

**Title Page**

**Music in Selected Play Productions of Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan**

**By**

**Olatunji Samson, SOTIMIRIN**

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Degree in Theatre and Performance**

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## **Declaration**

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## **Acknowledgements**

I wholeheartedly, most sincerely and profoundly acknowledge and appreciate the cast and crew of the drama of my life symbolised in the successful completion of this dissertation.

### **CAST LIST**

- God Almighty -** Alpha and Omega, the Author and Finisher of my Faith
- Alimotu Alabi Sotimirin -** My passage into this planet of the living
- Samson Sotimirin -** The pillar in whom my strength is formidable
- Deola, Oluwayemisi Sotimirin –** Exquisite and adorable companion in whom my imperfection is made perfect.
- Oluwaseun Temitope Sotimirin -**
- Yetunde Ibukunoluwa Sotimirin -**
- Eniola Wuraola Sotimirin –** The three musketeers, my comrades, replicas and spices of my exuberance, in whom I am well pleased.
- Ebenezer Solanke Sotimirin –** The Production Manager whose legacy endures in me
- Prof. Duro Oni –** The silent but salient force of progress and stability
- Prof. Osita Okagbue –** My progenitor’s ancestral spirit personified

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## **Abstract**

Despite the existence of a robust scholarly attention on African plays and performance practices, not enough attention has been given to music, a unique art form, as a performance element in African theatre. This study investigates the use of music in African drama in selected play productions of Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan's plays.

Data for this study were gathered from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources included the use of structured interviews and non-participant observation methods. The playwrights whose plays are case studies, namely Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan, were interviewed. The researcher was on ground at the rehearsals of the selected plays and noted the methods of teaching the songs and the importance attached to the music of the plays during the rehearsals. The texts of the plays were critically studied in relation to the lyrics of the songs. Significant primary data arose from informal interactions with the cast and crew of the selected performances. Recordings of the performances were critically evaluated. The secondary source of data collection consisted of a robust library search and review of related literature. Comparative and descriptive analysis served as analytical tools for the discourse.

The results show that music is used to reflect the subjective underpinnings and compositions important for the essence, character and statements in Soyinka and Osofisan's plays. As a method of preserving their culture, histories, and identity, Soyinka and Osofisan exploit the oral performance traditions from their Yoruba culture, combining music and dance to achieve total theatre dramaturgy. The study opens new vistas of academic investigations into cultural studies. The study also contributes to scholarship of music in the theatre through the transcription and orchestration of some of the pieces, transcribed for indigenous instruments and Western symphonic orchestra. It was discovered from the study that as components of traditional African theatre, music is an artistic cultural index that Soyinka and Osofisan utilise predominantly in their plays.

This study concludes that music is not, and should not be treated as an ordinary complimentary piece or a mere aesthetic embellishment. African theatre is incomplete without music, they both collaborate in the dramatic narrative process. Music in Soyinka and Osofisan's plays (both in the form of literary drama and in realisation as performance), functions as a narrative device. Both Soyinka and Osofisan draw their music from Yoruba

culture. (Culture both in its popular and pristine forms). Their use of music certainly goes beyond the bounds of embellishment. The various songs used in their works take some steps further into the metaphysical and spiritual consciousness of their people. It is through the concerted determination of theatre artistes in Nigeria and other African countries that traditional African theatre can take its rightful place amongst the theatres of the world. It also concludes that Africans should construct expressions that could suitably describe their music and give profound meaning

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Music in African culture is integrated with life and appropriate music accompanies every phase of human existence. Music is essential in human lives; be it for pleasure, emotional stability, socio-political, cultural, religious and educational activities. The fact that every society engages in a variety of music underscores the timelessness of music. According to Oscar Brockett (1974: 61)

In Greek cultural history, it is believed that theatre, as we know it today, actually began as music and poetry performed (or ‘recited’) by the earliest Greek actors during the festival of Dionysus, the Greek god of fertility and wine.

However, music, though universal, is culturally defined and interpreted. Music is a global phenomenon, existing in all lands and clans but the form and content of music differ from one environment to the other. Objectively, the lyrics and performance of music reveal the individual and communal attitude of a people. Music as a socio-cultural invention creates a mutual sense of emotional strength and spiritual fulfilment. Western music is rooted in the tradition of the West as African music is rooted in the tradition of Africa. Nevertheless, its functions across the globe are universal. In the words of Karolyi (1965:1), “the creation of the world came about with the accompaniment of motion and sound. This is why music has such magical importance for primitive people, as it often satisfies life.” Richard Okafor (2004:16) corroborates this assertion:

Music is undoubtedly old in nature and primeval in the story of man. As an art, music predates any other form and is more effective as a means of expression. Mankind has, in every culture, engaged music in the process of creation, production and communication.

It is an aspect of human behaviour, especially in terms of the interaction of people within the scope of set rules and acceptable standards, concerning beliefs and attitude to life, the cosmos, and totality of existence. Emurobome Idolor (2002: 4) notes that through music:

Many of the mysteries of life are given explanations. Some of these mysteries include the cosmology, the purpose of man's endeavour and life after death. Arising from these explanations, souls are consoled, doubts are cleared and hopes are raised.

In African cultures, music is essentially an oral process. Traditionally, African communities do not have musical notation like their western counterparts. Oshiotse Okwilagwe (2002: 105) opines that music "derives its origin from the oral traditions or folklore of the different ethnic groups that make up the Nigerian nation."

Music has been a part of theatrical activities from time immemorial. Often it seems inconceivable that a play performance should take place without one form of musical intervention or the other, even if it is just an incidental piece played during the performance to put the audience in the appropriate mood. Music as an art form is strongly rooted in the culture of the people and often finds its fullest expression in theatrical performances. Indeed, a musical performance, with little or no mimetic accompaniment but laced with dance can take place as a piece of theatrical performance in its own right. Joel Adedeji (1969: 12) observes:

Theatre arts has its origin in the activities of the earliest man who had to perform certain elements of theatre such as dancing, singing, imitation, mime, performances, theatre and re-enactment and masking.

African theatre employs music thematically and aesthetically in productions. Africans exist in communities, sharing things and living together. They express some of their attitude and beliefs through various forms of music rendered in chants, dirges and praise-songs. This way of life informs the dramaturgy of dramatists who draw inspiration from their various cultural backgrounds and communities. Music and dance are two expressive elements of ritual and feature prominently in most performances. This underscores the fact that music is

not a mere aesthetic element but performs functional roles in play productions. Asked whether some of his plays can be performed without music, Soyinka responded: “The answer is, it will be a different play if the music is not part of it. Yes, it will be a totally different play” (Soyinka, 2010: Interview).

Meki Nzewi (1981: 312) proposes a “contemporary model of an essentially traditional paradigm, which can provide an appropriate framework for theorising the relevance of music in African theatre in a postcolonial age.” Here, Nzewi gives an insight into what constitutes the significance of music in Africa. He emphasises the need to acclaim and appreciate the essence of the conventional African productive spirit, to recognise the exclusive African music conception and to discern and acknowledge the importance, future and privileges of African music especially in today’s globalising world. In this regard, Oluyemi Olaniyan (1999: 215), in his perception of the ability and capacity of African music to function effectively and appropriately in modern society, describes it as “race retrieval” and “cultural self-apprehension”, which underlines its role within a postcolonial discourse, that is very much relevant...” to the central idea of this study in many ways. Thus, Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan, the two Nigerian dramatists whose works are investigated in this study, with reference to the functions of music in their plays as a way of preserving their cultural identity, draw on oral performance cultures from their Yoruba traditions. They incorporate music and dance, merging them with conceptions of drama appropriated from practices and experience of western colonization, to establish theatrical modes, which are syncretic and comprehensive in both form and content. Soyinka in his plays employs music to resuscitate and popularise African cultural heritage whereas Osofisan uses music to rejuvenate African culture within the context of contemporary realities. Rather than Soyinka’s African cultural rebirth stance, Osofisan gives new strength to African culture. Both playwrights, therefore, find a ready and effective tool in music to articulate their ideological positions and creative essence.

A survey of African plays by notable dramatists such as Ola Rotimi, Wale Ogunyemi, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ama Ata Aidoo, Athol Fugard, Efua Suntherland, indicates a preponderance of attention on the dramaturgy of individuals and their creative responses to the socio-political and economic issues of their time. The rise of missionary activities and colonialism both combine to subject African arts to mere expressions of pagan culture devoid of aesthetic value. It sought to reconstruct a Western past, as explained by Kacke Gotrick (1984: 39), "the aim of early researchers was to reconstruct the "original" theatre to shed light on past stages of our own (European) theatre, and even on past stages of our entire cultural development...."

Adedeji's (1969) study of the Alarinjo<sup>1</sup> theatre hinges on a play witnessed in Oyo in 1826 by Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander, whose account can at best be described as a cursory glance and panoramic view of African life as seen through European eyes. Adedeji attempts to construct a historiography of the genre based on oral and written sources, specifically the Egungun ritual play, following in the way of Oyin Ogunba (1967), who discusses the amalgamation and multiple techniques of ritual presentation devoted to ancestral glorification incorporating intricate singing, drumming and dancing to mark this extraordinary communal occasion. In addition to this, Oyekan Owomoyela (1971) emphasises folklore rather than ritual as the root of Yoruba theatrical expression.

The search for contemporary African theatre's roots in traditional practices has been a persistent preoccupation of scholars since the 1960s. Akin Euba (1989: 211) argues that Yoruba folk opera "represents a successful transposition of music and other performing arts from their traditional context into modern theatre." The treatment of music as an important

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Alarinjo is a Yoruba indigenous theatre company which evolved presumably from Egungun (Yoruba masquerade) associated with genealogical spirits.

aspect of Nigerian theatre has been limited mostly to studies on Yoruba operatic tradition. Egun Clark (1979), in her appraisal of the functionality of music in Hubert Ogunde's operatic theatre tradition stresses the importance of cultural literacy to any valid theorising of this particular art form. In this line of thought, Biodun Jeyifo (1984) attempts a critical study of the movement that Hubert Ogunde and the generation after him, notably Duro Ladipo, represent. He describes the theatre form as indigenous and popular with their performances usually sprinkled with a generous dose of music derived from church hymns and European instruments. He also argues that it is derived primarily or even exclusively from the use of traditional rhythms and idioms.

Despite the fact that music as a narrative medium has been extensively used by so many Nigerian dramatists, the increasing number of essays, from a library search by this researcher, concentrated on literary theatre. Where issues like ideology, dramaturgy and thematic analyses form the crux of critical consideration, a mere cursory glance is paid to the centrality of music to the discourse.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Despite the existence of scholarly attention to African plays and performance practices, not enough attention has been given to music, which is a unique art form, as a performance element in African theatre. Given the significant contribution of music to African play productions, it is fundamental to study the employment of music in African drama and theatre as this will highlight the functionality and aesthetic import of music, both as a cultural index and a performance element. There is a need to fill this academic vacuum. The role of music as a narrative device in play performance has been given scant attention. Music is given a parenthetical attention only as far as it contributes to the aesthetic appeal of

a play performance. This trend is particularly common in those scholarly works devoted to an appraisal of literary drama and production reviews.

Therefore, this study investigates the use of music in African drama with emphasis on selected play productions of two prominent African dramatists: Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan. The study seeks to address this gap in the examination of modern Nigerian theatre. It investigates not only the social and cultural factors that condition the use of music in representative modern Nigerian theatre, but also examines the artistic integrity of this practice that has come to be described as total theatre.

### **1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to examine and establish the relevance of music as an effective and aesthetic communication tool in the projection of vast socio-cultural worldviews of the African, vis-à-vis their deployment in the selected case studies. In this pursuit, the study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To elicit an understanding of the nature and usage of music in Nigerian theatre and by extension Africa;
2. To examine the functional purviews of music as deployed in the performances of selected plays of Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan;
3. To identify and analyse the aesthetic nuances as captured in the music of the selected performances;
4. To examine the ideological underpinning and thematic structures responsible for the nature and varieties of music and musicality as employed in the works of Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan;
5. To investigate how music functions as narrative medium in these performances; and
6. To critically compare and contrast how music is used in the selected play productions.

## 1.4 Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

1. How is music used to enhance the effective performances of the texts studied?
2. To what extent is music as employed in the performances contributory to the thematic preoccupation and sociological realities of the studied works?
3. Are there specific roles of music in theatre productions?
4. Is the potential of music maximised in the selected plays?

## 1.5 Research Methodology

This research, because of the nature of its subject, which is primarily to uncover the underlying impulses and reasons for how Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan used Yoruba music in their plays—had to adopt a mainly qualitative research approach and thus the data for the study is from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the use of structured interviews, participant and non-participant observation methods. Thus, the researcher acted in *Death and the King's Horseman*, and attended the rehearsals of the three other productions to observe, interact and take notes. The case studies, namely Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan, were interviewed. The researcher attended rehearsals of the selected plays and noted the methods of teaching the songs and the importance attached to the music of the plays during the rehearsals. The texts of the plays were also critically studied in relation to the lyrics of the songs. Attention was given to the musical ensemble of the plays. There was also significant data collection from informal interactions with the associates of the playwrights, and the cast and crew of previous performances. Electronic recordings of the performances were critically evaluated.

Data for the post-performance phase evaluation was gathered from the comments of professional dramatists and arts enthusiasts who saw the performances and were interacted

with by this researcher. The researcher engaged the audience randomly to assess their impression of the performances. The interview conducted after the performance of *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* turns out as a tool for evaluating the post-performance phase.

The secondary source of data collection consists of library research where the academic works of ethnomusicologists, literary scholars and critics relevant to the study were critically reviewed. The internet also played a vital role in the secondary sources of data collection for analysis. The work made use of data gathered from published plays, critical essays in scholarly articles and journals, as well as several books found to be relevant to the study. The researcher hired the services of music experts for the notations of some of the music that were prepared in accordance with music scales and structure peculiar to Western musical tradition. This study adopts comparative and descriptive analyses to drive its discourse.

