



LASU JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES (LASUJOH)

VOL. 15, 2021 EDITION | ISSN: 978-274-384-4

A publication of:

Faculty of Arts
Lagos State University, Ojo
Lagos, Nigeria.
Email: dean-arts@lasu.edu.ng

LASU Journal of Humanities (LASUJOH)

Volume 15, 2021 Edition

© 2021 Faculty of Arts
Lagos State University, Ojo
Lagos, Nigeria

ISSN: 978-274-384-4

Produced by

FREE ENTERPRISE PUBLISHERS LAGOS

HEAD OFFICE: 50 Thomas Salako Street, Ogba, Ikeja, Lagos.
☎+234.814.1211.670. ✉free.ent.publishers@gmail.com

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Journal Address: LASU Journal of Humanities
c/o The Dean, Faculty of Arts, Lagos State University, Ojo
Lagos, Nigeria. e-mail: lasujournalofhumanities@lasu.edu.ng

- **Subscription—The Journal is published twice annually although submissions are accepted throughout the year**

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Osofisan's Mythopoetic Reimaginings of the Gods and its Implications for Contemporary Postcolonial Discourse

Afolayan, Bosede Funke

Abstract

African drama, like its Greek counterpart, is at once a dramatization of the interference of the gods in man's affairs. In this relationship, humans are usually at the losing end. In other words, the gods are all-wise, all-knowing and all-seeing while man is a pawn in the hands of the gods. Osofisan's Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels and Many Colours Make the Thunder King are huge festivals devoted to the celebration of the supernatural powers of Yoruba gods; Sango and Esu principally. Against this backdrop, this paper examines Osofisan's attitude towards the Yoruba gods that he employs in his drama, and his radical subversion of the myths and festivals built around such gods. The paper concludes with the view that Osofisan does not import the gods wholesale into the festivals he creates in his drama. Rather, he questions their place and relevance in contemporary life by subverting the myths surrounding them.

Keywords: *festivals, the gods, Osofisan, Nigerian drama*

Literature can entertain, in act must entertain, but it is only the dim-witted or brainwashed artist who is content merely to entertain, to play the clown. The primary value of literature seems to me to lie in its *subversive potential, that explosive charge which lies hidden behind the façade of entertainment and which must be controlled and made to explode for the use of our people, of mankind ...* Literature must be used to play its role in the advancement of our society, in the urgent struggle against neocolonialism and the insidious spread of fascism. (Emphasis mine. Osofisan "The Terror of Relevance" in *Insidious Treasons* p.84)

Introduction

THE PREFATORY STATEMENT ABOVE IS FEMI OSOFISAN HIMSELF ELABORATING on his philosophy of writing and what he considers the value of literature. To him, literature must go beyond the primary aim of entertainment to challenge existing ethos and not necessarily reinforcing them. Critics such as Olu Obafemi (1982, 1996), Muyiwa Awodiya (1993, 1995), Sandra L. Richards (1987, 1996), Diran Ademiju-Bepo (2009), Wumi Raji (2008), Saint Gbilekaa (1997), Sola Adeyemi (2006), Akoh Dennis Ameh (2008) and this writer (2013) have emphasised the “revolutionary aesthetics,” “aesthetics of anger” and the radical persuasions of the art of Osofisan. In two articles entitled “And After the Wasted Breed? Responses to History and to Wole Soyinka’s Dramaturgy” and “Wole Soyinka and a Living Dramatist,” Osofisan isolates and describes his sharp point of departure from the art of Soyinka which he first, admired but had to challenge as he develops his own artistry. In spite of this, as will be shown in this paper, Osofisan still operates within the common pool of Yoruba traditions and customs but with a sharp deviation that incorporates his revolutionary bent. He appropriates the rituals and myths in Yoruba culture but for a subversive purpose, as will be shown in this paper.

