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"THE PLAY'S THE THING": ILLUSION, ANTI-ILLUSION AND THE POLITICS OF FEMI OSOFISAN IN TEGONNI: AN AFRICAN ANTIGONE

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Abstract
Drama is conventionally assumed to be an imaginative enactment of human experience mainly executed through dialogue and allied verbal and para-verbal elements on stage for the purpose of instruction and entertainment of the theatre-going audience. Since Aristotle's Poetics, most dramatists and playwrights have composed and produced plays which prioritise Aristotelian aesthetic parameters and dramaturgic paradigms. Accordingly, therefore, an overwhelming majority of these writers have scrupulously followed this Aristotelian mimetic impulse which fundamentally highlights histrionic plausibility or artistic verisimilitude, thus, the question of illusion (or illusionism) implicates and valorises faithful reproduction or/and a photographic representation of life (or aspects of life) as we know it. However, following Brecht, and, to a very large extent, African oral poetics, some African playwrights have rejected this mainstream conventionalized Aristotelianism in favour of anti-illusionism, an alternative literary modus operandi which is driven by a revolutionary imperative to mobilise the theatre as a site for social criticism, mass mobilisation and the torpedoing of a decedent and reactionary status quo. Osofisan, in Tegonni, deploys mainly dramatic elements of anti-illusion drawn from Brecht and the Yoruba folktale performance tradition to interrogate colonial power, inter-racial love and freedom in late 19th century Yorubaland. The paper, therefore, investigates the issues of illusion, anti-illusion as dramaturgic ingredients and the politics of Osofisan in Tegonni, using aspects of Marxism as analytic tools. It concludes that Osofisan succeeds largely in leveraging the theatre of instruction and mass mobilisation to convey his pro-masses ideology.

Key words: Illusion, Anti-illusion, Politics, Tegonni, Antigone, change, drama.

Introduction

Right from the classical era, dramatists and playwrights have always striven to create or produce plays that either *educate* or *entertain* or, in some cases, do both. This is in keeping, essentially, with the Greco-Roman dictum of *utile et dulce*, meaning in loose English translation, *utility* and *delight*. But the point to be made from the outset is that all literature is geared towards the production or the giving of delight or aesthetic pleasure. Thus, many scholars see or consider the other function of literature, to wit: *utile* (read: instruction/social answerability of art) as an addendum, a surplus, merely. For this group of scholars, therefore, the first and the distinguishing function of art is "entertainment". To achieve this, writers and dramatist, in the case of drama and theatre, resort to the deployment of various forms of theatrical architectonics. It is equally important to state that drama as a genre of literature is generally defined as an illusion of reality. To this extent, therefore, dramatists and playwrights strive to carefully compose plays that give the illusion of reality; they develop plays that exhibit a high degree of verisimilitude or plausibility. The theatre-going crowd should, therefore, be able to see them mirrored in the histrionic image on stage at every step of the unfolding dramatic action before their eyes. It is important to also divert our attention at this juncture to the African experience in traditional dramatic or even artistic oral-literary re-enactments.

For instance, during what is generally regarded as an oral storytelling session in a Yoruba traditional (African) society, the *raconteur* is usually careful enough to stay

faithful to the well-known patterns or the ideational lineaments of the tale with which every member of the audience is familiar. Should he or she deviate from the conventional patterns of the story, the audience is liable to demur instantly, calling the raconteur's attention back to the deviation, which to them, amounts to epistemic violence to the aesthetic integrity of the communal fare.

Conversely, should the *raconteur* stay faithful to the story from start to finish, the audience would applaud his or her effort at dramaticre-enactment. And to achieve this pragmatic concurrence of audience approbation, the storyteller must aim at a very high degree of plausibility, making sure not to violate audience expectation. The narrative style and singing, which is usually interphonal between storyteller and audience and the gestural aid, among others, must be perfect to earn the audience's approval. This is to say, in most storytelling techniques in oral settings in traditional environments, the raconteur and his or her supporting cast of *acteurs*, as the case may be, must pitch for verisimilitude. The question of verisimilitude enjoys, therefore, a very prominent place in Greco-Roman literary tradition, with the likes of Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Longinus emphasising what we have pointed out earlier on a *utile etdulce*.