## **1.6 Significance of Study**

This study provides a timely addition to the existing body of knowledge on the fundamentals of music in theatre. The findings of this study, it is hoped, will provoke additional research in related fields. Budding dramatists and dramatists in training will benefit significantly from the outcome of this research, as it should open a new vista of understanding of the importance of music in theatrical performance. The study also contributes to scholarship of music in the theatre through the transcription and orchestration of some of the pieces, transcribed for indigenous instruments and Western symphonic orchestra, to expand the scope of understanding and appreciating music in African theatrical performances to promote globalisation of the concept. Having situated the study of music in play performance within a given theoretical context, it engenders renewed interest in music scholarship.

## 1.7 Scope of the Study

The study investigates the aesthetic functions of music in selected play productions by Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan. This is achieved through the analysis of the music forms of the song texts contained in the selected works and the analysis of music in selected recorded dramatic performances of both playwrights' works. It examines the Yoruba concept of music as an expressive art form, a complementary vehicle for oral communication and for transmission of non-verbal messages in concert with other art forms, incorporating the role of poetry, chants, dirge/elegy among other related verbal art forms. The specific performances selected for analysis in this study include Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* as performed at the Muson Centre, Onikan, Lagos by the National Troupe of Nigeria July 2003; *The Strong Breed* as performed by the National Troupe of Nigeria in October 2002 at the Muson Centre, Onikan, Lagos. Others are Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu* as performed by the National Troupe of Nigeria in December 2008 at the National Theatre, Iganmu, Lagos and *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* as performed by the students of the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos in August 2008 at the Main Auditorium of the University of Lagos.

The plays were chosen based on a number of criteria ranging from their popularity, international recognition, audience reception, thematic thrusts, adherence to the concept of African total theatre and the richness of their cultural content. Evidently, the dramatists in question have several plays to their credits. Out of Soyinka's over twenty plays the most widely celebrated is *Death and the King's Horseman*, which is a thesis play for the idea of African tragedy.

Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* is considered by many to be his greatest play, (Hemming, 2009). The play, apart from its rich Yoruba cultural content, significantly dramatises some aspects of Western culture. *The Strong Breed* is an unapologetic celebration of African tradition and has generated many controversies, one of which is Femi Osofisan's

dramatic rejoinder, *No More the Wasted Breed*. *The Strong Breed* is popular both at home and abroad and has been the preoccupation of an appreciable number of academic discourses.

On the other hand, Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*, an adaptation of Euripides' *The Trojan Women* allows a comparative analysis of the significance of music across cultures and underscores the universality of music against the backdrop of its intertextual nature and performance aesthetics. In addition, *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* is included in the productions to be studied because of the playwright's employment of African oral tradition in the exploration of his socio-political preoccupations.

Investigating the role of music in these performances, particular attention is paid to song texts and the contexts in which they are employed by these dramatists, bearing in mind Alan Lomax's observation that folk song texts are "culture indicators" (1971, 21) and knowing also that in African societies, songs are agents of information transmission. Song texts and those used in these performances "reveal" a good measure of the people's cultural ethics, norms and general pattern of life" (Olaniyan, 1999: 58).

## **1.8 Conclusion**

The foregoing is a prelude to the study. It is a statement of what is to be done, which is a comparative critical analysis of the deployment of music in selected performances of Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan's plays; both of whom are significant first- and second-generation Nigerian dramatists respectively. This chapter foregrounds the circumstances that inspired the study. It captures the purpose of the research and details the approaches of gathering, collating and analysing data. This chapter also delimits the horizon of the study

and articulates its significance in the existing body of knowledge in the field of study. Therefore, this chapter sets the flow of the research and suggests a blueprint to navigate with.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In the preceding chapter, the study established the basis for its critical exegesis, highlighting its purpose, aims and objectives, scope and limitation and the breakdown of the study. This chapter reviews existing literatures that are relevant to the study. The review is executed under the following sub-themes:

- (a) Music in Nigerian culture: Characteristics and Functions
- (b) Contexts of musical performances in Nigeria
- (c) The Nigerian Theatre: Evolution and Structure
- (d) Previous Studies on the Deployment of Music in Nigerian Drama and Theatre

#### **2.2 Music in Nigerian Culture: Characteristics and Functions**

Owing to the multilingual and multicultural nature of Nigeria, according to Vidal(1993), the musical expressions reflect the various characteristic features of the cultures and traditions of the different ethnic and linguistic groups. Euba, Ekwueme, Omibiyi, Vidal, Okafor, and many others have tried to categorise the typology of music that abound in Nigeria. Akin Euba (1969), for example, categorises Nigerian music into traditional and new music. He sub-divides his new music into Church music, music in concert hall, music in the theatre and music in nightclubs. Laz Ekwueme groups Nigerian music into traditional music, church music, popular music, folk opera, and art music. Richard Okafor postulates folk or traditional music, popular music and art music as the major categories of music in Nigeria (2004). Mosunmola Omibiyi (2007) harmonises other scholars' opinions of Nigerian music into traditional music, religious music, popular music, and art music.

### 2.2.1 Religious Music

Omibiyi (2007) divides religious music in Nigeria in two categories. The first comprises all forms of Church music that developed when the believers “revolted”, demanding for an Africanised way of worship. This is in tandem with the post-colonial spirit, where Africans resisted imperialist influence and domination in favour of reconstructing the essence of Africanism. The natives opposed the western form of worship as it deprived them of their sense of identity. From this revolutionary acts, two forms of religious music emerged; sacred and secular religious music. M. J. Calvin asserts that the sacred religious music includes all forms of music used during Christian liturgical worship such as chants, canticles and hymns and other local classical compositions in the art music form (1998). Femi Adedeji (2004), on the other hand, opines that “the secular religious music includes all styles of religious music that result from the fusion of the religious texts from the sacred scriptures with popular music tunes in the society such as highlife, reggae, *fuji*, *juju*, hip-hop, jazz, soul, *Ikwokirikwo*, etc” (12). Omibiyi (2007) believes secular religious music gained prominence during Christian socio-religious gatherings such as child naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, funerals and so on.

The second category of religious music, according to Omibiyi, comprises Islamic music, which consists of Quranic chants and recitations of Islamic liturgy during and after worship. With these assertions, it becomes obvious that Islamic music includes liturgical and non-liturgical music. Vidal (1993) supports this viewpoint when he opines that the Islamic liturgical music includes the call to prayer and intoning the prayers and sections from the Holy Quran. Vidal further believes that “non-liturgical music such as *Were*, *Waka*, *Sakara* and *Apala* developed outside the mosque especially for such occasions as the Id-el-Fitri, Id-el-Kabir and the weekly Salah” (1993:88).

### **2.2.2 Nigerian Art Music**

Scholars like Omibiyi (2007) and Omojola (1999) agree on Nigerian art music as the creativity of trained men and women in universities or conservatories either at home or abroad. Their training being in the act of writing and performing works that are Europe-based or works that employ a considerable degree of African musical elements that are conceived along the lines of European musical idioms are performed in an auditorium or hall, before an audience who is excluded from the performance.

Stephen Olusoji (2009) corroborates the fact that art music is a medium, a platform for the western-trained African musicologists to express and explore their creative ingenuity using the whole gamut of materials sourced from traditional African folk music vocal and instrumental rendition. Examples of musicians, who have practiced art music in Nigeria according to Omojola (1999), include the likes of Robert Coker, T.K.E Phillips, Fela Showande, Ayo Bankole, Lazarus Ekwueme, Akin Euba, Okechukwu Ndubuisi, Samuel Akpabot and Dayo Dedeke. Others include; Dan Agu, Offili Keri, Uzoma Asiji, Yemi Olaniyan, Sam Ojukwu, Bode Omojola, Ademola Adegbite, Chukwu Ezeokoli and Idolorr Emorubome (Adegbite, 2001). Another category includes Obidike M. Omibiyi, Anthony Merenini, Olusoji Stephen, Oikelome Albert, and others (Adegbite, 2001).

### **2.2.3 Traditional Music**

Traditional music according to Omibiyi (2007) is associated with traditional institutions and performed during festivals, ritual ceremonies and socio-cultural events in both rural and urban areas. Omojola (1999) also defines traditional music as musical practices that are largely indigenous to the various communities in Nigeria. He further classifies Nigerian traditional music into two types: religious and secular music. The first includes worship and ritual music, which are used to appease and invoke the spirits or the gods during traditional festivals and other sacred rites. The second includes all forms of music that are

played during social events such as naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, funerals, coronation of kings, installation of chiefs, and so on.

Despite the distinctiveness of types of music in Nigeria, there are striking similar features that bind them. For example, Nigerian societies depend on the linguistic and semantic factors of the different dialects of the Nigerian people to guide the melody in music compositions. Sam Akpabot (2005) asserts that melody in Ibibio is word-born; which means that melodies evolve from the rise and fall of the words in a sentence. Laz Ekwueme (1985) concurs that African languages are tonally inflected and for the true meaning of words to be retained when they are sung, the tune has to follow the rise and fall of the tones of the dialects.

Rhythm is the foundation or framework upon which African music is built (Munyaradzi and Zimidzi, 2012). This is so because of the support it gives to the melodies and the creative freedom it allows the African musicians (Albert Oikelome, 2005). Rhythm determines the creative ability of the musicians to create, organise and combine tones into acceptable rhythmic patterns that interlock and complement each other, thereby making musical statements that interpret the mind of the creator of the music. Munyaradzi and Zimidzi (2012) further assert that Africans employ complex rhythmic patterns (polyrhythm and cross-rhythm) at the same time. Polyrhythm involves the synchronization of two or more contradictory rhythms that do not immediately appear to emerge from the same source, or a reflection of the same musical element. If the contradiction is because of another music, it is known as cross-rhythm. Polyrhythm is not the same as irrational rhythms, as irrational rhythm may manifest in a single part. Polyrhythm requires at least two rhythms to be played at the same time, one of which is typically an irrational rhythm (Eugene Novotney, 1998).

Forms of music in Nigerian society according to Vidal (1993) include court music, ritual music, ceremonial music, occasional music, recreational music, panegyric music and theatrical music while forms in Nigerian music are categorised as, call and response

antiphonal form, through composed form, strophic form and strophic responsorial form. Oikelome (2005) adds cue cantour; call and response with declamation, solo-response with alternation as other types of forms in Nigerian music. Dan Agu (1999) adds mixed structural form (a combination of all other forms) as another type of form in music inherent in African/Nigerian music.

J.H.Kwabena Nketia (1974) believes African harmony is not the harmony of block chords built on triads or secondary chords and their inversions, or a system of progression based more on chords relationships rather than on triadic movement of the western music. Ekwueme (2004) and Nketia (1980) have postulated that Africans sing in parallel harmonies ranging from 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and even octave. In this line of thought, Vidal (1993) observes that the different African cultures and societies do not all apply these harmonic systems equally. Using Nigeria as a case study, he gives the examples of the Ijaw, Igbo and Efik people of Nigeria who deploy homophonic harmony in parallel thirds; the Ijesa and Ekiti people harmonise in parallel seconds with sporadic thirds and fifths in their harmonic system. While the Hausa, Nupe and Oyo-Yoruba people of Nigeria use monophony in unison and octave. Another type of harmonic pattern noticed with Africans is the harmony by overlapping (Ekwueme, 2004). Nketia (1980) describes 'harmony by overlapping' as the technique of beginning the cantor's part before the chorus response is ended or the cantor continuing after the chorus entry.

Furthermore, the texture of Nigerian/African music in comparison with music from other cultures is very distinct in nature. Several scholars have supported the argument that African music is percussive in nature. This percussive nature of African music, largely, has influenced the typology of musical instruments found in African societies. According to Curt Sachs (1937) and Nketia (1963), Munyaradzi and Zimidzi (2012), enormous varieties of musical instruments exist in Nigeria and they are grouped under aerophones (wind instruments), chordophones (stringed instruments), idiophones (instruments that produce

sounds only when their bodies are struck) and membranophones (drums).

### **2.3. Functionality of Music in Nigerian Culture**

Music as in other cultures is an essential element of life, tradition and religion of the African peoples and it plays important roles in their day-to-day lives. Ekwueme (2004) observes that one of the outstanding characteristics of African music in comparison to the music of other cultures is its functionality. Music is employed for recreation and entertainment during sports, weddings, funerals, ritual ceremonies, and most essentially for relaxation and aesthetic pleasure. Again, music helps to sustain the tempo of workers for greater output in the field; farmers, mechanics, hunters, weavers, dyers, bricklayers and so on use music as they work. Alan Merriam (1964: 212) is of the opinion that:

Music is said to be functional in the sense that it draws from a large proportion of the people of any given non-literate society and that almost everyone participates in it. Thus emphasizing the lack of basic distinction between “artist” and “Craftsman” or between “artist” and “audience”.

Another significant function of music in Nigerian culture is in the domain of social control (Oikelome, 2005). According to Oikelome, traditional music serves as a tool of regulation and social sanction among the people. In this instance, music serves as the channel through which evil actions and impunity are rebuked. For example, the Yoruba employ abusive music to lampoon unruly and self-centred people. Some songs equally caution on imminent decisions or consequences of corruption or diabolic action. Music equally performs the function of summoning the essence of deities for certain objectives. This view is validated by Omojola (1999: 50) who states that, “drums and rhythms function as a means of delineating the character of the individual gods and working their presence as well as of performing sacred texts associated with their worship.”