In light of the above, Osofisan is aware of the personal danger that a radical artist is exposed to in the discharge of his/her work. To avert this, he propounds a theory of revolutionary art which he terms “surreptitious insurrection,” “insidious treason” or “surreptitious tactics.” In the essay, “The Revolution as Muse,” Osofisan explains that artists who must survive in a one-party state and still air their protest and dissent, must work within the “surreptitious tactics.” He asserts that “the dissenting artist can triumph through the gift of metaphor and magic, parody and parable, masking and mimicry.” (Osofisan 51) He or she must learn to work within existing “ritual drama” and couch their radical agenda in prevailing artistry. He refers to this method as “a covert and metamorphic system of maneuvering—called surreptitious insurrection.” (Osofisan 51) How does he achieve this as a radical writer? Using himself as an example, he states: “I turn official historiography and mythopoeisy on their head, insisting on their hidden partisan agenda, and offer a dialectical counter-narrative.” (Osofisan 58).

Drawing on this, Muhammed Bhadmus posits that:

At a point, the institutionalized drama of Soyinka and others were no longer effective and relevant outside their usage and demand in studies and examination in schools and colleges. The “old plays” speak no longer to present situation; their syncretic edges have grown powerless against the new weight of pain in the air, Osofisan argues. Fundamentally, the theatre was ripe for a revival and a renewal. Osofisan set out like Brecht to make the theatre more effective. His striving for “alternative literature” is largely within the ambience of the popular theatre as Brecht’s is through the epic. (240)

It is against this backdrop that this paper examines Osofisan's interrogation of the gods in two of his plays. It sets out to investigate the relationship between the gods and man as dramatized in Osofisan's *Many Colours Make the Thunder King* and *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*. Traditionally, the Yoruba man/woman is animist in religion. According to Wole Soyinka in *Myth, Literature and the African World*, the Yoruba world is in three tiers; the world of the dead, the world of the living and the world of the unborn. This is the idea that foregrounds his play; *Death and the King's Horseman*.

The African man's attitude to the gods is one of reverence and worship. The gods are supernatural deities and ancestors, who are higher than man in all facets of life. These gods interact with man regularly in festivals and are revered. However, the relationship is an unequal one because man lives in perpetual fear of the gods. Festivals provide the sacred ambience in which the gods come down from the rafters to be propitiated, especially in the Egungun festivals. This paper examines the gods in a typical festival as depicted in the selected plays.

Like the West, drama in the African context began from the worship of gods and goddesses and in the Greek theatre, especially in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, man is shown as helpless, in total despair in his relationship with the gods. Thus, the gods exact a great influence in the affairs of man. Although Ruth Finnegan and M.C.J. Echeruo claim that there is nothing dramatic in ritual, Oyin Ogunba, Ossie Enekwe and Ola Rotimi aver that ritual drama can transform into drama just as it did in the West. The performative essence, the imitation, the extended conflict and dialogue, the audience as acolytes and uninitiates, and the market place/grove as the stage are such integral elements that make festivals dramatic. This idea has been thoroughly argued in my essay "Festival Aesthetics: Continuities and Discontinuities in selected plays of Wole Soyinka." In that essay, I re-read Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* and *Death and the King's Horseman* as huge festivals.

The focus here is to isolate a crucial element in festivals—the gods -and see how they perform and are viewed through the prism of Osofisan's dramatic lens. Is Osofisan merely rehashing what we know in Yoruba traditional folklore? Is he celebratory of the acts of these gods? Does he invest the gods with more powers that we stand in awe and dread of these gods? Does he show the gods as man's creation and dispel the awe and trepidation such that will make man the architect of his fate rather than continue to dread the wrath of the gods? These are the salient questions this paper intends to investigate.

Background of Study

There are many festivals in Yorubaland. As a matter of fact, Oyin Ogunba, a foremost oral literature expert, states:

In a town of modest size, say twenty thousand inhabitants, there may be as many as ten to fifteen festivals in a year's cycle of ceremonies. Such ceremonies are woven around diverse beings and physical phenomena

ranging from powerful gods and goddesses to hills and water spirits and the generality of illustrious ancestors. (3)

The statement above reiterates the prominence and significance of festivals among the Yoruba people. Festivals are cultural institutions where people show their respect to gods and celebrate them. In fact, Ogunba confirms that Ile-Ife, the cradle of the Yoruba is said to have a festival each day of the year except one (3). Festivals are defined in different ways. Again, Oyin Ogunba states that festivals are:

An indigenous cultural institution, a form of art nurtured on the African soil over the centuries and which has, therefore, developed distinctive features and whose techniques are sometimes totally different from the borrowed form now practised by many of our contemporary artists (4).

