lòsàn-án. (TT: 17)

EMBELLISHMENT

Àrèmú engages in a lot of embellishment of details in order to render a beautiful translation of what is in the source text. All these are done in an attempt to accommodate the sayings within the Yoruba cultural set-up. One way of doing this is the insertion of names in the discussion. Name-calling is essential for a perfect communication between people, in order to ensure that the hearer is following what one is saying, or to impress or emphasize the point to the hearer especially when such people exhibit surprising actions. Therefore, we find the characters calling each other names to express surprise at certain actions or behaviors. Ìbídùn usually calls “Àkànjí” while Àkànjí too calls “Ìbídùn,” even when they are together (See TT: 8, 9, 33, 34). Another form of embellishment introduced into the translation is to give more details than what the ST says. When Ìbídùn complained about the cruelty of the slave masters and the inability of their men, and most especially Àkànjí, to do anything, the TT went ahead to express this differently, making use of semantic repetition. To render the last
sentence of Ìbídùn’s speech, “You have done nothing for them” (ST: 100), we have the following semantic repletion embedded:

Àkànjí àbàtà rẹ ta kété bíi ènì tí ò bódò tan. Eye re kò sọ fun wa pókò ń bọ, odò re wá gbàgbé olúwẹrì. O fọwọ lèràn ò n wò wá níran, láláírí ohun kan gbé ń. O ọ bikítà látí gbà wá lówó iyà. (TT 23)

STYLE

Àrèmú tried as much as possible to maintain the style of the source text. This has therefore resulted in a fine translation. However, he introduced some modifications such as

- Rendering statements in the ST in question form in the TT.
  Akanji: I am not alone.
  TT: Sìgbón mo wa fìgbà kan dá wá bì?

Rearranging text: a good example of this is the mixed-up speeches noticed on page 30 of the translated work. A lot of omissions are noticed in the translation. “Total translations, Steiner declared, are impossible because each writing represents its own complex, historical, and collectively determined aggregate of values, proceedings of social conduct, and conjectures on life. So, translators have to decide what they are going to try to retain…and what they are going to be willing to lose” (Ìṣòlá, 6). Therefore all statements that are not important nor affect the meaning and flow of ongoing discussion in the play are usually omitted. For example, Jumoke talks about Ìbídùn losing “her first child” (ST: 109); this phrase is not important in the cultural context. A two-month pregnancy is not yet taken as one’s child; hence Àrèmú deliberately omitted the phrase in his translation (TT: 18)

- Speeches already taken care of by previous speakers are omitted in the translation. For example, the speech of the 2nd Soldier reiterating what he and the 1st Soldier had earlier said was completely omitted. This led to a new arrangement in the translation whereby the speech of the 1st Soldier is attached to the 2nd Soldier and vice versa in about five lines.

LAPSES

For a translated piece to be judged perfect, it has to satisfy the graphical representation of the target language. Àrèmú’s use of current Yoruba orthography
is highly commendable. The words are properly tone-marked too. However, some lapses are noticed with regards to:

- spelling of some words such as:
  Åbô (TT: 32) instead of Åábô
  Òlóórí (TT: 13) instead of olórí

- word division:
  Ènikankan (TT: 20) instead of Èni kankan
  Kẹ ẹ (TT: 22) instead of kẹẹ
  Ñkó / ń jẹ (TT 23) instead of ń kọ / ń jẹ

- unnecessary vowel lengthening:
  jọ̀kùn (TT: 16) instead of jòkùn
  Ṣe (TT: 8) instead of ëè

Also, there are areas where the translations were wrong:
- Forgive me (ST: 101) È ń e é TT: 7) instead of È dáíjì mí
- Has Soponno visited my house? (ST: 102) Olódùmarè, òrán ńbí kín lèyì? (TT: 8) instead of Kíń ló wọlé tò mí yìí?
- Are you ready now to serve us? (ST: 104) Láisí ńní-ńní, ó dájú pé o ńtán láti ń ń tiwá (TT: 104). Here, the king is asking a question, whereas, the translation is already confirming an answer yet to be given.
- Charcoal (ST: 113) èèrú (TT: 24) instead of èèdú
- Take her away! (ST: 102) È ńọ ń pámọ (TT: 9) instead of È mú un lọ
- For that woman had a son (ST: 108) Ògbọ́n ní tèmí ńgań ní, ńbí rómo bí. (TT: 17)

CONCLUSION

The purpose of translation is to pass on an understanding to people in their own language and create the same impact as the original, and Àrèmú has been able to achieve this effectively in Ónà Òmíníra Ónà Èjè. The work upholds the common belief that translators are better at translating into their mother tongue than into a second language. Ónà Òmíníra Ónà Èjè reveals that Àrèmú has a more profound linguistic and cultural background of Yorùbá, a more natural and practical knowledge of various linguistic elements and he was able to render cultural elements—proverbs, idioms, metaphors, collocations, etc., into proper equivalents. He has the storyline in mind, his arrangement of events, and characters are in order. He makes use of his own words most of the time resulting in a natural and readable Yorùbá while ensuring at the same time that he is not writing a new
work based on Ọṣọfisan’s play. Above all, reading through Red Is the Freedom Road evinces a wonderful literary skill and reading Àrèmù’s translation of it into Ọnà Òmìnira Ọnà Èjè doubles the pleasure one more time.