Like in most traditional African cultures, music in Nigeria is a vehicle for communication and oral tradition. On this, Sharon Omotoso (2009) asserts that music as a

cultural tool can be used to transmit knowledge, cultural values, emotions, feelings, and morals. Okafor and Ng'andu (2004), supporting this submission, corroborate that music as a traditional art can be used to pass information, which may be current, topical, historical or legendary. They believe that music transmits the received doctrines of the community, chronicles of heroes, wars fought and won, migrations of a people and the magnanimity of the ancestors. Omotoso (2009) further believes that music can be used to send and receive information and to accompany different forms of oral traditions such as folktales, storytelling, chants, singing and dancing.

Music therapy is now an aspect of music study that continually investigates the use of music in healing processes. Traditional Nigerian music functions effectively in health giving procedures. Scholars like Ekwueme and Aluede (2009) support his viewpoint. According to Aluede, (quoted by Osanebi, 2014), traditional Nigerian music is used as audio-analgesics to alleviate or lessen pain, lower blood pressure, heart rate and muscle tensions. Ekwueme (2004) also notes that traditional healers employ music in their arts as an aid to both physical and spiritual healing. Music performs a prominent function during significant communal and ritual ceremonies. The placement of music for worship surpasses the ordinary amusement of singing and dancing and this African custom gives credence to the predominant authorities that oversee the world. These authorities are solemnly participating in the various events of our daily lives. This explains the rationale for Harper's assertion, articulated by Oikelome (2005), that music needed to play both propitiatory and jubilant roles. She also notes that a spiritual function is to appease the supernatural powers while jubilant function is to celebrate a successful enterprise or give thanks for favours received.

## 2.4 Contexts of Musical Performances in Nigeria

Africans observe rites, such as childbirth, naming, initiation into adulthood and age grades, marriage ceremonies, funerals, celebration of the spirit beings, historical events, etc. Each of the aforementioned life cycles is associated with music. The various rites constitute the occasions and contexts where music is performed. Traditional Nigerian musical performances are generally designed for the people, considering the fact that they are largely communally rooted. Musical performances in Nigeria are the affirmation of an intrinsic connection with different expressions of the community's cultural practices out of which the nature of music and its creation by the citizens generally originate. In the opinion of Omojola (1999: 44), the organization of musical performances in traditional Nigerian societies occurs in both formal and informal contexts. On the formal level Omojola added:

Music is performed during religious festivals, in palaces and for royal festivities by professional guilds, to accompany rites of passage and at special offerings to the gods. On the informal level, music functions as an expressive tool of social and religious significance. Such informal circumstances include the utilitarian deployment of music to stimulate higher productivity at work places such as farms and blacksmith's shed.

From the above postulation, it is very evident that music functions in both the religious and social lifestyles of the Nigerian peoples as Bebey (1969:16) says, "Music is an integral part of the Africans from the cradle to the grave". Different scholars have validated the above statement. Micheal Osanebi (2014) observes that Africans are noted for the celebration of various aspects of their existence via music. Songs are rendered for social control and enculturation as illustrated in the Yoruba-alo, a musical dramatic forum for imparting moral values and transmitting facts of historical importance to younger generations (Omojola, 1999). Omatseye and Kingsley Emeriewen (2010) submit that, "the worship objects, the guttural sound of the masquerade, the tensioning of the worshippers and the symbolic rhythmic sounds of the drums in some ways functionally, yet artistically express the people's religious faith" (2010: 539). The different places where music functions also

constitute the various avenues where music is performed.

Apart from the aforementioned places where music is performed, Akin Euba (1989) noted that music could also be found in the palaces of kings. He gives the instance of a palace in Yorubaland where music is employed to wake up the kings in the morning, announce the presence of visitors, to warn the king and members of the palace of any danger. Another place where music is found is in the theatre where it is employed to sustain a theatrical formulation. In African total theatre conception, music presents relaxation; it is the substance of entertainment. It creates and underpins mood in plays. Samuel Johnson (1921:174) posits:

With the overwhelming potentials of music in attaining its aesthetic appeal, certain plays still use music wrongly, and as a consequence, hinder the music from giving the desired effect in the drama. He however suggests that it would be helpful to consider how music can be deployed in drama to attain the desired artistic impact.

## **2.5 Popular Theatre in Nigeria**

Nigeria, at the beginning of the twentieth century, experienced colonization and a desire to uphold its cultural identity. The Yoruba people considered it abominable that the missionaries ordered that Africans who changed to Christianity should put on western clothes and embrace European tradition. As a manner of rejecting these experiences, the Nigerian informed aristocrats started to take both governmental and patriotic positions. This situation indicated the resurrection of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre in 1945 introduced by Hubert Ogunde (1919-1990), an erstwhile schoolteacher, church organist and an ex-Nigerian police officer (Clark, 1979). He is believed to be the father of contemporary Nigerian theatre. Ododo asserts that, “he has been variously described as the 'trunk', 'father' 'doyen', 'starter' and founder of modern Nigerian Theatre practice by different scholars such as Clark, Barber and Ogundijo, Gumucio-Dragron and Beier, and so on” (2006: 41).

### **2.5.1 The Yoruba Travelling Theatre**

The Yoruba travelling theatre is a theatre in the Yoruba language, which emerged from the community of masquerades in the middle of the sixteenth century around the nineteenth century. From the moribund associates of the former travelling masquerade productions and long-established Yoruba fondness for music, dance, and ritual, a contemporary dramatic style developed. The Yoruba operatic theatre emerged from the “indigenous theatres” and the “rhapsodies” which brightened up the action of the separatist churches (the African churches and subsequently other “Aladura” or Apostolic churches) in Lagos in the course of the beginning period of the twentieth century. By the 1940s and 1950s, this theatre had grown into the popular theatre in Nigeria (Jeyifo 1984).

The theatre companies presented plays in school assembly rooms, borough assembly rooms, and on devised spaces out of doorways in several sections of the country. Karin Barber (2000) submits that, “the Yoruba popular theatre was capable of attracting audiences from across the full-socio-economic spectrum. They could fill university theatres as well as village halls” (204). Barber (2000) submits further that the Yoruba popular theatre incorporated the dramas of Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo, Oyin Adejobi, Moses Olaiya, Isola Ogunmola, Jimoh Aliu, Leke Ajao, Ojo Ladipo, Akin Ogungbe, Femi Phillips and several Yoruba operatic practitioners.

She posits further that the diversity of folk compositions of the Yoruba community in South Western Nigeria developed in the beginning of the 1940s. It emerged in mime, fascinating attires, cultural drumming, music and oral history targeted at indigenous spectators. It employed Nigerian subjects, from contemporary parody to ancient misadventure. Although, the plays were performed entirely in the Yoruba language, they could be understood and appreciated by speakers of other languages with the aid of translation.

### 2.5.2 Post-Independence Nigerian Theatre

In 1960, Nigeria attained independence and a different set of playwrights sprang up changing the direction of theatre to one of political and social significance. As previously indicated, during this period, theatre had been acknowledged as a specialized venture that does not depend on religion to survive. It did not depend on the churches for its finance or content. During this time, so many companies, particularly, of practitioners like Wole Soyinka, J.P Clark and Ola Rotimi undertook serious business in the campaign for the consolidation of a genuinely Nigerian theatrical practice (Azeez). They wrote and performed plays that focused on issues ranging from repositioning Nigeria, Nigerian cultural rejuvenation and identity redefinition. Their theatrical works revolved around the socio-cultural emancipation of Nigeria. They at their individual levels contributed immensely to the establishment of the departments of theatre studies in Nigerian universities.

These dramatists, headed by Wole Soyinka who had just come back from Leeds University, United Kingdom, perceived beforehand the dishonesty and self-centeredness of the new crop of administrators. Saint Gbilekaa (1997: 21) corroborates the above statement, also observing that, “the return of Soyinka to Nigeria in 1960 and the subsequent production of *A Dance of the Forests* to mark Nigeria's Independence stepped up theatrical activities.” The consciousness and passionate obligation to caution the politicians is incorporated symbolically in Soyinka's play. In this play, he compares the country to an *abiku* (spirit child) whose bearing and cause is vague; it is fascinating that in spite of their ethnic distinctions, a different writer of this era and Soyinka's peer, J.P Clark, equally wrote *the Raft* (1961) a play that examines the political purposelessness of the developing nation.

Hubert Ogunde was preoccupied with the political situation in the country, particularly the confusion involving Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his second in command, Chief S.L Akintola; his strong political declaration and reproach of Akintola's administration with his song "Yoruba Ronu" (Reflect Yoruba People!) culminated in the proscription of his

company by the Akintola administration of Western Nigeria. According to Egun Clark (1979: 389):

Ogunde's aim in composing Yoruba Ronu was to ask Yoruba people to unite once again to become one of the most powerful and prosperous groups in Nigeria. Given the political atmosphere of that period, the recording of the song became immensely popular.

Moreover, some literary writers had started to deploy their intellectual resources in their plays. Soyinka and Clark again occupy a significant space in this regard. While Clark returned to his Ijaw culture, Soyinka, naturally, examined the Yoruba culture and custom in his drama. As already indicated, two complementary conventions were present, juxtaposing the literary practice. Owing to the fact that these two conventions were not opposed to one another, a few literary artists, professionals and commentators pronounced that they wanted to observe how the two practices could gain from each other.

Consequently, one or two educated ones out of the popular theatre culture professionals such as Kola Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo were introduced into the University of Ibadan to work with their university colleagues. This venture resulted in profound and ingenious artistic expressions such as Kola Ogunmola's *Palmwine Drinkard*, which was reconstructed, for example, from the novel of a similar title by Amos Tutuola. Adedeji and Ekwuazi (1998: 51) inform: "Ogunmola did the adaptation and composed the lyrics but the production was designed and directed by Demas Nwoko under the supervision of Geoffrey Axworthy, the Director of the School of Drama".

## **2.6 Music in Nigerian Drama and Theatre**

Scholars such as Ogunba (1966), Adedeji (1978), and more recently Barber (2000) have written about the Yoruba Operatic Theatre or Popular Travelling Theatre and commented on the use of music in the performances of the theatre troupes. Citing the "opening glee" or "entrance song", which usually opens each performance by these troupes as a device, clearly indicates that the whole performances are in the mould of an "opera".

Expatriating on the use of music in the popular theatre tradition as embodied in the works of Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Oyin Adejobi, Isola Ogunsola and others. Ayo Akinwale (1997: 254) informs that:

Their opening and closing glees, contained songs that philosophically touched on the socio-political and economic lives of their huge audiences. Music was also used in the productions to comment on a passing action or to announce what to expect next. Such music is both within the context and mood of the plays. Their music is thus used to put the audience and the actors in a spiritual experience, which both performers and audience live to remember for a long time.

However, in Ogunba and Irele (1978: 43), Joel Adedeji provides a comprehensive explanation with regard to the essence of the chorus in Yoruba Travelling Theatre, where he submits that:

The chorus, called Akunyungba, was an essential part of the performance. During the early part of the theatre when the masque-dramaturge was yet another officer at the court, the chorus was composed mainly of the women of the palace. Later when the theatre moved out of court circles and the troupe had to travel about entertaining the public, the masque-dramaturge had to rely on his younger actors to play the chorus, sometimes his wives and spectators joined in, especially when the action involved a particular song that was familiar to them. The chief function of the chorus was to provide the “song element” which was invariably part of the plot.

Within this scope of understanding, Osita Okagbue (2007: 31) also draws attention to the significance of music and dance in African theatre in his work, *African Theatres and Performances*, by citing the examples of the Bori cult:

... horses, musicians and gods are the key actors of the Bori cult. The musicians are professionals whose function is to preserve much of the oral tradition of the cult art, to invoke the spirit with special songs during possession trance performances.

Okagbue's submission encapsulates the spontaneity and participatory nature of African theatre, connecting the overflow of powerful emotion in the process of ritual enactment of which music and dance are centrally positioned as a vehicle. To support this view, Ugolo (1997: 180) in his analysis of music in Nigerian Dance performance draws awareness to the

fact that music and dance in traditional Nigerian societies happen as religious (ritual) and social (ceremonial) events. Therefore, to some extent, dance is a replication of the social dynamics of music. He however emphasises that:

Controversy exists as to the relationship between the art of dance and the art of music. One school of thought believes that music gave rise to dance, that is, dance cannot exist without music. Another school of thought believes on the contrary, that dance gave birth to music. A third school of thought takes a middle line viewpoint that is seeing dance and music existing in a symbiotic relationship.

To rationalise the interrelationship between music and dance in performance, Dapo Adelugba sheds some light noting that: “Music often accompanies dance but it is not specifically an African phenomenon, although the co-existence may be seen as stronger and more intimate in the African context” (qtd in Ugolo, 1997: 181). Although music, dance and drama that are mutually recognised as performing arts, share some conventional characteristics such as the rich cultural aptitudes, considerable prominence on empirical illustration and enactment for a large audience, “music is the king and the nucleus of the performing arts. On its own, it is perfect with or without words. Without music there is nothing to dance to; without music, drama is incomplete” (Adelugba qtd in Ugolo, 1997:165). Olu Obafemi (2006: 151) clearly elucidated in his observation of the function of music in Soyinka’s theatre stating thus:

The mainstay of Soyinka’s play is dance and music employed in conjunction with enactments and representations of events and actions in the past and present lives of his protagonists. So even as his dialogue are carried out in a foreign language and he employs the theatrical models of the west, he retains the traditional African concept of theatre as a comprehensive total and celebratory experience in which all the arts integrate. Examples of the fusion of rhetoric (dialogue) with musical as well as kinetic arts abound in Soyinka’s play.