Segun Adekoya updates this idea thus,

Festival is the over-arching goal of economic activities in traditional African society, the overall objective of all political, religious and social institutions and processes. All that the creative genius of an African people has produced in the course of a year—the clothes, masks, shoes, music, dance and the accoutrements of culture are put on display for appreciation, critical assessment, entertainment and education of the community. (194)

In addition, Muyiwa Awodiya defines it as

Occasions of merriment and joyous celebration through which ritual propitiation and sacrifice are offered by the community in order to control and dominate the natural forces around them. (62)

Common to all these insights are the issues of celebration, feasting, of sacrifices, drumming, dancing and ritual and spectacle. In such festivals, gods and goddesses are worshipped and celebrated with dances, drumming, music and songs and chanted poetry. Such Yoruba gods and goddesses include Ogun, the god of wine, iron and metallurgy; Sango, the god of lightning and thunder; Esu, the trickster god; Orunmila, Obatala. Osun, the goddess of fertility; Oya, Yemoja, and Oba. According to Yoruba mythology, some of these gods and goddesses were once illustrious sons or kings of Yoruba land. For instance, Sango, who has been reified and, revered, is deified as one of the gods in the Yoruba pantheon.

As earlier stated, the traditional Yoruba man is an animist. They believe in an Almighty called Eledumare. However, he also believes that Eledumare must and can be approached through the many other gods such as Ogun, Orunmila, etc. The priests and the acolytes of these gods act as intermediaries between man and the gods. The gods are supernatural beings; all-knowing, all-seeing and all-

present. They are consulted for protection and worshipped by initiates in festivals celebrated yearly or monthly. Segun Adekoya avers:

. . . a festival period is an opportunity to celebrate life in all its fullness and labour that reproduces it, to renew the bond between the political authorities and the people, thank ancestors and divinities for their myriads of blessings, tease the unborn into coming into being, determine how economically successful the year has been, strengthen communal ties, cleanse the society of accumulated moral and spiritual filth, generally have a good time and be energized and primed for another productive year that is about to begin. (194-195)

From Adekoya's notion of the functions of festivals, it can be deciphered that festivals are not just sacred. Both the profane, the secular and social are intertwined with the divine, the religious and the sacred. The statement also emphasizes the sense of community and communal belonging that festivals are known for. Festivals are basically moments of rejoicing for the Yoruba people.

Significant to this discourse is the Yoruba worldview that sees the world in three stages: the world of the living, the world of the dead, ancestors and the world of the unborn. These three stages are interrelated by transition according to Soyinka in *Myth, Literature and the African World*. The whole idea is what informs Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. This same idea is pivotal to the Yoruba's view of life. He sees life as consisting of the present, the living and the world of the dead, the ancestors who come down as Egungun (masquerades) and the world of the unborn. To appease the gods, sacrifices are made during festivals. In fact, it is believed that there are 400 and one gods in Yorubaland.

Each god is noted for a peculiar act. Sango, according to historical account is a fire-belching deity. Defied, Shango manifests in thunder and lightning and his acolytes—mostly men—make cornrow hairdos and dance with great athletic agility during the celebration. This is why a Yoruba proverb says *Oni Shango t'ojoti ko t'apa, abuku ara re ni* (Shame to the Sango acolyte who dances without great agility). Again, the god is known for his many colors, like the colors of the rainbow.

Esu on the other hand is a trickster god worshiped on the crossroads. According to traditional religious worshippers and critics, Esu is much maligned by the Christian religion, which has equated him with the person of the Christian devil or Satan. To these critics, Esu is not always evil but can be propitiated.