Aristotle, in particular, in *Poetics* sets forth the criteria and principles of artistic mimesis, beginning with his definition of tragedy. In his definition, he references the phrase *an illusion of an action*. Thus, since Aristotle, successive generations of literary theoreticians, scholars, researchers and writers have tried to make sense of the term *illusion*. The critical consensus, therefore, is that on the face of it, *illusion* implies a look-alike, a shadow of something concrete, an image that seems to *represent* the original. Thus, we can speak of the *illusion* of rain; the *illusion* of happiness, and so on. This seems to suggest that an illusion is a lie, albeit a truthful lie: *truthful* in the sense that the stand-in image displays all the constitutive features of the *real* thing and a *lie* because it is *not* the real thing but a *simulacrum*, or, what Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* calls *a slice of life*. Prior, therefore, to the 18th century advent of realism in novelistic (or artistic) representation, preceding eras had always striven for realistic depiction of human activities in art as a whole. Hence, we can speak, for instance, of the *three unities*, namely the unity of place, the unity of time and the unity of interest/action in ancient Greek drama. Although, this principle of three unities was violated by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, even so, this violation, interestingly, highlighted a desire for greater *naturalness* in drama. In terms of staging techniques, acting, dialogue, characterization, plot development, setting and so forth, dramatists down the ages in keeping with the entertainment imperative of drama, had attempted to achieve increasing plausibility. This was made largely possible by the conventional practice of the so-called "willing suspension of disbelief" on the part of the audience.

Illusion, thus, is premised on the fact that much of Western literature (drama in particular) is based on Aristotelian aesthetics. Accordingly, Aristotle's *Poetics* seems to have legislated the universal application of histrionic verisimilitude. To that extent, therefore, the setting must be life-like, and strictly realistic, the characters must be well-drawn, three-dimensional, and possessing the ability both to shock and surprise the audience and, more crucially, liable to undergo change.

Furthermore, the stage properties, movement, speech delivery and other elements must be as close to *nature* as possible. According to Richard Taylor, in relation to acting techniques, "*illusionistic* acting depends on the re-creation of life-like speeches and movement of finding an exact counterpart in inflection and gesture for the

idea or feeling to be expressed, and of playing together with other actors in a convincing approximation of normal intercourse" (125). He argues further that "for example, actors might faithfully reproduce normal human events, but slightly stylize the dialogue, movement and gesture, thus suggesting that the audience comment on the action rather than allow them to be carried away by it" (125).

Taylor goes on to provide clarification on what we might regard or consider as *anti-illusionism*. On acting technique, he posits thus: "Anti-illusionistic acting frankly recognises the *artificiality* of stage convention and requires the actor to "play directly to the audience", declaiming lines even at the edge of the stage: acting and raving sometimes chanting and even singing in order to achieve a heightened and exaggerated effect" (125, emphasis added). Therefore, in anti-illusionistic drama production, Taylor argues that the dialogue, movement and gesture are stylized, "thus suggesting that the audience comment on the action rather than allow themselves to be carried away by it" (125).