In consonance with Obafemi’s argument, K.E Senanu (1980: 77) in his essay, “Thoughts on Creating the Popular Theatre”, analyses the significance of music and dance as an expressive art form in Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* this way:

For our concern with those nodal points of the plot, those moments in the unfolding action, when speech cannot adequately express what the characters are undergoing and when dance, the bodily movement to music, objectifies the life of the play. There are four of such moments in the course of the play; the first is at the end of the morning scene when Sidi celebrates her renowned beauty, the second, of the night scene, when Sadiku performs the spell, followed by a dance expressing her supposed emasculation of the Baale, the third movement effectively demonstrates his prowess and anticipates his seduction of Sidi. The final movement is the dance which celebrates the cuckolding of Lakunle and the marriage of Sidi and the Baale.

In the same vein, Michael Etherton (1982) comments on the structure of songs in *Opera Wonyosi* by Wole Soyinka, a play modelled on two European Plays; Bertolt Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper (The Three Penny Opera)* (1930) which itself was a twentieth Century version of a play composed exactly two hundred years before, that is, John Gay's *Beggars Opera* (1728). Both titles, like Soyinka's, are ironical and reflect the fact that both plays were critical of their societies. Etherton (1982: 273) observes that:

Part of the reason for the success of both plays is the music. Gay's play was a new art form when it first appeared; a Ballad opera. That is to say the play was not (sic) full opera in which every word was sung. The songs of *The Three Penny Opera* have had a profound appeal for audiences. The opening song, 'Mack the knife', later popularized by Louis Armstrong's rendering of it is well known in its own right and Soyinka uses it as the opening song for *Opera Wonyosi*, with words adapted to the Nigerian situation.

Etherton's thoughts on the structure of songs in Soyinka's *Opera Wonyosi* is in line with Meki Nzewi (1981: 207) who in his investigation of the essentials of the indigenous drama as against 'dry theatre' remarks:

If one ever dares to observe that drama unincorporated with music and dance is alien to the theatrical sensibilities of the un-alienated Nigerian of any ethnic background, the chances are that he would be hounded, branded and written off as heretic by our core of Euro-American- oriented literary dramatists and stage critics. But the truth remains that the stage presentation not structured to, sequenced by, vetted through or tipped with music and dance or stylized movement is alien to the inherent Nigerian theatre sensibility.

This also connects evidently with Bode Osanyin's opinion on the function of music and dance in African total theatre, which he describes as serving more than mere melody and gymnastics respectively. It is an expression of the soul. The physical is embedded in the immaterial. Both must roll together in one artistic whole. As it is difficult to separate dialogue from speech, or mime from dance, so it is futile to disassociate chants from songs. The pulsating worm-like dance of Tiv and the Madinka outwit all mechanical counting of the beats and footsteps (2007).

Every art brings forth its fruits to this great harvest called the theatre. All arts eventually subsume into theatre arts where they become Living Arts. Further exploring the African total theatrical tradition with regard to the role of music, Samuel Akpabot (1986: 1) again writes:

Unlike western music, African music is rather difficult to compartmentalize. The same music statement could as validly be made about the performances of Charley Patton, a fact that has contributed to the multiplicity of posthumous critical impressions of him. The difficulties of attempting to compartmentalize African traditional music become apparent when one considers the concepts of total theatre, which allows that in many traditional settings throughout sub-Saharan Africa, music seldom exist (sic) in isolation from other modes of expression.

Another writer who deploys the components of African cultural tradition through his use of music, myth, dance and history is Femi Osofisan. However, the dominant tendency in the criticism of his theatre has been the alignment of his dramatic vision with Marxist revolutionary aesthetics. Osofisan and other writers of the generation after Wole Soyinka have been variously described in Olu Obafemi's book *Revolutionary Aesthetics in Recent Nigerian Theatre* (1982) as 'Marxist', 'Socialists Militants', 'leftist's and Brechtian aesthetics in reference to their materialist leanings and ideological convictions.

The implication of this critical approach is that not enough attention is often given to the arts of the theatre, such as music in the manner in which it is utilized by these dramatists in their works. Olu Obafemi (1982) and later in the third chapter of his book *Contemporary*

*Nigerian Theatre: Cultural Heritage and Social Vision* (1996), gives a critical appraisal of these socialist writers with very little information on the other aspects of their creative vision, such as their utilization of other arts (music specifically) of the theatre to realise their goals. Even in a book length appraisal such as Muyiwa Awodiya's *The Drama of Osofisan: A Critical Perspective* (1995), Osofisan's extensive use of music as part of his dramaturgy is given only a passing acknowledgement. In this full-length study, the author considers music as only tangential to African tradition and culture, which Osofisan's work embodies. Although a whole chapter is devoted to a study of music and song in his theatre, the analysis carried out can hardly be described as adequate. Music is treated merely as an appendage to the playwright's thematic preoccupation. One would expect a different analytical approach, perhaps one that investigates the aesthetics, the significance, and the production of meaning in the songs through the analysis of the song text as well as the accompanying dramatic actions. This is a significant objective of this study.

A more recent study of Osofisan's theatre and drama by Sandra Richards entitled, *Ancient Songs Set Ablaze: The Theatre of Femi Osofisan* (1995) devotes more space to music in Osofisan's dramaturgy. The only limitation of this extended study is that music is treated as an aspect of the cultural matrix in which the study is conducted. Music is not regarded as a narrative device in its own right; rather, it is treated as a parenthesis of form and technique in Osofisan's dramaturgy. The inadequate attention given to music in Nigerian theatre is not limited to these texts. Most of the books and essays written about African music are written from an ethnomusicological perspective.

This had been the trend since the publication in 1964 of Alan Merriam's *The Anthropology of Music*, which introduces the study of music, and culture in black Africa. Writers such as Euba (1969) and Nketia (1974) discuss music in Africa mostly from a sociological perspective. None of these writers considers music to be of any narrative

importance in theatrical productions. In *Music in Africa: Facts and Illusions* (2002), edited by Emurobome Idolor, music is considered from diverse perspectives by various scholars in the field, but without them paying sustained attention to the intrinsic manner in which the playwrights engage music as distinctive art form.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

As a foreground to the subject matter of this study, this chapter engages the perspectives of scholars on the meaning, forms and functions of music. It explores specialists' opinions about the nature and characteristics of music in Nigerian culture. It itemises types of music in Nigerian culture as religious, arts and traditional music. It discusses the functions of music in Nigerian culture, the content and context of musical practices in Nigeria. It examines musical practices in the Nigerian popular theatre, Alarinjo theatre and the post-independent theatre within the context of musical practice.

This review of musical performances in Nigerian culture reveals music as an integral part of Nigerian life. Music features in every facet of Nigerian life and its theatre naturally reflects the musical realities. It becomes apparent that music in Nigeria transcends the realms of entertainment. It is used to instruct, inform, educate, as a form of worship and for emotional and psychological stability. Music is therefore enshrined in the fabric of Nigerian life. This chapter therefore prepares the ground for the findings and conclusion of this study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### YORUBA CULTURE, MUSIC AND THEATRE

#### 3.1 Introduction

The Yoruba people are found in several locations along the West African coast, especially Nigeria, Togo and the Republic of Benin. Because of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, they are also found in several parts of the world, especially in the Caribbean Islands, United States and Brazil, among others (Paul Lovejoy, 2003). Yoruba people have a rich oral tradition, vibrant culture and laudable history that date back to the period before 1300. They also lay claim to a rich artistic heritage, being the custodians of such things as naturalistic terracotta, stone, bronze and brass sculpture traditions, some of which archaeological findings date around A.D 1100 (Johnson, 1921).

In addition, the Yoruba are known to be makers and lovers of music, an expressive phenomenon that permeates every facet of their existence. However, in contrast to political multiplicity, as reflected by sub-cultures such as Oyo, Egba, Ijebu, Ife, Egbado, Ekiti, Ijesha, among several others, the Yoruba lay claim to music as a common spiritual heritage as can be seen in their culture— for instance, observance of rites of passage such as birth, puberty, marital and burial. Fundamentally, all these rites have particular music that are identified with them. Marriages are incomplete in Yoruba land without “Ekun Iyawo”, (the Bride’s Poetry/Song) in which a bride musically takes leave of her parents as she prepares to join her husband. The mother in a kind of “Call and Response” manner responds to the bride, praying, encouraging and admonishing her in preparation for her new life. This poetry/song is an integral part of the marital rite.

Various songs are rendered traditionally to usher in a newborn baby into the world of the living, particularly during naming ceremonies. One that readily comes to mind is “Kekere

jojolo” (Gorgeous Newborn). This song welcomes the newborn with joy and indicates the fact that growth commences right from birth and that the day a child is born, is when it starts the steady journey to adulthood. The case is not any different from the burial ceremony where different types of songs set the mood of the event. The point being made here is that the Yoruba people are culturally musical and have different music for different aspects of life.

### **3.2 Overview of the History of the Yoruba**

Traditionally, the Yoruba people are majorly agrarian and in addition to agriculture practice several other occupations, including weaving, dyeing, smithy, leatherwork, carving, sculpting, pottery and trade. They are the largest ethnic group in the Western zone, with a number of dialects and sub-groups earlier mentioned, which originally had no common or general name for themselves, each section regarding itself as a distinct nationality. However, the term “Yoruba” was the Hausa designation for the Oyo dialect speakers only, and it was only from the nineteenth century that it came to be extended to the other groups by the Christian missionaries (Fadipe, 1970).

The various Yoruba-speaking groups share a common tradition of origin from Ile Ife. Oduduwa is generally regarded as the progenitor of the Yoruba (Johnson, 1921). According to this version, Oduduwa was the son of Lamurudu, the king of Mecca. He relapsed from the Islamic faith into paganism, and in the crisis, which this action subsequently provoked, Lamurudu was killed and Oduduwa ejected from the state. Leaving Mecca with his body of supporters, Oduduwa moved westwards, and at the end of a ninety-day sojourn arrived at Ile Ife where he chose to settle. Seven of his grandsons subsequently led migrations out of Ile Ife to begin the population of the Yoruba nation. One of them, Oranmiyan often abbreviated as Oranyan founded the Oyo Kingdom. It has, however, been argued that this story of Middle-Eastern origins is a re-modified version of Muhammad Bello’s account that the ancestors of the Yoruba, that is Oyo, were a negroid race rejected from the Middle East (Law, 1984).

Law further submits that a number of kingdoms developed among the Yoruba. The notable ones include Ife, Oyo, Ijebu, Owo, Ondo and those of the Ekiti areas. Oyo was the largest and most powerful of all the kingdoms. The Oyo king was titled Alaafin. The kingdom reached the zenith of its power under the reign of Alaafin Abiodun (c.1774--c.1789). His successor, Awole (c.1789--c.1796) was confronted with a rebellion by some of the provincial rulers of the kingdom, notably Afonja of Ilorin.

The crisis eventually led to the collapse of the state. Significant historical account has it that even after the royal seat of power had moved to Oyo from Ile Ife, the Yoruba to this day continue to regard the Ooni (monarch) of Ife as their spiritual father. Even though there are no specific dates in history when Oduduwa migrated to Ile Ife, there are oral accounts by historians. Notably is Saburi Biobaku (1955) who attests to the fact that by the arrival on the coast of the first Portuguese explorers in the fifteenth century, the Yoruba had already established political organization in several major and minor urban centres. With trade and other proselytizing activities, especially the influence of the Hausa/Fulani in the North and by Europe through the Atlantic Ocean, documentation of Yoruba culture and musical practices were made by the explorers, missionaries and traders.

### **3.2.1 The Yoruba People's Language**

The language of the people is also called Yoruba and, like many African languages, it is a tonal language, which intimately interacts with music, thereby creating a kind of close-knit relationship between sound and meaning. Significantly, too, there is a preoccupation with vowels, that is, speech sounds produced with the vocal tract open and capable of sustaining tones, a fact underlined by the nature of all Yoruba nouns beginning with a vowel and all Yoruba words ending with a vowel, with the exception of the voiced consonant "n". There is also the adoption of musical instruments as speech surrogates, which the people do

not regard as merely speech but as music in its own right. Samuel Johnson (1921: 121) explains this as part of Yoruba culture in the sense that:

Musicians also have first to learn how to manufacture the instruments they have to perform upon [...] having learnt how to make their instruments, they then begin to learn how to “speak” with them, an operation to which the Yoruba language readily lends itself, as it consists chiefly in the modulation of the voice; this the instruments try to emulate.

Sowande (1967) is of the view that, Yoruba words could have several meanings. This is determined by the tonal inflections used by the speakers, who demonstrate their ability to enunciate the vowel sounds a,e,e,i,o,o,u along a continuum of tonal levels classified into high, mid and low represented by diacritic marks, namely, acute accent for high (  $\acute{\text{}}$  ), grave accent for low (  $\grave{\text{}}$  ) while mid tones ( - ) are not marked. These tone levels serve as the syntax of word, phrase and sentence formation. The following could show examples of such variation in sounds and meaning:

<u>IGBA</u>		
Igba	(low low)	Time
Igba	(low mid)	Garden egg (fruit)
Igba	(mid mid)	Numerical figure; 200
Igba	(mid high)	Calabash/Wares

There is an important need to understand this of the Yoruba words so as not to mean different things while trying to say another. Fela Sowande (1967: 260) provides a classic example of such misinterpretation in his reference to the popular Christian hymn, “O Come all ye Faithful” in Yoruba meaning “Wa eyin olooto”, but set to the German tune *Adeste Fidelis* and translated by the missionaries instead to mean “Dig up palm kernel, you that urinate.”



Figure 1 : Tonal Notation of “O Come all ye Faithful”

Sound and meaning are of equal importance to the Yoruba people. Indeed, a strong relationship exists between speech melody and song melody, as well as sound and meaning in Yoruba practice. Euba, a distinguished musicologist notes the distinctions between Yoruba sound and chant forms. According to him, chants are heightened speech, free rhythm and unaccompanied, while songs have pitches that are more discrete, are in strict rhythm and accompanied with instruments and dance (1989). Perhaps this is why some anthropologists, such as Gerhard Kubik (2005: 133), have tended to provide the understanding that the verbal arts of the Yoruba should be considered as musico-linguistic registers along a non-hierarchical continuum of vocal expression. He observes that taxonomy and categorization of literary and musical genres in Yoruba generally go across that in Western languages.