Apart from these two gods, other gods and goddesses featured in Osofisan's *Many Colours* and *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*. In *Many Colours*, Oya, Osun, Oba and Alagemo or Igunnuko are some of the gods used effectively.

However, Osofisan brings to bear on these communal materials his own ideology, belief and philosophy. He re-enacts the story of Shango in *Many Colours*. He does not just dramatize the traditional history but he re-invents it and subverts the divinity of the gods by investing them with human frailties. Shango is great

but he has a chink in the armor of his greatness which ultimately leads to his downfall.

This is where he differs from Soyinka whose patron god is Ogun whom he reveres and celebrates for his creative essence. Osofisan believes that these gods are the creation of man and thus can be discarded if they do not serve the purpose for which, in the first place, they have been created.

Dialectical Re-Imagining: Humanizing the Gods in *Many Colours*

Osofisan populates *Many Colours* with a variety of gods. They range from Sango, the protagonist, to Oya, Osun, Oba, Esu, Igunnuko/Alagemo and Yeye Iroko. These are mythic personages and characters that have become deified and are capable of extraordinary powers. Many of them like Sango have become legends and their tales of supernatural feats are retold in folklores.

In *Many Colours*, Osofisan reinvents the history of Sango as the Alaafin of Oyo. Rather than focus on the political intrigues and the myth of his uncanny fire-emission, Osofisan dwells largely on his domestic affairs; a dramatic effect that is deplored for a reason we shall see later on.

The play is built on a festival which can be realized in music, dance, drama and fantasy. The play begins with Igunnuko, the masked figure on stilts who appears taller than everyone else. He is ushered in amidst songs and drumming reminiscent of pure “total theatre.” The stage is the Square on which Igunnuko displays great agility. Like a festival, Igunnuko pays homage to different gods such as Ogun, Esu, and other deities. This is the usual opening in a typical Yoruba festival where the priest pays homage and respect in order to have a successful outing and performance.

Like a festival of Sango, there is a roll of thunder and lightning that reveals Sango, Gbonka and Timi. This marks the beginning of the play. Right before the audience Igunnuko transforms to Alagemo, the human form of the Chameleon. This feat is achieved by the cutting down of the great *odan* tree. As a chameleon, he is capable of different mutations because of his many colors. He has been sent by Esu, his master to render services to Sango. He tells Sango that the only way to surpass his father, Oranmiyan, is to do three things: “marry a river, wed a forest, and bring the mountain as wife.” Sango is impatient to know the full details and he hurries off to marry Oya, the beautiful river goddess. Still in his bid to achieve the seemingly impossible because of Oya’s barrenness, he, with the help of Alagemo as usual, brings home Osun, the river goddess of fertility. He is able to do this through mystery, magic and fantasy. Osun’s arrival brought fertility into the palace but then Oya becomes jealous.

The third and final feat that would have made him surpass his father is scuttled by palace intrigue and domestic troubles initiated by Oya aided by Sango’s war generals, Timi and Gbonka. “Spirits” waylaid the emissaries to the Mountain and the dowry could not be paid. Oya, though very beautiful is childless and is envious of the fertile Osun, who has many children for the king. She tricks Osun

into admiring Alagemo while directing the king to catch her as she hangs on the shoulders of Alagemo who had transformed himself to Sango. Sango is angry, sends Osun and her children away and imprisons Alagemo. Oya is shown as a betrayer who lacks conscience because Osun had earlier taken her to Yeye Iroko who had through ritual given her a child.

Goading her husband on, Oya instigates Sango against his generals. A battle is on and one beheads the other and leaves the decapitated head on the laps of Sango in defiance, declaring war on him and asking him to abdicate. The stage description shows Sango dejected, afraid and sobbing. Sango remembers Alagemo, his true friend but a colony of ants has helped him to escape. Sango is on the run, Oya loses her baby to Yeye Iroko but Alagemo comes to the rescue again. However, in the ritual to kill Oya's baby, Osun and the baby die. Sango hangs himself and Oya stabs herself in the breast with water gushing out. The water rescues the charred body of Alagemo in order to have the last words.