The preceding discourse has been an attempt to demonstrate that in drama and theatre production, we have two main types of dramaturgic styles, namely: *illusionism* and *anti-illusionism*. As we have noted above, whilst the former prioritises verisimilitude, and, hence, *entertainment* (*dulce* in Greek) as its end-product, the latter aims at exploding and subverting the accustomed ruse of naturalistic mimesis and, instead, highlights the social instrumentality or utility of art. It is generally believed that anti-illusionism in the theatre was principally developed by Bertolt Brecht. Scholars tend to point to his influential dramaturgic technique known as *Alienation Effect* as the ultimate basis of anti-illusionism. By the same token, Brecht diverges from Aristotle in terms of *content* and *form* of drama including the question of heroism and stage-set architecture, amongst others. (Yerima, 2003, Ukala, 2001). Almost verging on what has been regarded as *Poor Theatre* (Jeyifo,2013), Brechtian aesthetics highlights functionality over excess, *instruction* over *entertainment*, frugality or minimalism over cloying overabundance and the promotion of radical progressive *change* over the reinforcement or reification of *tradition* (or the *status quo*). For Brecht and his ilk, the *status quo* is normally retrograde, oppressive and decadent, and, as such, almost always ripe for torpedoing and dismantling. This brings into view the question of *class*. Those who benefit from the subsisting system would fight to the death to resist change while those at the receiving end of oppressive regimes of stasis and regressive convention are usually primed for confrontation, always bristling with revolutionary fury.

As Ngugi rightly posits, every writer is a writer in politics, there is no sitting on the fence, ideologically speaking. It is either you are on the side of the *bulimic vampires* (read: ruling classes and their minions) or you are on the side of the people and, thus, are using your art as weapon to salvage the situation and liberate the suffering *déclassé*. Needless to say, Femi Osofisan is, in some quarters, regarded as a disciple of Brecht. Ahmed Yerima, for instance, avers that: "The freedom to experiment in an environment which was both lively, and less inhibiting, allowed Brecht's style to influence the new radical playwrights such as Femi Osofisan and BiodunJeyifo" (74). In Yerima's article, he further argues that Osofisan follows in the footsteps of Brecht in the specific areas of the incorporation of elements of storytelling, episodic plotting, audience participation, use of songs and music, Marxist ideological underpinnings and so forth (76-7). Thus, Yerima surmises that "Brecht had also become a cultural influence for the then Nigerian playwrights and scholars who constantly found him relevant to their theatrical realities and practice" (77). In spite of this, Yerima, however, manages to conclude his argument pertaining to Brecht on the Nigeria stage by stating that Osofisan

and others like him still succeeded in merging Brecht with "what Soyinka calls the communal roots" (77) in their respective dramas. Thus, given the close or proximate similarities between Brechtian aesthetics and traditional Yoruba (African) oral aesthetics, it is difficult to know where to draw the line in matters of attribution.

Still on the nature of Femi Osofisan's drama, Sam Ukala refers to Osofisan's dramaturgy as "alternative dramaturgical form" (32) which, he argues derives fundamentally from "the African folktale tradition" or, put differently, the African folktale performance structure, which manifests in "the laws of aesthetic response" (33). In the course of this paper, we shall return to these "laws" as they are supposedly deployed in Osofisan's dramaturgy.

But it is enough to reiterate at this juncture, that, in Femi Osofisan's drama we encounter what can be described as histrionic minimalism exemplified by the use of spare stage-set, minimal stage props, symbolic costuming, and stylised acting techniques and impersonation, improvisation and greater stage-audience *rapport* and a democratisation of decision-making involving both actors and audience alike.

However, this paper is not a wholesale discussion or exploration of Osofisan's*oeuvre* but rather an analysis of a single play of his, entitled *Tegonni*: *an African Antigone*. Like most (but not all) of his plays, *Tegonni*, is an eloquent exemplification of the adroit and deft deployment of anti-illusion in virtually every aspect of dramaturgy. Although Osofisan has tried on several occasions to distance him from the label of being regarded a Marxist-socialist writer, but, as the saying goes, the taste of the pudding is in the eating. A cursory look at many of his plays confirms the correctness of that description.