Even the paramount terms “music’ and “oral literature” are no less vexing. In the Yoruba language, there is no comparable categorization and these realms are, in fact, so intimately connected that any evaluation of Yoruba material within the framework of such categories can easily lead the student away from reality.

Considering both the linguistic formulae of the Yoruba language/speech and its stylistic registers, one also finds such relationship between tonal intensity and manipulation, mixed with rhythmic modulation. This generates a continuum of verbal expressive modes with varying degrees of psychic and social significance, on one hand, and, on the other hand, the link with their ritualistic or social usages through which the Yoruba interact with one another and with their cosmos. Such variations include the *rara*, *ege* and *ewi* with a more social usage and the *ijala*, the chants of the hunters and devotees of Ogun, *ofo* the incantations of priests and *esa/iwi egungun*, the poetry of the *Egungun* cult with their restricted ritual functions. Soyinka explains, that “it is ‘unmusical’ to separate Yoruba musical form from myth and poetry (because) the nature of Yoruba music is intensely the nature of its language and poetry, highly-charged, symbolic, and myth-embryonic” (133).

Ethnomusicologists have also attempted providing understanding of the intricate relationship between the two. Particularly in relation to the Yoruba sonic experience, since

the people regard sound as meaning. Sowande (1967: 256) a distinguished music scholar explains:

Nigerian traditional man would tell us that Sound was evocative; not that it 'could' be, but that by its very nature it was evocative; he would point to its "words of power" or his "mantras", which he has used time and again to produce tangible results; if he happens to be Yoruba, he would refer to those terrible vocal forms handed to him by his forefathers, such as the *Asan*, the *Ogede*, or the *Ofo*, patterns of Pure Sound, the likes of which Elisha used in the Bible to call down fire on the soldiers sent to arrest him, or Jesus used to command the storm to be still. Nigerian traditional man knew—at least in Yoruba land---that through the medium of Sound, he could evoke and handle Psychic Forces of tremendous potencies, which could be directed according to his purpose. This knowledge is a product of his practical experience.

In terms of linguistic content, there are the Yoruba verbal arts drawn from a specialized corpus, especially their wider usage being their fundamental feature. In form, they are defined by various highly stylized methods of vocal production as well as knowledge of a textual corpus. This is acquired through long and intense training; with vocal style peculiar to each indicated by the verb prefixing it, such as *keewi*, that is to *declaim*; *pe ofo*, that is to *call* or *invoke ofo*; *sun ijala*, that is, to *chant ijala* etc. In this instance too, one could consider other forms considered together as poetry. They are musical in tone, and at the level of functioning as linguistic signifiers, require the use of particular tone of voice in order to drive home the import of the message or statement contained in them. A professional Yoruba poet is usually endowed with special gifts and natural skill to "sing" and praise people, compose lyrics that will enchant, motivate and inspire to elicit responses ranging from the emotional, psychological and physical to the spiritual. He equally uses his skill to comment on social, political and cultural situations as they affect his community.

Euba (1989: 477) explains the interdependent relationship of music to art, as it is given credence by its popularity in other world cultures:

In many cultures of the world, song/poetry is a type of music distinguished from other types of music by its reliance upon literary texts; the literary material of song is essentially poetical and this is particularly true of the

Yoruba tradition. We have therefore in song an example of the poetic basis of Yoruba music. The relationship of poetry to music in the Yoruba tradition goes far beyond stylistic requirements of song. The total conception of Yoruba music is founded upon poetry.

We find such vivid examples in the praise-singer or *Akigbe* in Yoruba traditional society who, as an established poet and musician, praises the king and with his art evaluates the monarch's lofty as well as undesirable and imperious policies. He chronicles his temper, emotional state of mind, strength and achievements through elaborate and highly dramatic, often metaphoric language. Examples of the praise-singer's art are taken from the following plays: Lekan Balogun's *Olofin Ajaye: The Story of Lagos* and Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*.

#### Example One

Olofin Awoogunjoye  
Adimula Alade  
Oloko n'ile Isheri  
Iwaju oloko amaa s'owo  
Ehin oloko a s'ejigba ileke  
Ogedegede oloko a tan yebe yebe loju omi

#### **English Translation**

Owner of the palace  
who crossed Ogun River to become a chieftain  
Our saviour, our King  
Owner of a fleet of canoes at Isheri  
Who boasts of wealth in front?  
Apparel of honour at the back  
Splendour that glows and dazzles as the shining sunlight at sea.  
(Balogun, 2010: 16)

It can be noted that in this case, the king's lineage's panegyric becomes subsumed in his own personal praise poetry meant to highlight the extent of his wealth. This underlines Vidal's (1993: 56) assertion that such rendition "describes the ancestors of a person, their virtue, as well as strengths and weaknesses against the background of references to the scenery and characteristics of the town and inhabitants." This is because Africans recognize the fact that life is a continuum, and that, as Osita Okagbue (2007: 146) explains, the

“ancestors are important in the African universe”, being among other things the “basis of moral and legal thought.”

Example Two:

Oba ni f'epo inu ebo rari  
Orisa l'oba  
Oba nii f'epo inu ebo r'awuje  
Orisa l'oba

English Translation

None but the King  
Takes oil from the crossroads and rubs his *awuje*  
The King is God  
(Soyinka, 1967: 13).

Oba Sarumi's praise-song from the Hemlock scene pays compliment to the power and magnificence of the king as a special being, akin to a god, among his subjects. Significantly, the rendition is fervently enhanced through accompaniment by the royal drum, *gbedu* and other musical instruments. Further, the *Akigbe* in keeping with the dictates of his art also narrates events such as war, recounts tales, myth and legend mixed with philosophy through performance of poetic songs. He represents the collective conscience and memory of the people. There are equally female praise-singers, mostly known as *Akunyungba* (similar to the Greek Chorus) in Oyo (Yoruba province), whose performance can only take place in the palace courtyard or inner chambers unlike their male counterparts who perform everywhere.

These types of poetic songs provide more than just entertainment. They serve both utilitarian and aesthetic functions. They can either be used for social control, to protest injustices, to condemn and ridicule people with cruel and overbearing tendencies. They are also used to warn those who have gone against established norms and values as well as to extol virtuous deeds. Some other examples include *rara*, a long narrative poetry performed by minstrels, *Ifa* seen not as the god of divinity but according to Obafemi (1996:20) as

“divinatory poetry that exists in various principal figures, *odus*, which are articulated by *Ifa* priests, called *babalawo*, to obtain divine messages.” The case of *iyereifa* (as it is rightly referred to) is particularly an interesting one. Aside poetry, the rendition also functions in several ways, namely as praise, invocation and ritual expression, which has a deep spiritual undertone. This following example will suffice:

Ifa o gbo,  
Omo Enire, omo enire  
Omo ejo meji tii sare ganranganran lori erewe  
Akere f’inu s’ogbon,  
Akoniloran bii yekan eni

**English Translation**

Listen, O Ifa!  
You, the son of Enire  
The son of Enire  
You the son of two snakes that dart about over leaves  
You the small person with a mind full of wisdom  
You are the giver of wisdom and brotherly counsel  
(Wande, 1976: 14).

There are also *ofo* (incantatory poetry recited to cast magical spells); *epe* (malediction poetry) recited to curse; *ebe* (propitiation); *iwure* (supplicatory blessings); *iba* (homage) often performed to upgrade the well-being of the people; *ijala* (hunters’ chants); *iwi/esa egungun* (ancestral masquerade chants) usually drawn from the memoirs of the masquerades cults, features of environment and allegorical incidents; and *ekuniyawo* (bride’s lament) poetry chanted by the bride on her wedding day to express joy as she moves to her husband’s house and her sadness at leaving her parents. It comes in the form of a dirge. *Ijala* is particularly interesting as a form of musical/poetic rendition performed during such occasions as the nightly gathering of hunters, hunting expedition and the other form, *Iremoje*, as the final rite of passage for their departed members and so on.

Still, within this level of signifying, the Yoruba when speaking may use a particular tone to drive home a point or message. For example, there are *owe* and *gbolohun*, usually

short and pithy, and there is *itan*, simply translated as history/tale which are more elaborate forms conveying special messages with their direct implications on the society, through shaping attitudes and values of both the individual and community as a whole. Another of this form is *Oriki*, of which the *Akigbe's* art can be grouped, which though historical in content, functions more in the context of praise/panegyric. Vidal (2012: 56) is also of the opinion that *Oriki* serves to connect the individual to his ancestors and environment through special descriptive phrases.

The tonality of the language does a lot in its appreciation, both as linguistic signifier and in their meaning as exemplified in *Alaafin Kanran* earlier mentioned. The *Oriki* is essentially crafted through juxtapositions and metaphors, which are primarily meant to lift the king's spirit and draw attention to the awesomeness of his person.

Oba to-o-to bi aro o, mo le'mi o p'eri Oba

Kabiyesi oti g'oke odo kafara to ja  
 Yagboyaaju,  
 Aja bi'iji wolu  
 Apata rapata rapata  
 T'apa oni papa oka  
 Kaka firi ekun patako Ekun  
 Kakaaka nii kaja lenu  
 Jawon laya, jawon londe  
 Kannakanna ako oka ti nforija, ti nfiruja.

English Translation

Hail, our royal King  
 Your Highness, plots you did survive, even before they are hatched  
 The royal storm, that swoops into town like a whirlwind  
 The mighty hill beyond the grasp of forest humblers  
 The ferocious lion never a match for ambitious dogs  
 Terror and fear in the hearts of detractors  
 The boa constrictor, deadly at the head and the tail  
 (Balogun, 2005:15).

The fact also remains that, in some cases Yoruba spoken expressions are musical in nature when they interface with music. This underscores an earlier submission that the Yoruba

verbal art, by nature possesses musico-linguistic registers of vocal expressions, which are neither independent nor self-contained, but interact fluidly with one another in various degrees and stages.

### **3.3 The Yoruba Culture**

The sense of community and humane living are highly cherished values of traditional African life, to which the Yoruba belong. This statement remains true in spite of the apparent disarray in the experience of modern politics and brutal internecine wars in many parts of the continent. For the Yoruba, the community is sacred, rather than secular, and surrounded by several religious forms and symbols. The individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He or she owes existence to other people, including those of past generations and his or her contemporaries. The community is much more than simply a social grouping of people bound together by reasons of natural origin and/or deep common interests and values. It is both a society as well as a unity of the visible and the invisible worlds: the world of the living, of the ancestors and the unborn.

This understanding asserts the background of the people's universe, in whatever way it is conceived. These hues of worship no doubt refer to the various means of apprehending the world, averting disaster and ensuring continued existence in peace and abundance that is achieved through religious and ritual observance. Osofisan (2001) sees this "state of being" in Yoruba society by finding semblance for it in the Greek environment. His opinion also helps to foreground the universality of nature that is expressed in ritual observance.

In conceptualising this world that is at once hostile and needed to be "tamed" and, at the same time abundantly enriched to provide everything needed to survive, certain mechanisms are developed by the Yoruba, first to make sense of the occurrences in their world and second, to live harmoniously within the cosmology, as part and parcel of that

specific creation. One valid form is ritual. La Fontaine (1972: 3) defines ritual as “any symbolic action in relation to the sacred.” It is a belief system which categorizes actions into the realm of the sacred and the mundane in order to establish rules for standardized behaviour, or what Hope Eghagha (1992: 11) has described as “any practice regularized in order to provide rules for sacred purposes.”

Myth is another of such mechanisms of understanding how Yoruba musical culture developed. Several definitions of myth abound, but the one that fits into this discussion is that myths are narratives or stories, which are handed down from one past generation to another encapsulating the early beliefs of a race or tribe. The fact that it is found in all societies and cultures makes myth a universal phenomenon. Eghagha (1992: 32) argues, “The language of myth is ritual. This language is esoteric and serves as the extension of symbolic actions.” These symbolic actions, he further argues, are found in rituals and they express beliefs and myths as an expression of external world and subjective projections of the community, thus foregrounding the fact that myth, symbols and rituals share a symbiotic relationship; that is, one depending on the other in order to reinforce itself. This line of argument is held with the fact that ritual, with myth as its essence, especially among the Yoruba, incorporates incantations and chants, songs, dances and actions to strengthen the belief in the presence and in the influence of the supernatural. It certainly embodies elements of theatre and actual drama, Peju Layiwola and Kunle Baiyere (2007: 27) argue that ritual is “imbued with an irreversible sequence, a plot and a generative structure associated with all performance genres.” However, it is to Turner (1982:81) that we shall turn for a comprehensive and apt description of ritual as a:

... cross-cultural expression, a synchronization of many performative genres, and is often ordered by dramatic structure, a plot, frequently involving sacrifice or self-sacrifice, which energizes and gives emotional colouring to the interdependent communicative codes which express in manifold ways the meaning inherent in the dramatic *leitmotiv*. In so far as it is “dramatic”,

ritual contains a distanced and generalized reduplication of the agonistic process of the social drama. Ritual, therefore, is not “threadbare” but “richly textured” by virtue of its varied interweavings of the productions of mind and senses.