Thus, the legend of Sango is elaborated with strong conflicts and motivations. The mythic storyline dramatized by Duro Ladipo in *Oba Koso* is enhanced with sustained dialogue and a dramatization of the mysterious, fantastical and magical celebration of the god. What Osofisan has done in the characterisation of the gods in this story is to embellish it with motives and motivations, against the fragmented plot in the myth. In other words, the common oral traditional story of the interactions of the gods has been invested with cause and motivation and a strong conflict is generated. This view is supported by Osofisan himself in an interview with Awodiya where he states: "We must begin to confront history at its empirical points. We must move our people away from superstition, and help them to analyze objectively, and hence, master their immediate condition" (Awodiya 1993: 20). Osofisan has humanized the character of Sango. He is seen as human, with his struggles, pains and triumphs unlike the flawless god in the myth. This subversion is deliberate.

Again, the audience is made to see the humanity of the supernatural powers. This is a subversion of the common oral knowledge he has imported into the myth. Sango is shown as a great king but impatient. Oya is beautiful, rich but barren, jealous and conniving. Alagemo is trustworthy, honest and dedicated to his master but he is too trusting and unaware that man can be treacherous. This helps to illustrate his revolutionary persuasions which support turning historiography on its head, subverts existing myths on the gods. Bhadmus' view is significant here. He states that "in the theatre, therefore, Osofisan is said to have abandoned the conventional classical drama of illusionary purgation and began to experiment more in the "realistic" and social terrain of "alternative literature." (239)

While the common pool of oral tradition is available for all writers to appropriate, Osofisan's appropriation of the myth surrounding the gods is unique. The gods in his drama have been imbued with a weakness, a frailty that makes them human. Instead of glorifying the physical strength and dramatizing

the political intrigues of Sango, what he has done in *Many Colours* is to show that the gods are not infallible after all. This irreverent depiction goes against the common knowledge but is informed by his philosophy and Marxist ideology. He diminishes Sango's supernatural powers by representing his humanity. He has put into practice what he preached in the "art of surreptitious tactics" by working within the drama of gods and rituals but realistically opening the audience to the fact that the gods are the creation of man.

Man as the Architect of His Fate: The Gods in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*

Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels opens with a festive scene and a celebration. It is the gathering of the people and the playwright gives different joyous occasions that can be employed by would-be directors of the play. He, however, insists that it must be a merriment that brings people together.

The play dramatizes the interactions of the gods in the lives of men. As we have in *Many Colours*, *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* focuses on five musicians who were once well-to do but have become paupers because of a change of government. They are hungry and the search for food has brought them to the crossroads at Sepeteri, the home of Esu, the god of the crossroads. The god appears to them as an Old Man and gives them a magic boon that requires anyone the musicians desire to help must dance and sing. It is only when the person does this that his problem will end. However, this escape from poverty comes with a condition; they must help those who are really in need and suffering. They all have only one chance to use this magic wand. While four of them use their power to assist only those who could reward them, Omele, the fifth musician uses his power to help a poor pregnant woman in dire need of help. Out of compassion, he goes again, to use the power to heal a leprous couple and gets their disease in return.

Esu returns to find out how they have fared and it is obvious, he is going to commend Omele and condemn the greedy others. The others rise up against him and drive away the pregnant woman who has come as a witness. At this point, Orunmila and Yeye Osun appear. They are gods themselves, having disguised as the leprous couple saved by Omele. Omele is healed and the greedy ones are to inherit the leprosy. Obaluafe, the god of smallpox is called upon to deal with them.

The play's major framework is the festival. It is built on the "gathering of the tribe," a sort of celebration that involves the whole community. Folabo Soyinka has hinted on this idea when he accused Osofisan of trying to put the whole community on stage (see *Insidious Treasons* 208). Osofisan replies by affirming that the whole essence and origin of African drama is the involvement of everyone in the village. The festival in a typical African setting is a gathering of all and sundry and this is what Osofisan has replicated in this play.