Theoretical Framework

Marxism works towards the actualisation of a socialist society both in specific local environments and the world at large. A revolutionary system of thought and action, Marxism, originating from Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, is geared towards the eventual overthrow of capitalist modernity with its egregious atrocities and inequities, especially the exploitation of the labour power of the working-classes and the enthronement of a classless society (i.e. communism). As Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach says; philosophers have interpreted the world; the point, is to "change" it (paraphrase). Therefore, left-leaning writers and intellectuals work at the service of the collective struggle to overthrow the asphyxiating regimes of capitalist oligarchies and to successfully establish, as stated earlier on, a socialist/communist *el-dorado* on earth. Hence, the night is never so dark for Marxists and socialists that they cannot discern a sliver of light.

This doctrine of revolutionary optimism undergirds Marxist theory of art, a theory to which Femi Osofisan's work is unarguably linked. But, far more crucially- it has to be emphasised- the *content* and the *form* of art are deliberately packaged in such a manner that the utilitarian purport of art must be highlighted over and above art's ludic and risible predilections.

Tegonni: Osofisan and the Politics of Freedom and Emancipation.

Tegonni is an African re-imagining of Sophocles' *Antigone* which the playwright was commissioned to write by the Emory Theatre of the Emory University, Atlanta, U.S.A. It was "part of the theatre department's "*Brave New Works*" project", (Osofisan, *Recent Outings*, 6). Not new to the theatre of adaptation (Adeoti 2010), Osofisan in *Tegonni* evidently puts his consummate dramaturgic skill at work in the crafting of the play. Right from the get-go, in the play's "Prologue", as is now typical of the

playwright, he lets the audience know that what they are about to watch is nothing but a cunningly devised "illusion of reality", or, more accurately, a "constructed" slice of reality. The Director in the play engages some of the Actors in a "demystificatory great reveal", namely that the dramatic action to be enacted right before their eyes is not real, *per se* but make-believe. Thus, the Director and Actors foreground *ab initio*, the fact that what the audience is about to see is *concocted*, an ingenious fabrication. This meta-theatrical device embosses the anti-illusionistic thrust and character of the play. What is more, also in the *Prologue*, reference is made to the term *illusion* indicating in the process the playwright's attempt at disabusing the audience's mind that the *show* is not real but artificial:

ACTOR: But use your imagination, man! Theatre is all about illusion, isn't it? (14).
He adds a little later:
ACTOR: Of course! All is illusion here, and everyone in the audience has come to play his or her own part in a dream. And dreams are where *anything can happen*. So, give me a costume, anything to mark me out from the others, and this evening's dream begins (14).

Even from the cast, we have been informed that one actor will play *multiple* roles, including black actors masquerading as *white* people! Also, as part of the anti-illusionistic form of theatre, Osofisan uses storytelling as a major ingredient of his dramaturgy as both Ukala and Yerima inform us earlier on. We see this at work in the dialogue between Isokun and the girls. As part of the play's exposition, Isokun and the girls – Kunbi, Yemisi and Faderera – unfurl the storyline at the start of the play. This form of narration is seized upon as a way to hold the audiences' attention in their curiosity to know what the play is all about and gradually invite them into the story's innards. The character-building of the eponymous heroine, Tegonni, is now unfolding apace while the audience awaits the advent of Tegonni on stage. Tegonni is a princess in a town called Oke-Osun, an imaginary town in South-western part of Nigeria. Against tradition, she decides to join the ancient guild of bronze casters and also a sculptor, a profession exclusively reserved for the male members of the town. Everyone except Isokun, an elder, stands against her in her stubborn determination to pursue her chosen career. The British District Officer, Allan Jones, seeing her sad situation, decides to help her set up a factory and find a market for her products in far-away Lagos metropolis. Given this closeness between Tegonni and Jones, they fall in love with each other and decide to get married, an inter-racial marriage arrangement generally considered repulsive both to the natives and the colonizers alike. As Tegonni and her group of friends dance and celebrate her nuptials, the British Governor, Lt. Gen. Carter-Ross dispatches soldiers to disrupt the wedding by ordering that a corpse be dumped by the stump of an *araba* tree in the marketplace located in the heart of the town and near the Palace, venue of the wedding. This forbidden sight (the corpse) temporarily stops the wedding procession dead in their tracks as Tegonni recognises the corpse as the remains of her late brother, Prince Oyekunle, who has just been killed in a succession tussle with his younger brother, Prince Adeloro. For defending the honour of the land, Governor Carter-Ross orders that Adeloro be interred with full honours while he forbids everyone from according Oyekunle the same honour of being buried properly in accordance with native custom.