To the Yoruba, ritual ceremonies provide a rich and varied context for dramatic and theatrical performances. Though the pattern of action does not tell a story, it however allows the people to reassert the essence of their faith in *symbolic* terms. As such, rituals “guarantee and promote constant re-activation of the divine in man” (Ibitokun, 1995: 22). Rituals serve as the means through which the people reach out to their gods to ward off evils, mishaps, death or other untowards occurrences. Just as the language of myth is ritual, the language of ritual is music. The efficacy of Yoruba ritual music is contained in its underlying communal aesthetics, as a tool by which deities are invoked, and votaries enter into a state of trance or possession and one comes in contact with the “possessed lyricist” who “speaks, sings and dances in authentic archetypal images from within the abyss” (Soyinka, 1976: 30).

### 3.4 Music in Yoruba Culture

Music is a significant part of Yoruba cultural heritage. It is a common practice to give an infant, on the day of its naming, an *oriki* - a form of panegyric especially composed - a salutary signature, which remains with the child for the rest of his/her life, among other praise, names (Adegbite, 2001:1). This is usually drawn from the family or lineage. Several of such descriptive names often characteristically encapsulate the history, myth or legend, or even significant events in the lives of the child's ancestral line. Through music, individuals or groups express the spirit of love, joy, co-operation and oneness, and perform in unity as part of their culture. Akpabot (2005: 91) explains "this" culture as "a way of thinking, feeling and believing in any given society" and that "one method of finding out about the culture of a people is to examine how they conceptualize their music."

As already indicated in the previous chapter, during festivals and ceremonies, music provides an excellent means of expression. Among the Yoruba, music is performed in connection with aspects of communal life such as birth, death, calendar festivals, religious rituals, marriages, initiation ceremonies, funerals, installations, coronations and other social functions.

The Yoruba exhibit differences in taste, method of music and music making. They have no indigenous musical notation since music is an oral process. Okwilagwe (2002:175) observes that their music "derives its origin and versatility from the oral traditions or folklore of the different groups which make up the people." Musical ceremonies are thus performed for the deities such as *Sango* (god of thunder), *Ogun* (god of war/iron), *Obatala* (god of creation), *Oya*, *Ifa* (oracular divinity), *Yemoja* and many others. Music is integrated with life and appropriate music accompanies almost every stage of their existence. Professional itinerant musicians such as minstrels, bards, chanters etc. entertain, and amuse members of the communities with vocal and instrumental music such as *rara*, *ege*, *esa*, *ijala*, *iyere*, *ogede*,

*alamo, bata, dundun, igbin, bembe, sekere, agogo and dadakuada* (Vidal, 2012: 320). The various rituals, kinship activities and ceremonies associated with divinities require music for effective functioning. Adegbite (1993: 6) notes that the “annual festivals afford the opportunity to hear various types of music performed in traditional Yoruba culture, either vocally with or without instrumental accompaniment or purely instrumental music such as *Bata, Ipese, Igbin* and *dundun*.”

In a context similar to this, Nzewi (1981:4) also stresses, “A deity or spirit has its own special folk music which depicts its character and which can summon its presence. The medium is to mime the character of the possessing deity or spirit, through dances or dance-drama.” Drums in Yoruba religious ceremonies summon ancestral spirits. Singers frequently alternate between the different vocal patterns in musical renditions such as *Orisa pipe, esa*, or *iwi*, with yielding, overlapping call and response, ululations, singing out interjections, interlocking and complex rhythmic figures. The devotees are usually actively involved in different musical skills, as there were no drums, no spirits and no rituals. Music in this case serves as a good background for the image of the gods or spirits that are being invoked. Thus, devotees chant the praises that depict the characteristics and benevolence of the divinities. However, in some other cases, they sing dirges and festival songs, funeral and ritual songs in honour of the dead or the ancestors. Spirits are summoned with music that spurs devotees to a state of ecstasy. Olukoju (1987: 129) explains that “among the Yoruba, the words of the songs and chants in praise of the deities form the bulk of Yoruba oral poetry, types of which are *Ijala* for Ogun, *rara*, originally identified with Eshu (the trickster god), *Iyere-Ifa* for Orunmila (the oracular divinity) and *esa* for the masquerade cult.”

To gain a full understanding of the Yoruba cosmology, it is important to understand the nature of their music; this is perhaps why John Blacking (1976: 186) emphasizes that “music-making is not simply an exercise in the organization of sound”, but that it is indeed

“a symbolic expression of social and cultural organization which reflects the values and the past and present ways of life of the human beings who create it.” Music, like dance, is a significant aspect of the cultural life of the Yoruba, both in terms of vocal rendition and instrumental accompaniment, with every occasion marked by a distinguishing musical style. The occasions for music among the people include recreational times for relaxation at social gatherings such as naming ceremony of a child, marriage, funeral, and the installation of a chief or coronation of a monarch. Traditional festivals such as *Osun Oshogbo*, *Ikire*, *Apomu* and *Ikoyi*; *Ogun* festivals in Ondo, Ilesha and Owo; *Egungun* and *Oke Ibadan*, the Egbado celebration of *Yemoja*, *Gelede* and *Efe* as well as the Ijebu’s *Agemo* are unique occasions for music rendition. Some of these festivals are scheduled to coincide with the dry season, some are for propitiation and request for blessings of the ancestors on the entire community. In all of these, music plays a central role as argued by Alabi Balogun (2005: 10):

Songs also enhance emotional and physical participation in an act of worship, which often leads to ecstatic experiences. These are ecstatic experiences and possession of the divinity from an indispensable part of worship during the annual festivals of certain divinities like Sango, Oya and Osun in Yoruba land. Yoruba festivals are simply inconceivable without the integration and performance of songs, which they regard as important instrument for evoking the spirits of the gods (Orisha). Songs and music help to shape the ceremonies and connect the physical with the supernatural in an atmosphere of celebration.

Music performed during any of these occasions is determined by certain cultural objectives, religious/ritual significance and symbolic representations as defined by the Yoruba worldview. Of importance in this regard, for example, is the Yoruba belief in transcendental practices such as funeral rites, ritualised propitiation and the invocation of the dead called *okupipe*. Observance of requiem is an important aspect of culture. Death in Yoruba philosophy is a transition to another realm, but not the finality of experience as believed in some other societies. This moment of transition of the physical being into the

metaphysical realm is usually accompanied with the performance of intricate rituals so that the deceased can rest in peace in the ancestral world.

In alignment with musical expressions, the Yoruba equally have the tendency to dramatise everything. Some of these festivals possess to a great degree elements of theatre or at best mimetic actions. For instance, music played on such occasions have accompanying steps, body gestures or language, which enhance the performative elements peculiar to them. This is traced to an attitude of reverence, which begins from traditional greetings: a boy prostrates while a girl kneels and so on.

### **3.5 Musical Instruments that Define Yoruba Culture**

There are various types of musical instruments for different occasions and functions. Some are used for religious ceremonies to build the right atmosphere for the people to commune with their gods and to satisfy the individual and collective aspiration. Some others are employed mainly for social functions with different instrumentation in any given situation. Drumming is one of the most essential activities in Yoruba cultural tradition. It plays a very prominent role among the people's musical instruments. As a procedure of achieving effective speech communication on their drums, members of Yoruba drumming family lineage, *Ayanagalu* (regarded as the first Yoruba drummer and the deity of the drum) usually sets aside a specific period to observe his worship for spiritual guidance and protection, and to elicit the permission of the spirits that are believed to lodge in the trees from which the drums are constructed, in order for them to "talk" eloquently.

That is why professional drummers who are employed in the production of African plays, especially those with Yoruba background, attach so much importance to the observance of this ritual and almost always ensure that it is performed before they mount the stage. For instance, during the preparation for the 1998 performance of Soyinka's *Opera Wonyosi*, the internationally acclaimed Nigerian drummer, Ayantunji Amoo (MBE), who was the lead drummer, requested that Ayanagalu, be appeased so that the drummers in the production would not falter. His request was granted and the necessary ritual performed. This researcher was a part of that production as the lead actor

These instruments range from the *Bata* associated with *Orisa* cults like the worship of *Sango* (god of thunder, lightning and retributive justice); *Egungun* (Yoruba ancestral masquerades), *Esu* (trickster god), and *Oya* (river goddess). There are other types like the *Igbin* for *Obatala* (god of creation and moulder of human destiny); *Ipese* for *Orunmila* (god of divination), the *Agere* ensemble for *Ogun* (god of war and iron implements); and *Bembe* for *Osun* (goddess of beauty and wealth). Others include, *Gbedu* for royalty and the *Ogboni* (the earth cult of judicial authority) among others including *Agogo*, *Sekere* and the rest. There are other types of drums recently integrated into the Yoruba social ceremonies, such as the *akuba*, *samba* and *sakara*. There is the *Dundun* ensemble, which is the most widely used of all Yoruba musical instruments. It comprises the *Iya ilu* (Chief drum), *kerikeri*, *gangan*, *isaju*, *kanango*, and *gudugudu* (kettle drum).

*Dundun*, a paired membrane hourglass shaped tension drum, is particularly important. It is usually grasped with the left arm. Should the drummer be left-handed it is grasped with the right arm. The left or right hand manipulates it. Firmly grasped, the drum head is struck with a curved stick called *kongo-ilu*, consequently aiding the drum to "talk". A virtuoso drummer can hold a prolonged talk on a talking drum, greeting, praising and even abusing people, "calling" their names, place of birth and engaging in dialogue with another drummer

or a call and response interaction with the audience. Euba (1989) explains that unlike other drums restricted to specific social contexts, the *dundun* enjoys unlimited freedom to participate in all kinds of contexts. This versatility somehow underlines the tonal variation of Yoruba speech pattern, as there is a musical rhythm in every Yoruba word, which is tonal, medium or low as earlier explained. In his study of Yoruba speech and music, Ekundayo Philip (1935: 1) observes:

It is difficult to conceive of Yoruba speech without rhythm and (musical) tones. From the earliest stage of the development of Yoruba speech, rhythm had come into it. Usually words are spoken in a running fashion, without any attempt at rhythm. But, sometimes, under certain conditions, such as rocking of a child, hawking, oration or ecstatic outburst, certain words are stressed or prolonged or hurriedly recited. This is probably the origin of rhythm.

In any Yoruba orchestra, the *iya ilu*, which is the lead talking drum, shares a lot with the *dundun*, especially its remarkable proficiency for mimicking the human voice and producing comprehensible rhythms. Adegbite (1993: 20) notes that the reason for the adoption of *dundun* by some religious sects is that, “it is easier to understand the language of the master drum, *iya ilu*, when she “speaks” the traditional phrases. These phrases, however, sound intelligible to those who understand the language of drums.

The *bata* drums are close to the *dundun* in terms of popularity and functionality. It is associated with the *Egungun* and *Sango* cults. Euba (1989: 35) compares the functions of *bata* and *dundun* thus:

*Dundun* is open to all comers, while *Sango*'s devotees and *egungun*'s are principal patrons of the *bata*. Secondly, the tonal capacity of *bata* is limited to two fixed pitches and can only be obtained by muting, making it much more difficult to understand it. Thirdly, *bata* uses somewhat subtle style of drumming, while the *dundun* is more assertive and dominates the *bata* in sheer volume of sound. Lastly, there is certain glamour to *dundun* drumming which is lacking in *bata*.

The *gbedu* is a ritual drum dedicated to royalty. It is usually kept in the palace for special occasions. There are also the *kakaki* (trumpet) and ivory horns, which are equally regarded as musical instruments of royalty. Other classifications and types offered by Olusoji (2009: 38) include the “*ekutu, toromagbe* (flute) *sekere, agogo, duru, apeses, seeli, and seere* among others.”

As a result of contact with western values, musical instruments of contemporary genre have been introduced, notably keyboard, guitar, trumpet, trombone, saxophone, conga drum and others. These drums and musical instruments feature prominently in the traditional theatres as well as the popular productions of the likes of Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola and other pioneer dramatists. In some major plays of Soyinka and Osofisan, (we shall treat them later), traditional African instruments are combined with western instruments, but the Yoruba musical idioms are still largely retained and emphasised. This is a way of asserting their African heritage in order to demonstrate the verve of the rich and strong Yoruba tradition in contrast and alongside the western culture to which both playwrights have been exposed.

### **3.6 Music in Indigenous Yoruba Performance**

For the Yoruba, music and drama or more specifically, theatre, are interwoven. The Yoruba musician is at once a dramatist, actor, composer and choreographer. He functions in several capacities, which underline the centrality of music to the ritual and cultural sensibility of the people. These are usually derived from myth, as explained earlier. For Soyinka, Yoruba cosmic myth not only provides the archetypal protagonist, but also functions as a mythopoeic framework upon which plot and the corresponding dimensions of its realization are structured. These dimensions, whether they are metaphysical or socio-cultural, are mediated through the ritual language of music (1976). In this regard, Karin Barber (2000) in addition focuses on the dimensions of culture as social constructs reflecting hierarchical structures

within the human interactive spheres of society, especially of the Yoruba, part of which is “played out” through traditional performances and music. Barber’s theory is that the “relationships between humans and the *Orisa* are in some sense a projection of relations between people in society” (2000: 393).

It is understandable then to begin the analysis of the use of music in indigenous Yoruba performances from festivals, which are their sources. Though there have been arguments as to whether they can be regarded as drama, notably the position of Ruth Finnegan (1970) who argues that the vast majority of dramatic forms in Africa do not adhere to the fundamental parameters by which strict drama is defined. She observes that “drama in Africa is not typically a widespread and developed form, and that what Africans have are certain dramatic and quasi-dramatic phenomena” (500), which are essentially marked out by the apparent absence of, among other very crucial factors, “linguistic contents, plot, represented interaction of several characters, specialized scenery etc.” (501). Having observed diverse performance forms from sub-Saharan Africa and considered them inadequate within the framework of a Western model, Finnegan echoes European scholars’ bias towards theatrical expression in Africa.