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About the Contributors and Editors

Adebola Adebambo Ademeso lectures in the Department of Theatre Arts and Music, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos State, Nigeria. His research areas include drama and society, theory and criticism, and media arts.

‘Diran Ademiju-Bepo, who holds a Ph.D. in Dramatic Literature and Criticism and Film Dramaturgy, is a film scholar with a background in playwriting, directing, and media studies. His research interests cover generational/comparative literature, film and society, popular genres/culture, and media studies. He lectures at the National Film Institute, Jos, Nigeria’s pioneer film training school. He is currently the Head, Industry Support Services, Nigerian Film Corporation, the developmental agency of the Federal government of Nigeria.

Victoria Adeniyi lectures in the Department of Dramatic Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Her areas of research include: Theatre History, Dramatic Theory and Criticism, and Dramatic Literature.

Gbemisola Adeoti holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He lectures in the Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. His areas of teaching and research include dramatic literature, poetry, literary history, and literary theory. He is the author of Naked Soles, editor of Muse and Mimesis: Critical Perspectives on Ahmed Yerima’s Drama, and co-editor (with Bjorn Beckman) of Intellectuals and African Development: Pretension and Resistance in African Politics.

Bose Afolayan lectures in the Department of English, University of Lagos, Nigeria. She studied English and Literary studies at the Obafemi Awolowo University and the University of Lagos where she obtained her B.A. and M.A. degrees respectively. She is at present a Ph.D. student at the University of Lagos, writing a research thesis on the comparative analysis of the works of Osborne and Osofisan and their propulsion by anger.

Ayodele Ajulo teaches in the Department of English and Mass Communication at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Nigeria. He obtained his B.A. in English from the University of Ado Ekiti, Nigeria, and M.A. in English from the
University of Ibadan, Nigeria. His research interests include discourse analysis and sociolinguistics.

**Samuel Alaba Akinwotu** teaches English in the Department of English and Mass Communication, Adekunle Ajasi University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. He took his B.A. and M.A. degrees in English from Ondo State University and the University of Lagos. He is currently studying for his Ph.D. at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. His research interest lies in semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and syntax.

**Tunde Akinyemi** teaches in the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, University of Florida at Gainesville. He specializes in Yoruba, and also does comparative work on African oral literature and popular culture. Several of his publications have appeared as chapters in books and articles in journals. He co-edited *Emerging Perspectives on Akinwumi Isola* (AWP 2008) with Toyin Falola.

**Uko Atai** is senior lecturer and former Acting Head, Department of Dramatic Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He is the author of *Saprites* and *Back Stage*, the British Council/Association of Nigerian Authors’ Drama Award Winner for 1989 and 1992 respectively. His directing portfolio includes Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*; Bertolt Brecht’s *Caucasian Chalk Circle*; and Ferdinad Oyona Mbia’s *Trois Pretendants: Un Mar, Saprites, and Backstage*. His other publications include numerous critical essays in journals and chapters in books on the theory and practice of modern African, European, and American drama/theater.

**Ademola Omobewaji Dasylva**, former Acting Head, department of English, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, teaches African literature (drama, poetry, and the African novel—theory and criticism), oral literature, and folklore. He is a poet. He co-coordinates the Ibadan Cultural Studies Group based at the University of Ibadan for the promotion of excellence in cultural studies. Besides his many articles in scholarly journals, he has published a number of books, including, among others, *Understanding Wole Soyinka: Death and the King’s Horseman* (1995); *Dramatic Literature: A Source Book for Colleges and Universities* (1997); *Studies in Drama* (2004); *Dapo Adelugba on Theatre Practice in Nigeria* (2003); *Forms and Functions of English and Indigenous Languages in Nigeria—A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Ayo Banjo* (co-edited, 2004); *Studies in Poetry* (co-authored, 2005); and *Classificatory Paradigms in African Oral Narrative* (1999).
Hope O. Eghagha, Ph.D., is associate professor in the Department of English, University of Lagos, Nigeria, where he teaches drama and poetry. He is also a visiting member of the editorial board of *The Guardian Newspaper* and editor of *Black Orpheus*. He is a published playwright and poet.

Toyin Falola is an internationally recognized leading scholar in the history of Africa. Falola has been presented with three festschriften, various citations, and honorary doctorate. He is the 2006 recipient of the Felix E. Udogu Africa Award, the 2006 Cheikh Anta Diop Award, the 2007 Amistad Award, and the 2007 SIRAS Award for Outstanding Contribution to African Studies. His award-winning memoir, *A Mouth Sweeter Than Salt*, captures his childhood years.

Kacke Götrick is Emeritus Professor of Theatre Studies, University of Bergen, Norway. She has published on traditional as well as modern African theater. She has been Editor-in-Chief of *Nordic Theatre Studies*.