He denies Prince Oyekunle final burial rites because Oyekunle had mobilized Dahomi mercenaries to attack his own people. In defiance of this colonial order, Tegonni (like Antigone before her) symbolically buries Oyekunle by pouring sand on his eyes, leaving his remains to be devoured by wild beasts and birds of prey. She is promptly arrested and detained by the guards of the British Colonial Governor Carter-Ross. Tegonni is let off the hook after she tenders a public

apology. Thinking her husband, Allen Jones, has been sent back to England by the Governor, just so to thwart their wedding, Tegonni is pleasantly surprised to see him materialise suddenly on the scene of her public humiliation. In a tragic twist of events, the Governor's soldiers shoot at Allan. Tegonni and her friends, who escape being killed in the shoot-out, join Yemoja, the River Goddess in a celebratory boat-ride as the curtain drops. Credit must be given to Femi Osofisan for his ability to make the past meet the present as Antigone materialises on stage with her bodyguards to meet Tegonni's girls (24). The first statement Antigone makes is instructive:

ANTIGONE: Has the play started? (25) …. "I heard you were "acting" my story" (25).

In this instance, Antigone is deliberately demystifying and stripping herself of any patina of supernaturalism or metaphysical essence. She lets it be known from the outset that she is a mere figment of the poet's fecund imagination, a mythic creation. "Antigone belongs to several incarnations", she says, thereby highlighting the fact that she has undergone several mythic (theatrical) re-interpretations and re-imaginings/reworkings such as the present one –*Tegonni: an African Antigone*. To further highlight the sheer *artificiality* of the story, one of the girls' queries: *But you are black*, and Antigone replies, *What colour is mythology*? Fully aware of the many interpretations and adaptations of the Antigone myth, Femi Osofisan in *Tegonni* engages in mythoclasm (i.e., the act of exploding and debunking myth) and mythography (the act of explanation of myth) which inevitably segues into mythopoeia (i.e., the making of myth). We must bear in mind, at this juncture, that imaginative literature was originally conceived as myth, and it is this original conception of literature as myth that Osofisan is exploring in *Tegonni*. Little wonder, then, that Antigone characterises herself as a mere "metaphor" (28). So, in keeping, therefore, with the poetic metaphorisation of the Antigone myth, the dramatist makes her guards play multiple roles right before the audience. Accordingly, the guards play "soldiers" of the Governor, Lt. General Carter-Ross (that is, the so-called soldiers of the West African Hausa Constabulary) led by the Governor himself (i.e., the Governor of the Southern Colony of Nigeria). Consider then, what Antigone tells the guards-turned-soldiers:

ANTIGONE: Right then, I am leaving now. Please remember all we said, for I may not be able to see you again, I will be busy with my own role. The script is the story we rehearsed, as it's happened at other times, in other places. And by the way, the language you speak as members of the Hausa constabulary is Pidgin English. (29-30).

Interestingly, as soldiers, these erstwhile guards of Antigone begin to speak Pidgin English since they are playing the role of Hausa soldiers owing, essentially, to their poor education. This recourse to Pidgin English is evidently indexical of the dialectic of class: whilst the high-and-mighty in society speak good English, the scum of society speak Pidgin English, the so-called language of wider communication (LWC) among the poor masses. But upon their reversal to the original role of Antigone's guards, they revert to the use of good English. This is a mark of histrionic pragmatism at its best.