Significantly, the play, according to the author, in the Author's Note is said

to be a “rite of fertility.” This is the ritual contained in the festival of the gods depicted. As in *Many Colours*, this play is inhabited by the actions of the gods. The central god used here is Esu, the god of the crossroads. This is his shrine where his acolytes come to seek his face for solutions to their problems. Significantly and deliberately, all the actions of the play occur at this place called Sepeteri. This setting is metaphoric just as the market in Yoruba land. It is Esu’s grove. The crossroads is where the story begins. It is the place of confusion and dilemma.

It is at this crucial place that the dejected musicians find themselves. Interestingly too, Sepeteri is a crucial landmark. It is “the last point behind the last town and the sacred grove of Orunmila” (23) and Esu is the lord of the place. In traditional Yoruba culture, Esu is not equivalent to Satan or the devil of the Christian god. He is seen as a kind of connection (intermediary) between men and their desires, between their wishes and the fulfilment (23). He is also seen as the trickster god of mischief. The five musicians are driven by hunger to this central place that will determine their destiny. They have come to “steal from Esu,” to partake of his sacrifice.

Confusion, argument and counter argument occur between the bedraggled musicians on the import of “eating or sharing” Esu’s food. Epo Oyinbo, one of the musicians narrates the spiritual anecdotes attached to the crossroads where they have come to assuage their thirst and hunger thus:

Epo Oyinbo: ... tales are told of people going mad here! Suddenly losing their senses and beginning to bark! Like dogs dying of rabies! Of men suddenly transfixed and having to be carried stiff to the home of herbalists! And of course, they never lived to recount their experiences! Or of women turning to screaming monsters! Of (27).

Omele, based on past experience, had brought them here with the intention of eating out of the sacrifices brought for Esu. The consequences of this is not lost on the musicians because, according to Epo Oyinbo “there is no time of day or night when it is safe to share Esu’s bed (22). In other words, they have to beware of Esu’s wrath. In spite of this, they are also aware of the fact that Esu can be kind to those he decides to favour especially because he can be placated to dole out riches, long life and even give children to those who worship him. Thus, they affirm both the good and bad essences of the god.

An important feature of a festival is rituals, placating with sacrifice and the rewards after. This crucial element is employed effectively by Osofisan. Esu appears to answer the musicians’ prayers by giving them a magic boon with which to help people who are suffering end their misery. They are to use songs and dance as instruments of healing. In the process, the musicians are to be rewarded.

Like a typical festival, a woman who has been carrying a pregnancy for nine years without any solution brings her sacrifice to the crossroads. Omele is moved by compassion to help her while there is no way she could repay Omele considering her helpless state. The others are unwilling to help because of her

poor state. Omele is ridiculed for having wasted his only chance. Two lepers come in hoping to be healed. No one was willing to help them too because they do not seem to be in any state of rewarding anyone. Omele rises up again, out of compassion to embrace the lepers as stipulated by their priest. He inherits their leprosy in the process and the others stone and drive him away from their midst.

Epo Oyinbo, Sinsin, Jigi and Redio on the other hand, decide to use their magic wands for people who they believe can reward them handsomely. At the end, Esu returns with his retinue. The retinue removes their hoods and masks to show that they were the men and women the musicians have helped. However, the pregnant woman and the two lepers were not among the crowd. Esu summons her and she appears with her baby. The lepers appear too to literally “collect” their leprosy back.

The play is inhabited by other gods apart from Esu. There are also Orunmila, Yeye Osun and Obaluaye. Osofisan refers to Orunmila as “the repository of wisdom and symbol of reconciliation and replenishment” and he has come disguised as the Male Leper. Yeye Osun is also disguised as the Female Leper. They have come to thwart the mischief of Esu and see if human beings are still capable of compassion and kindness. Omele’s actions do not disappoint them. Orunmila and Yeye Osun have come in Esu’s mischief with the help of the Edumare; the Yoruba Almighty God in order to rescue man from Esu’s clutches.