With Soyinka’s (1976:94) warning that “instead of considering festivals from one point of view - that of providing, in a primitive form, the ingredients of drama—we may even begin examining the opposite point of view: that of contemporary drama, as we experience it today. It is a contraction of drama, necessitated by the productive order of society in other directions” becomes very important, against the background of June Clara Balistreri’s counter opinion. She sees similarities in Greek theatre developing from the rites in honour of Dionysus in the light of African festivals possessing dramatic expressions, which, in spirit and style strongly evoke those same theatrical practices Finnegan et al (1978: 211) discountenanced. She argues that:

The creation of a “total theatre” incorporating the elements of song, dance, music and speech has been the desired goal of many modern Western playwrights and directors such as Brecht, Artaud, Grotowski and Brook. Strangely enough, this hard-to-achieve goal (for Westerners) has become an easy-to-tread path for an African playwright. Since these elements are so much part of the living tradition of Africa seen in daily life, rituals, festivals and the traditional theatre, their incorporation into modern African drama is not only natural but expected by both African and non-African audiences.

Yoruba rituals have very strong dramatic features. Various dramatic enactments during festivals such as *Edi* of Ile Ife, the *Alagemo-Oluwin* which climaxes the annual Obatala festival and others such as the *Ogun-Ajobo*, *Osun-Oshogbo* with their multi-media and multi-dimensional enactments, of which their pristine sacredness have yielded a vibrant secular branch, are recognised as the traditional theatre of the Yoruba. In *Gelede* theatre and ritual of the Yoruba for instance, drums are beaten, while songs of praise and honour are properly composed for the occasion. On such occasions, the festivals’ appropriation of music operates on three levels, namely the evocative nature of sound, the organization of sound into structural patterns of communication and its cosmological basis. In his extensive study of the ritual origin of Yoruba traditional performances, Adedeji (1971: 239) writes that;

The Bata leader in *Alarinjo*, the traditional Yoruba travelling theatre, had a number of duties during a performance. He served as the callboy for the actors and communicated with the audience by announcing what scene or act they were going to see next. He also warned the actors when they were exceeding their limits. He pinpointed the highlights in the actor of the play, adding a few embellishments.

*Alarinjo* theatre situates its origin in the *Egungun* ritual play, which began as a funerary ruse to perpetuate the memory of the dead Oyo kings (the Alaafin), who are considered not deceased but transformed and existing in a different form, that is, as masquerade. What began as court entertainment, during the reign of Alaafin Ogbolu enthroned at Oyo Igboho around 1590, according to Adedeji (233), later moved out of court and gradually developed into an itinerant theatre distinct from its ritual beginnings by the middle of the eighteenth century. However, it retained its ritual sources as theatre and cult,

and it continues to coexist, with cult members and masque dramaturges bound together by ancestor worship and periodic meetings, such as at the funeral of members.

The use of traditional drums and orchestra as well as folk songs gives emotive and motive projection to the dramatic intentions. There are music-verbal dialogues, calls and responses, recitatives, arias, oratorios, sequences, interjections, chanting, evocations and praises, in which music is fundamental to the thematic development. Nzewi (1981: 454) notes of the Yoruba traditional performances:

Music and dance act as vehicles for promoting dramatic intention at the fundamental level of comprehension and entertainment. It gives soul to, while propping the body of the production. Absence of an action, affective as well as qualitative music and dance greatly reduce consumer interest.

Music in the performances gives the freedom to express thoughts, ideas, and comments, which cannot be stated boldly in the normal language situation. Music is thus used as a vehicle to convey information in the performances.

However, the *Alarinjo* suffered significant cultural emasculation at the influx and penetrating influence of Western religions, notably Islam and Christianity, which considered it pagan and indeed banned traditional practices including theatre seen to promote it. Yoruba internecine wars equally contributed to its decline. However, both *Alarinjo* and *Egungun* traditions, the aforementioned originated from the latter, continue to exist underground alongside emergent forms such as the *Adamu Orisha* play of Lagos, also known as *Eyo* festival, first observed in honour of Oba Akintoye of Lagos, in 1854 (Osanyin, 2004: 120). Yet, festivals as the prime artistic institution of traditional Africa have been watered down due to overwhelming foreign influence, which in turn gave birth to some new forms, though borrowing from the past.

### 3.7 Yoruba Music and Literary Theatre Tradition

The introduction of courses in drama and theatre in 1957 as well as the formation of two theatre groups, namely Arts Theatre Production by expatriate university teachers and civil servants in Ibadan, and the University Dramatic Society, which involved students of the Department of English, is significant to the understanding of literary theatre development in Nigeria. Further, the production of Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Swamp Dwellers* in 1958; the formation of Players of the Dawn, an amateur student production group among others, were equally of significance. However, this development was not without conflict in terms of differences in tastes and aesthetic value, especially about the choice of plays being produced by the foreign expatriates and their Nigerian counterparts. As such, adaptations of works to suit the local environment was a welcome development. Dapo Adelugba et al's *That Scoundrel Suberu* (1965), is a good example.

By 1960 with the founding of Soyinka's *The Masks* and Ola Rotimi's *Ori-Olokun* at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife), the scope of indigenous theatrical activities began to expand. Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* (1963) and Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame* (1971) and *Kurunmi* (1985), are good plays, with indigenous Yoruba background. While these works can be regarded as the products of colonial experiences, they nevertheless manifested the spirit of postcolonialism, functioning as inspiration for the revival of cultural identity, deconstruction and reconstruction of the Yoruba worldview. Akinwunmi Isola (1981: 400) vividly highlights this fact:

Modern Yoruba plays have something in common with other genres of Yoruba written literature: they too borrow a lot from oral tradition, especially from oral poetry. So that in spite of some evidence of formal influence, modern Yoruba plays still have a strong structural link with ritual drama and travelling theatre plays [...] There is also a generous use of songs, drumming and dancing, largely borrowed from the practice of travelling theatre groups.

Plays of this period are constructed and written in English, but with the fusion of indigenous Yoruba culture, ritual and mores as already discussed. Izevbaye (1981: 155) notes the functions of these works as:

Instrument for the recovery of identity, of tradition, even of an elusive cultural essence...a practical means of transforming the colonial word without abandoning it...the proverb and other speech forms were implanted in the structure and lexis of Queen's English, one of the highly prized benefits of the colonial educational system.

He further argues that the new literary plays did not thrive without raising fundamental questions about racial identity, cultural relevance and language barriers. This is what Gotrick (1984: 11-12) describes as the controversy "in the characteristics of the 'Africanness' in general and the 'Africanness' of literature, theatre and criticism", yet one finds that a peculiar feature they all possess, despite departing from the practices of earlier Yoruba folk opera and emerging within a scholarly environment, include recourse to extensive use of traditional songs, Yoruba oral poetry, dance, instrumental music, drum texts, divination and incantation as well as continued reliance on aesthetic principles based on Yoruba cosmology.

The multi-artistic nature of Yoruba theatre 'naturally' derives from a culture in which music, dance and other forms of oral and plastic arts feature prominently in everyday realizations. With this kind of understanding, Nzewi's (1981: 455) demand that music and dance in modern theatre "should be synthesized and its symbiotic factors conceived for projecting and propelling the plot, or used to sustain dramatic action, or to enhance the dramatic presence of an actor, location, or to evoke a psychological moment..." becomes relevant. No doubt, the incorporation of modern elements derived from Western culture into Yoruba theatre mirrors the very real phenomenon of cultural plurality in which Yoruba and most African societies necessarily negotiate their daily existence. The continued presence of traditional practices, whether as self-contained modes of expression existing alongside newer

forms, or as definitive elements within modern genres such as popular and literary theatre, may be construed as presenting a cultural grounding within the flux of external influences and the threat to self-identity implicit therein.

Even in hostile circumstances where, as Soyinka (1976: 89) argues that culture is a decided “target of assault by an invading force”, and indigenous culture has indeed been brought under hostile suffusion by the upper hand of, say colonisation or enslavement, the Yoruba have reacted, not with agitated insecurity, but with calm, contemplative reasoning, seeking relevance, similarities and points of confluence between the invading culture and theirs. Having found these similarities, they then reclaim, that is, apprehend their own identity through processes of appropriation. The plays under study lend credence to this assertion.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

Yoruba people are rich in culture, traditions, customs, beliefs and ethos. Yoruba people’s love for music is deep and reflects in their daily activities. Despite the Yoruba people’s multiple sub-cultures as reflected in their various idiolects as manifested in their different names such as Oyo, Egba, Ijebu, Ekiti and Ijesa to mention a few, they all share music as a spiritual heritage. They are majorly agrarian but engage in other vocations. They have a common ancestry, which is traced to Oduduwa. Yoruba, the language of the Yoruba people is tonal. Like the Greeks, Yoruba culture is rich in mythology and this explains most of their worldviews.

Yoruba arts, be it visual, performative or literary, have musical reinforcements. Characters that dominate Yoruba fine arts are drawn from among their deities, legends and mythic personae, who have one song or the other associated with them. Their theatre hinges on the total theatre concept, which is a fusion of dance, drama and music. Traditionally, the Yoruba people relish music so much that even grievances are musically expressed. It becomes

so effortless for Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan to showcase a dramaturgy that is musically enchanting and profound.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE DEPLOYMENT OF MUSIC IN THE NATIONAL TROUPE OF NIGERIA'S PERFORMANCE OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN* AND *THE STRONG BREED*

#### 4.1 Introduction

Music in theatre is a primordial phenomenon. Music complements and enhances theatre and vice-versa depending on the circumstance. During the Greek classical era, the chorus played to advance the plot of the drama as the stories unfolded. It underscored thematic preoccupations, set moods and created the right atmosphere for the audience to be engaged in the theatrical experience. The situation has improved to the extent that today it is almost unimaginable to conceptualise a play without music. Theatre also complements music. This chapter focuses on the functionality of music in theatre and its discourse is hinged on a critical evaluation of Soyinka's deployment of music in *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Strong Breed*. But before this engagement, it might be pertinent to first examine how the biography of Soyinka has influenced and impacted on his creative endeavour.

#### 4.2 Wole Soyinka: A Biography

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka, popularly known as Wole Soyinka, was born in 1934 into a Remo family in Isara Remo, Abeokuta, Ogun State in Nigeria. After rounding off at Government College in 1952, he began studies at University College in Ibadan (1952–54), where he met with other notable Nigerian creative writers such as J.P. Clark, Michael Echeruo, Nkem Nwankwo among “a concentration of exceptional literary talents” (Moore, 1978: 4) and through interaction significantly influenced him. He studied English Literature, Greek, and Western History. Between 1953 and 1954 Soyinka began work on *Keffi's Birthday Treat*, a short radio play for Nigerian Broadcasting Service, which was broadcasted in July 1954.

Soyinka is a prolific writer whose literary works cut across all genres. His plays include but are not limited to the following: *The Swamp Dwellers* (1963), *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1964), *The Road* (1965), *Madmen and Specialists* (1971), *Jero's Metamorphosis* (1973) and *A Dance of the Forests* (1963). Others are *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), *Camwood on the Leaves* (1973), *The Strong Breed* (1965), *Kongi's Harvest* (1967), *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973), *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), *Opera Wonyosi* (1981), *A Play of Giants* (1984), and *Requiem for a Futurologist* (1985). From the nineties till date, Soyinka has published other major works which include: *From Zia with Love* (1992), *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1996), *King Baabu* (2001) and *Alapata Apata* (2011).

In all these works, Soyinka relies on his upbringing to project the Yoruba worldview the same way in which Clark, Echeruo, and Nwankwo project the socio-cultural milieu of their upbringing. This can be illustrated with Soyinka's "Abiku" in contradistinction to Clark's "Abiku." Although treating the same subject matter, the landscape of both poems are different owing to the culture in which both writers developed. The riverine landscape of Clark's poem, for instance, is nowhere existent in Soyinka's composition. However, that Soyinka has had to rely on his upbringing in crafting his plays can be seen from the synopsis of his *Death and the King's Horseman*.

#### **4.3 A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE DEPLOYMENT OF MUSIC IN THE NATIONAL TROUPE OF NIGERIA'S PERFORMANCE OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN***

Wole Soyinka has established himself as a dramatic icon. Through the depth of his creativity, he has developed his own distinctive conceptions, which characterise his humanity and manifest his unique worldviews. *Death and the King's Horseman*, phenomenal for its mastery of poetry, language dexterity, its philosophy, its proficiency of rhetoric and melancholic reverence of Africa is all-encompassing and comprehensive in indigenous Yoruba culture. According to K.P Sudha (2004), "*Death and the King's Horseman* and *The*

*Strong Breed*” are considered the most African of Wole Soyinka’s plays. They are remarkable for the recreation of ritual elements” (257). Elesin’s significant dance into the transition to save his community, the deployment of proverbs and the consequence of sacrifice place *Death and the King’s Horseman* and *The Strong Breed* as Soyinka’s revered African plays.

#### **4.3.1      *Death and the King’s Horseman; A Synopsis***

In *Death and the King’s Horseman*, Soyinka explores the Yoruba worldview that when a king passes on, his horse-guard (the Elesin) is required to go with him. This drama is Soyinka’s recreation of an incident that occurred in the city of Oyo, Southwest Nigeria between 1943 and 1944. Elesin is an influential chief and he is the king’s chief horse guard. By the time the play begins the king has passed on about a month back and he is to be interred that very night. Based on the community’s prescription, his special horse and his horse guard are required to escort him to the ancestral world. Elesin is prepared but just as he is leaving, he observes a pretty girl at the market and resolves to wed her in anticipation of his journey to the world beyond.