We need to also comment on the use of dance in the play. For anyone familiar with Osofisan's drama, they would have known that he uses *dance* as a major element of his dramaturgy. Almost always writing back to Wole Soyinka, who, for Osofisan, represents the conventional right-wing centre, Osofisan tries to counter Soyinka's idiosyncratic deployment of violence and war (which Ogun, Yoruba god of war, and Soyinka's patron saint embodies) in his plays. Thus, Osofisan prioritizes dance or (song and dance) instead in his drama as he does in *Tegonni*. This is

evident in his deft employment of *EkunIyawo* (Bridal chants among the Yoruba) which Tegonni's friends chant as they accompany her onwards to her matrimonial home, as it were. Therefore, from time to time, as the play's plot develops, the audience is regaled with scintillating dances and songs. The role of song and dance in the play demonstrates clearly that the play is an operatic play as the dialogue is periodically interspersed with dances and songs. For instance, in Part 3 of the play, when Tegonni and her friends are tied to various posts in one of the market stalls, they try to keep up their spirits by singing. By the same token, *costuming* equally serves as an index of anti-illusionism in the play as well. Costume confers identity upon the players in relation to the roles they are playing at any point in time. This highlights again the sheer artificiality of identity, as we know it.

There is nothing nailed-on or sacrosanct about identity, especially social identity. Every situation or circumstance determines what identity people put on as the occasion warrants. Given the inherent multiplicity of identities that individuals have, dress or costume is seized upon to signify identity most of the time. For instance, the swagger-stick for the soldiers and the wig for the lawyers are clear examples of such. This metonymic association with an artist of clothing or dress is sufficient clue in an anti-illusionistic theatre to indicate the professional affiliation or identity of a particular character. This minimalist suggestiveness of roles via dressing in dramatic enactments is geared towards a ruthless routing of the soporifics of Aristotelian verisimilitude or histrionic mimesis.

To be certain, the play's the thing, indeed! Thus, emotion is suitably trumped by reason as anti-illusionistic theatre is directed at the *head* rather than at the *heart*. In this theatre of fabulous or parabolic *instruction***,** therefore, the overriding purpose is not just to entertain but, more importantly, to teach, to mobilise, to conscientise, and to provoke the audience out of their accustomed torpor and quietude to challenge and overthrow repressive regimes of meaning. Femi Osofisan further drives home the fact that what the audience is watching is not a divine given, not a "real" event, even though it is a *realistic* depiction of actuality but a mere make-believe. This point is put in bolder relief in the excerpt below:

3RDSol: Then find us some other role to play.

2NDSol: Something different, with compassion in it.

1STSol: Otherwise lead us now to re-join our mother on the boat.

ANTIGONE: Before the play end! You must be joking!

3RDSol: Well, we want to go on with this. Or we will soon lose all our humanity.

ANTIGONE: You can't quit before the play ends.

3RDSol: When we quit, the play will end.

ANTIGONE: All right, all right. Be patient. Very soon there will be a flashback… (75).

There is consequently, a folkloric feel to the dramatic action because, as in an oral narrative or a folktale in which the listening audience is keenly aware that it is all fabulation, Tegonni also is deliberately distanced emotionally from the audience, the better for them to be able to participate in its hortatory and heuristic import. This overt didacticism facilitates the play's ultimate goal, namely, to teach and to edify and to empower the audience with the requisite information and knowledge to break every yoke of ignorance, disease, fear, superstitions and poverty, among others.

Still on the strategy of fabulation or what Sam Ukala calls "the African folktale performance structure" (33) deployed as a dramaturgic element by the playwright, we find the felicitous mobilisation of such artistic ingredients as folkloric motifs, storytelling,