The end of the play is peculiar. There is a debate to determine how the play should end. Omele is healed and restored. And Obaluaye, the god of smallpox is called upon to punish the greedy musicians with leprosy: “the disease should go to those who have won it, those who seek to be rich without labour. Who have put their selfish greed first before everything, including their humanity” (90). This is the same ending in *Once Upon Four Robbers*. The play is left open-ended. Again, Osofisan wants the audience to see the play as a parable, hoping to use it to teach a moral. The key issue is to preach compassion over materialism. Human beings are enjoined to embrace kindness, which is the essence of humanity. However, Osofisan makes the characters develop a life of their own. The four musicians who are already condemned refuse to stay behind the stage. They come up on stage to ask for a place.

Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels is also realized in song, dance and spectacle. The prologue contains an orchestra. There are at least six major different songs that are thematically connected with the actions of the play such as “the song of Khaki and Agbada,” the song of Esu which literally brings the Old Man and his followers to the stage and into the action, the song of the Maiden and the Music Man among others.

Osofisan uses the festival element to a great extent. On page 28, a priest with a white loincloth, who is ringing a bell and holding a pot in his other hand is actually seen on stage. This figure actually emphasizes the use of festival in the play. This is reinforced by the people who are in need coming to the crossroads seeking help to their problems with calabashes and baskets of sacrifices.

The ending of the play brings to the fore Osofisan's philosophy of playwriting. He believes that plays can transform the society and be used as an instrument of humanizing individuals and engineering societal ills. He is careful not to evoke the kind of catharsis achieved by Sophocles and as documented by Aristotle. He disabuses the audience's minds to see such a play as what it is because the real struggles as he states in *Morountodun*, are in reality; with us. In the words of Male Leper:

If only you'd waited for our last song!
Now the joke's on you, for clearly,
You've missed the difference between reality
And its many mirrors. All of us.
What else are we, but metaphors in a
Fading tale? Just the props of a parable,
The drums on which the message is beaten
But it is time to go. Call the others in the wings,
Let us end the play with our final song
As the author wants it. And remember,
Sing only as farmers plant seeds:
Sing well. And- please remove your costumes
And masks. Lights!
Let us restore the audience back to reality (94)

This is Osofisan at his best, at his most critical, most irreverent, always looking for a way to provoke his audience to be aware of their plight and do something about it instead of looking to the gods. He tries to remove the illusion of reality. Muhammed Bhadmus He makes the actors remove their costumes and masks and the bare lights in the theatre be restored in order that the audience can see the actors as they are and not the illusion created on stage. This may seem to have been influenced by the Brechtian anti-illusionary aesthetics but they are authentically African oral aesthetics. (Ayo Kehinde 2006: 167-178).

Conclusion

This paper has examined Osofisan's use of a traditional element in a festival; the gods and their interactions with men in two plays, *Many Colours Make the Thunder King* and *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* in which he shows that man is the architect of his destiny and disabuses people's minds from superstition into facing the reality of their lives. He has effectively utilized the gods as metaphors for the people even when dramatizing the oral history surrounding them. The world of the two plays is inhabited by different gods such as Sango, Oya, Osun, Oba, Esu, Yeye Iroko and Orunmila. Unlike Soyinka, Osofisan's patron god is Orunmila, who he sees as more accommodating and symbolic of wisdom unlike Ogun. Osofisan

shows what these gods represent in both their creative and destructive essences. He affirms in this drama of gods the fact that they are supernatural, capable of extraordinary strength and power, but he also invests them with frailties and weaknesses such that are common to humans. Sango is fiery and strong but he is impatient. Oya is beautiful and rich but she is conniving, jealous and a betrayer.

Above all, festivals are performed in the plays. The rituals at the Yeye Iroko shrine and the rites of Esu at the crossroads are examples of such. It is not just that the plays have a festival motif running through them as theme and form, but that they are in themselves huge festivals. Most importantly, the plays are realized in a context and an atmosphere of celebration, festivity and joyous encounters and merriment. Again, as discussed, the plays are parabolic in nature with the Alagemo and Male Leper in both plays having the last words admonishing the audience to show compassion which is a key element of humanity.

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