Festus Ogu Idoko, holds B.A. and M.A. degrees in theater arts from the University of Jos. Currently, he is a doctoral student in the same department. His areas of interest include inter-culturalism in Nigerian theater and audience studies. Oluchi Joyce Igili teaches in the Department of English Studies and Mass Communication, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko and directs the University theater group. Her research interests include social criticism, feminism, and comparative literature. She is a member of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) and the National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP).

Edde E. Iji is an associate professor in the Department of Theatre Arts of the University of Calabar, Cross River, Nigeria. Several of his critical works have appeared as journal articles and books chapters. He is a member of the National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP).

Alexander Kure, Ph.D., was educated at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, in Nigeria. He is presently a Senior Lecturer at the Department of English and Drama and Director of the General Studies Unit of the Kaduna State University, Kaduna. His research interests are in the areas of comparative literature, applied linguistics, gender, conflict, and environmental issues as reflected in literature, creative writing, and literature and curriculum development. He is a member of the Linguistics Association of Nigeria (LAN), Nigerian English Studies Association (NESA), English Language Teachers Association of Nigeria (ELTAN), and National Association of Remedial English Teachers (NARET).
Busuyi Mekusi is a doctoral research student in African literature at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. His research investigates the negotiation of memory, identity, and the ideas of crime and corruption as challenges for nation-building in post-apartheid South African drama. He has published articles in reputable journals. He is also the author of the play *Whispers Across the Wall*.

Tiziana Morosetti has a first degree from “Roma Tre” University, Italy, and a doctoral degree from the University of Bologna, Italy, where she discussed a thesis entitled “The Politics of African Theatre: A Reading of Femi Osofisan,” and where she is currently a research fellow. She has published several articles on Anglophone West African literature, in both English and Italian, and is the author of a forthcoming book in Italian on Nigerian theater. She is editor-in-chief of *Quaderni del ’900*, a California State University Long Beach journal, for which she edited an issue on postcolonial literature in Italian (IV, 2004). She is currently working on West African utopian writing in English, as well as on the literary representation of the exotic body in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and France.

Philip Adedotun Ogundeji is professor of Yoruba literature and the chair of the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. His special areas of interest include dramatic criticism and semiotics. He is the Chairman of the Odunjo Memorial Lectures Committee (2006 to date), the immediate past President of the Yoruba Studies Association of Nigeria and Co-coordinator Ibadan Cultural Studies Group, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan. Some of his publications have appeared in *African Languages and Cultures, Research in African Literatures, Forms and Functions of English and Indigenous Languages in Nigeria: A Festschrift in Honour of Ayo Banjo, African Culture and Civilization*, His collections of poems, *Orin Ewúro* (1998) written under the pseudonym, Atàrí Ajánàkú, is a joint winner of the Association Of Nigerian Authors, Oyo State chapter, 1998 Yoruba Poetry Prize.

Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju has taught Drama and Theatre as well as Communication Skills at the University of Ilorin in Nigeria since 1989. A Senior Lecturer, her research is in Theatre Aesthetics with bias for cross-cultural transformations particularly with regard to African and Caribbean theatre aesthetics. She is presently visiting at the Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba also in Nigeria.

Henri Oripeloye teaches literature in English in the department of English studies and Mass Communication, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria.
Sola Owonibi, poet and playwright, obtained first and second degrees in English at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife Nigeria. He’s presently in a Ph.D. program in English at the University of Ibadan with specialization in literature and medicine. He teaches in the Department of English Studies and Mass Communication, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Nigeria and serves as the Coordinator of the university’s Linkage/Exchange Program.

Laide Sheba, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer and the Head of Department of the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. She was also a former Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the same University. She has been teaching Yorùbá literature since 1985. She has published extensively in many reputable academic journals on issues in Yorùbá Literature and gender issues. She is also the author of two books, Ìsètòfábo nínú Isé àwọn Ònkòwékùnrin Yorùbá (Womanism in the Works of Yorùbá Male Writers, a critical book, published by The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS), Cape Town (2000), and Yorùbá Proverbs with Feminine Lexis published by Spectrum Books Ltd., Ibadan, Nigeria (2006).

James Tar Tsaaior holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He taught briefly in Ibadan as a graduate student before proceeding to Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria where he taught courses in African literature, cultural studies and literary theory. He now lectures in Ibadan and his research interests include African and Afro-diasporic literatures, folklore, gender, and cultural studies, as well as literary theory and criticism. He has published in these areas in local and international journals. Dr. Tsaaior is a poet, and his collection, Moments and Monuments was published in 2005. His critical books, African Literature and the Politics of Culture and Gender Politics in Tiv Oral Narratives will be out in 2009. He is also a respected columnist and an editorial board member of some Nigerian national newspapers.

Ngozi Nneka Udengwu holds an M.A. degree in literature from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Ph.D. in theater arts from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. She currently lectures in the Department of Theatre Arts of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where she teaches a wide range of courses including acting, theories of the modern theater, Third World drama and theater, topics in dramatic literature, etc.