masking, possession and puppetry in *Tegonni* (94). For instance, at the start of the dramatic action, we are told that Tegonni was jilted by a former suitor (the Asipa) and, thereafter nobody was willing to ask her hand in marriage any longer. However; there is something that harks back to a popular folktale in traditional West African cultures, particularly Ghanaians and Nigerians. In Ama Ata Aidoo's play "Anowa", the eponym, described as headstrong and feisty, is likened to the girl in a folktale who refuses the marriage proposal from every eligible bachelor except that from a suitor from the spirit-world, a hideous ogre. She had dissolved into a swooning admiration at first sight and promptly married him to her eternal regret and grief. This is a very popular tale deployed by parents as a cautionary tale to properly socialise their young daughters; to caution them against juvenile presumptuousness and the probable risks of being too picky. Although not overtly fleshed out in the play, Femi Osofisan undoubtedly must have had this oral tale in mind when he was creating the scenario in which Tegonni goes against tradition to seek to wed a white man, Allan Jones, the District Officer. Osofisan concedes in an interview with Biodun Jeyifo that he uses this interracial marriage to address racism in 19th century Africa and the contemporary era. He claims to be using Tegonni to counter "the prevailing philosophies created and celebrated" (i.e. racism and white supremacy)" (Jeyifo 37). Besides, given the prevailing circumstances surrounding the period he was commissioned to write this play in the U.S, he felt called upon to use the play to enter a plea for mixed couples who "live in social ghettos, tolerated but not really accepted by either race" (39). In spite of the fact, as Jeyifo aptly posits, that Tegonni-Jones liaison embosses the dialectic of colonial over-lordship and anti-colonial slippage of the yoke" (40), Jeyifo still feels that Osofisan is merely succumbing to the literature of exoticism, an unreflective, uncritical over-romanticisation of idyllic or idealized love. In the unforgiving cauldron of colonial occupation, such liaisons are strictly forbidden as Lord Lugard's "Secret Circular B" which equated miscegenation to bestiality demonstrates (37). But it is enough to cut Osofisan some slack in that love cannot be legislated, it happens when chemistry finds opportunity as Tegonni and Jone's case shows.

Perhaps, it is timely to return again to the centrality of storytelling to Osofisan's dramaturgy. Beyond the inherent relationship between the *Anowa complexes* exhibited by Tegonni, by marrying Allan Jones, she later takes upon herself the role of what the dramatist frequently terms "The Spirit of Stories" (94). She goes out of her way to narrate a well-known folktale known as "the Tiger who swallowed a Frog" (93). For a more convincing *modus operandi* in the telling of this tale, Osofisan puts forward suggested alternatives in modes of narration especially the use of puppets (94). Again, such latitude further underlines the malleability or flexibility of the story itself. We are here reminded of the supreme indispensability of story as Chinua Achebe's Old Man in *Anthills of the Savannah* tells us. It is however, important at this juncture, to reiterate the point that Osofisan does not simply regale his readers or audiences with the Tiger versus Frog story for the purpose of mere entertainment. Rather, he uses it as a signal instantiation of meta-critical commentary on the play's ontologic integrity. This play-within-a-play strategy has the added advantage of further deepening the thematic concern of the broader dramatic phenomenon.

By the same token, Ekun, the Tiger in the oral tale can be interpreted as the British colonisers and the Frog is symbolic of the *natives*. In the agonistic struggle for supremacy and control over meaning, Kunbi Yemisi and Faderera put on masks in a bid to scare the living day-light out of Carter-Ross who mistakes the masked girls for spirits of

the bilious dead come to life to settle scores with anuppity interloper (110). Scared, thus, out of his wit, Carter-Ross caves in, allowing the girls have their way. In the same connection, therefore, when, in the closing moments of the play, during the shooting incident, these same girls band together under "possession" to rain malediction upon their white adversaries led by Carter-Ross. We should be reminded also that, in spite of the roles played by male characters in *Tegonni*, this play can almost pass for an all-female one, just like *Yungba-Yungba*. Thus, beyond the biological, or physiological categorization of these female actors, collectively semiotise the softer graces of the homo sapiens, embodying, as they do, such tempering qualities as nurturance, restraint, compassion, love, tolerance, patience and forbearance. The females nearly always represent the proverbial *Beauty* in the tale as against the *Beast* traditionally exemplified by the masculine gender. Interestingly, as Ola Rotimi in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* declares that women have taken over the world, so also does Osofisan indirectly enthuses in *Tegonni*:

> ISOKUN: Bayo, what did I say? Our world is changing, even faster than we feared. The girls are right… (112).
>
> Bayo: Yes, it's a new age! We are on the brink of great transformation (112).

The theme of change (premised on Marxist ideology as earlier noted) seamlessly indicates the equally important themes of inter-racial marriage between Tegonni and Allan Jones, and of love. Commenting on the wider ramifications of the inter-racial marriage in the play, the writer says that the marriage is a subtle demonstration of the essential equality of all races regardless of colour or creed. It is not for nothing, therefore, that Gov. Carter-Ross, symbol of empire, fights to the death to thwart the marriage (120). Tegonni-Jones marriage is a veritable chink in the arrogant armour of empire and its polarising protocols and ideologies (131). Hear the Governor:

> Against the fearsome fevers, the murderous dysentery, the foul and fetid air!... but as I look at you now (i.e., Allan Jones), I begin to see the ominous signals that something is dying, that those grandiose days are closing… I sense the dawn of a new enfeebled age, the first awful premonitions that all we have struggled to build here and all over the world may one day come to naught… (131).

Yet, Femi Osofisan is particularly enamoured of the lesson of history, hence he brings Antigone on stage, that timeless metaphor of principled defiance against unconscionable power typified by Creon in Sophocles '*Antigone* and Carter-Ross in *Tegonni*. Although Antigone coyly engages in self-deflation by arguing that she has been contaminated by history and that she is no longer "the relic in the memory of poets" (125), yet the playwright resolutely seizes upon her as trope to drive home the divergent and differing fortunes and fates of oppressors and oppressed alike as the dramatic recitation of Shelley's "Ozymandias" eloquently shows. The short of it is that both evil and life-denying power shall always rise just as the supposedly powerless under-classes shall equally rise. The lesson of history, nonetheless, is that, with the necessary grunt work and resolve, ordinary people will always outlast the palace.

Instructively in the play's Epilogue, as lights come up on stage, the boat of Yemoja, Antigone and Tegonni meet and embrace as they both join the Yemoja party with boundless joy. Antigone ("past") and Tegonni (*present*) coalesce and meld into a single indivisible force superintended over by Yemoja herself as an all-female celebration of victory over forces of conservative reaction. At a higher level of hermeneutical engagement, it is logical to imagine Orunmila,

Yoruba god of knowledge, wisdom and divination hovering over this feminine *joie devivr*e, thereby shooing off the clamorous clamour of Ogun's war-games and blood-fests. It might be incorrect, however, to ascribe anti-illusionism as deployed in T*egonni* to Brecht alone since as noted earlier on there exist histrionic parallels between Brecht and African folktale poetics (Ukala and Yerima). Yet, the similarity of ideological orientation between Brecht and Osofisan persuades one to see the latter as apt-pupil of the former in the classic precursor -ephebe relationship with the associated anxieties of influence.

Conclusion

That being said, despite Femi Osofisan's best intentions to compose a drama text that shuns Aristotelianism, the play still ends up on occasion veering rather uncomfortably too far into Aristotelian territory, what with the sustained attempt at creating unwittingly emotion-laden stretches of dialogic give-and-take which, ultimately, defeats the "distancing" effect of anti-illusionism. Instances of this unconscious deviation abound in the text which space constraints will not allow us to elaborate upon. But this is, to a degree, addressed with the periodic reminders that it is all a play and the characters mere "actors". With the penumbral switches from illusionism to anti-illusionism in the play, the progressive politics of Osofisan shines through, namely, that power, unconscionable, irresponsible and oppressive (especially colonial over lordship) is odious and retrogressive and the people in bondage (of any sort) must come together (as *class-for-itself*) as one to confront and overthrow an unjust, repressive system in order for true freedom and liberty to reign, unfettered.

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