Despite the fact that the girl is betrothed to her own son, Iyaloja, ‘the mother of the market’, dare not turn down the desire of a man who is at the point of death. Meanwhile the regional administrator Pilkings hears about the conceived ritual homicide from his black sergeant Amusa during a tango rehearsal session with his wife Jane for a ball at the English society. Amusa gives him his news on a notepaper, because he declines to speak to the couple putting on an African outfit of death affiliation, an outfit that for him possesses the potential of death. Pilkings instructs him, Amusa, to detain Elesin. Amusa’s gesture is changed into force by market women and their daughters and Elesin’s marriage ceremony, uninterrupted, runs ‘efficiently’ into Elesin getting ready for dying.

Simultaneously, the ball at the English association proceeds as planned, commemorated by the attendance of his majesty, the prince on an excursion to the colonised

territories. As the Pilkings' amuses the group with their local mask, Amusa then appears to announce the lack of success of his assignment. Pilkings decides to direct the action himself. Jane opposes Elesin's ritual suicide. Olunde, in anticipation of his father's passing away, decides to come home for his burial ceremony and implores Pilkings not to intervene. As he perceives the sound of drums from afar, signalling the death of his father and makes to observe his remains, Elesin is led in alive handcuffed. The disturbance is intense on both sides. Elesin, shamed and pitifully guilty, collapses before his son, but Olunde is unwilling to acknowledge him.

The final moment happens in Elesin's contrived cell inside the apartment of the Pilkings. Pilkings delivers Olunde's message to him; in it contains his repentance for his recoil and prayer for his father's good wishes before he departs to England. At this point, Iyaloja's group is ushered in bearing the remains of Olunde on which they expected Elesin to deliver the "Sacred password" that would enable Olunde to lead the departed king into the ancestral world. When Elesin requests to see the messenger, the corpse of Olunde is revealed. The Pilkings' are astonished and Elesin in a split second strangulates himself. The youthful spouse, who came with him to the cell, shuts his eyes. Soyinka demonstrates his deep consciousness of his Yoruba cultural heritage through recreating a whole traditional way of life, bringing out, with varying degrees of realism and different shades of attitudes, triumphs and failures. This is premised upon his stance on the need to recapitulate Africa's glorious past notwithstanding his views to the contrary.

#### 4.3.2 The Use of Music in the National Troupe of Nigeria's Performance of *Death and the King's Horseman*

In *Death and the King's Horseman* Soyinka demonstrates his profound Yoruba cultural heritage with costumes, traditional ceremonies, communal festivities, beliefs, taboos, ritual, language and most importantly, music to the audience's aesthetic delight. Soyinka in the play draws attention to the two goals that a literary work can attain, in terms of aesthetic satisfaction. He implies that a good work of art, in its use of language and orchestration of the ensemble can have either a positive or a negative effect on its audience or readers to the extent that they will be emotionally or intellectually engaged. Philosophically, Soyinka, in *Death and the King's Horseman*, demonstrates the potentiality of drama to edify, instruct, educate and impart moral lessons. The audience or readers are presented with a dramatic mirror in which they are reflected and thus able to reflect and better their lots in the process.

The Yoruba concept of the universe, as Soyinka himself explains, recognizes three distinct but interrelated 'worlds'; the world of the unborn, the world of the living and the world of the ancestors, all linked by the gulf of transition – "the fourth stage". In his words:

The past is the ancestors'; the present belongs to the living and the future to the unborn. The deities stand in the same situation to the living as do the ancestors and the unborn, obeying the same laws, suffering the same agonies and uncertainties, employing the same Masonic intelligence of rituals for the perilous plunge into the fourth area of experience, the immeasurable gulf of transition. (Soyinka, 1976:148)

Everyone, it is believed in the Yoruba cosmology, must pass through this numinous cycle in his complex journey of being; the unborn leaves its abode, conceived and born into the world of the living where after its sojourn it transits to the ancestral world. Soyinka's passion for this hallowed tradition, norms and values of his Yoruba cultural background is taken to a distinguished level in the canonical play, *Death and the King's Horseman*, as can be glimpsed through a close reading of the text and as theatre. It particularly manifests in the characterisation of Elesin-Oba, Olohun-Iyo, Iyaloja and Olunde. The idiomatic expression of

these African characters illuminates the Yoruba cosmic world of the unborn, the living and the dead. In his observation, Jeyifo (1997: 32) submits:

The Elesin-Oba and other African characters, excepting the native functionaries of the colonial machine, are made to express, consciously and with considerable lyrical force, the redemptive nature of Elesin-Oba's intended ritual suicide.

Jeyifo also stresses that, in contrast to any other play of Soyinka's, *Death and the King's Horseman* is a presentation of realities with lyrical brilliance of dramatic language that compels acceptance. In his display of mastery of the English language, Soyinka is not unmindful of the Yoruba flavour of the imageries and proverbs translated into English when rendered in performance. *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Strong Breed* were performed by the National Troupe of Nigeria and directed by Ahmed Yerima in 2002 and 2004, respectively.

In order to have a coherent perception of the use of music in the performance of *Death and the King's Horseman*, the following will be critically examined. The performance phases of the play, which are divided into three aspects namely; pre-performance, performance and post-performance. The effectiveness or otherwise of the use of music in the play constitutes the focus of the segment.

#### **4.3.2.1 Pre-Performance Phase**

In 2004 *Death and the King's Horseman* was chosen as the play to be staged to celebrate the playwright's birthday. Prof. Ahmed Yerima, invited professional actors such as Olu Jacobs, Kunle Bamtefa and many others including this researcher, to join the regular members of the National Troupe in preparation for the production. The cast for proper understanding read the play several times. The director who apparently by virtue of his informed discussion, analysis and evaluation of the script, had done his research on the play. He facilitated a collective intellectual interrogation of the ideological basis of the play. He systematically presented the play and shared his vision with the cast and crew.

This was the mode of operation for one week and then formal blockings were assigned to actors subsequently. Every rehearsal session as witnessed, experienced and participated in by this researcher, was always preceded by warm-up exercises accompanied by live music-drums, agogo (gongs) sekere and other traditional Yoruba musical instruments such as bata, dundun, flutes and songs to motivate the actors and dancers. In the progression of rehearsals, the director occasionally divided the group into several units: some actors would work directly with the director, others would work with the assistant director and the dancers would work with the choreographer while the music director and the stage managers took general notes. The reason for separating the group was to identify and address specific artistic objectives ranging from play analysis and interpretation, conceptualisation, line delivery, the grasping of the cultural philosophy of the play and so on, all in a bid to give the production a sound actualisation.

#### **4.3.2.2 Performance Phase/Music**

Professional musicians (singers and drummers) resident in the National Troupe of Nigeria and invited ones combined their creative talents to explore the thematic objective of the play. This collaboration facilitated a musical composition that intensified the instincts of the actors, and strengthened the dramatic action of the play. The said performance by the National Troupe of Nigeria on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2004, at the MUSON Centre, Onikan Lagos, was a committed effort to realise the synergy between robust dialogue and ritual music. In this highly engaging “ritual of music and dance metaphor”, as Ahmed Yerima described the play in his “Directorial Note”, ritual music meant to convey the enormity of the sacrifice of Elesin is made to overshadow every other activity. It draws from the Yoruba ritual idiom and seemed to be rendered by the chorus of singers at every point in the play. The rendition of songs; a mixture of chant, invocation and music; shows the functional role of music in cosmic energy.

As in the text, the performance equally begins at the marketplace, and in response to the call by Olohun-Iyo, Elesin-Oba's preparation to perform the ritual commences with music and dance as the movement of transition. The plot of the entire play is thus woven around dialogue and music, ritual songs and dances which Soyinka (1976: 146-147) explains; "At the charged climactic moments of the tragic rites we understand how music came to be the sole art form which can contain tragic reality. The votary is led by no other guide into the pristine heart of tragedy."

Notations of all the songs critically analysed in this research were done exclusively for this study. This researcher, though a trained tonal actor, does not have the professional competence for music notation. As such, this researcher employed the services of a musicologist, Mr Michael Osanebi, who in addition to years of experience as a musician has a Master's degree in Ethnomusicology. This researcher performed the songs to and presented him the lyrics for notation. Different songs were performed in the play. They include: "Alele ti le", "Ojoje" (The die is cast), "Ero be dele" (At the end of this voyage), "Mee gbagbe o, O di gbere" (Always Remember) "Lojo mo ba sun gbalaja" (Whenever I pass on). The songs are critically analysed as follows.

**Alele le le**  
Alele le le  
Awo mi lo  
B'Awo ba dale Awo a te

(Translation)

**Transition hour is here**  
Transition hour is here  
The initiate journeys into the world beyond  
Should the initiate be derelict  
He would become an epitome of ridicule and disrespect



Musical Notation 1. Ale le le  
*Death and the King's Horseman*

This is the first song in the play and it summarises the Yoruba worldview that underpins the play. The song, within the plot progression of the play literally expresses the fact that it is time for the tragic protagonist to depart this plane of existence and transit to the fourth stage so as to usher the departed king into the ancestral world. The song is strategically placed at the beginning of the play to showcase the Yoruba cosmology in which life is a journey and that the journey of life is in three phases – morning, afternoon and night. The morning is from when man is a child up to when he is a young adult. The afternoon symbolises middle age period while “night” is old age and the period that man prepares to leave the world of the living.

By extension, “nighttime” in Yoruba cosmology extends to any time man has to answer the call to leave the world of the living. Therefore, “nighttime” is the time when individuals prepare for death. The song is a reminder of this philosophical perception of life and it is creatively and strategically inserted at the beginning to highlight the fact that while the colonial authority perceives the suicide Elesin is about to commit as barbaric and a waste, for the Yoruba it has a purpose and is therefore necessary. But it also is a reminder of the Yoruba worldview that just as it is impossible to abort the completion of these three phases of a day, man cannot circumvent passing through this cycle. The song also serves as a warning to the protagonist of the dire consequences of failing to render the service the society has nurtured him for from birth. The song eloquently warns that, should the initiate shirk his responsibility and jeopardise the collective wellbeing of the community, he would become

despicable, ridiculous and totally disrespected. The audience gets a hint of wherein lies the tragedy in the play. The non-performance of his responsibility would foment catastrophe for the community and dishonour for the protagonist and his family. It turns out that the song is prophetic, because Elesin indeed betrayed the cause and lost all the respect and honour the society had for him.

It is not a coincidence that, though the play begins in the early afternoon of the day, the song says “Alele le” literally meaning it is nighttime. The concept of “night” here is not the literal time of the day that is close to the end of the day, rather it denotes the end of time for Elesin to do what is needed and transit to make peace reign on in the community. This rich cultural heritage has gone into extinction due to western civilisation. However, the playwright creatively represents the fading cultural legacy with a view to reviving it. What is more, the song sets the mood of the play right from the start. The audience is made conscious of the seriousness of the dramatic voyage it is witnessing. The initiate must perform a duty upon which the fate of the community hangs, and the audience then becomes suspense gripped – will the protagonist do the expected or fail the community? This song is thus appropriate in its placement in the play.

Yerima’s choice was to make a variety of indigenous music convey the essence of the ritual. At some point, the chorus takes up another song, after which it is replaced by the initial music in the background. The song in question is titled “Ojo je” (The Die is Cast). This is another noteworthy song in the play under investigation. Let us examine the lyrics, its aptness and relevance to the play.

### **Ojoje**

Ojooje, omi iroo,

Omi ma iro ni’waju gbo’ge gbo’ge

Onikan okan laa rubi oro o re, larudu Olodumare e

Oro lo roooro, ojooje

(Translation)

### The die is cast

No matter what, this is a must do assignment  
It is the chosen who must bear the yoke  
That is the divine arrangement  
A ritual is a ritual and it is binding

Solemn

The musical notation is written on three staves in a 12/8 time signature with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The first staff contains the lyrics 'O - jo je o - mi i ro O-mi ma-i ro ni wa ju u-gbo ge gbo ge'. The second staff contains the lyrics 'o - ni kan o - kan la - ru - bi o - ro re la ru tu O - lo - du - ma - re o ro lo ro'. The third staff contains the lyrics 'o jo je'. The music consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some notes beamed together. There are repeat signs in the first and second staves.

Musical Notation 2: *Ojooje, omi iroo* from Wole Soyinka's  
*Death and the King's Horseman*

With this song, Olohun-Iyo calls on Elesin-Oba to regard and perform the ritual of committing suicide; there is also a sense in which the song is also used to facilitate the Alaafin's smooth transition, Yerima chooses to create a background of despair and fear, especially as Elesin fantasises, with thoughts of tarrying over the pleasures of life.

This night I'll lay my head upon their laps and go to sleep. This night, I'll touch feet with their feet in a dance that is no longer of this earth. But the smell of their flesh, their sweat, the smell of indigo on their cloth, this is the last air I wish to breathe as I go to meet my great forebears (10).

The music laments the agony of death and the pain of separation that goes with it. In using this particular song, Yerima argues that it is in sympathy with Elesin, and is inspired by the Yoruba proverb; "Baba n r'uju lo s'orun, e ni ko kile" (A man is struggling with death, yet he is told to say us well to those beyond). This directorial sympathy is uncalled for and portrays a misconception of the Yoruba cosmology that Wole Soyinka propagates. Elesin's situation, from the Yoruba worldview, is neither precarious nor pathetic. It is messianic and an exclusive duty of the chosen. It is the non-performance of the ritual sacrifice that is inglorious, pitiable and dishonourable. After all, there is a price for every feat and success.

At this stage of Elesin’s transition what he needs is not sympathy but raw truth about his position and the societal expectation. He could be encouraged being human but having occupied a position that afforded him all the luxuries of life just so that he could stand up to his responsibility at the appropriate time, what he needs is not sympathy.

Singing a song for sympathy of his plight is misleading and may make him lose focus while the human element in him is musically being appealed to. What is more, the mood of the scene becomes sorrowful rather than celebrative. As such the song is inimical to the evocation of the Ogunian will (Soyinka, 1976) needed by Elesin at that time to forge ahead. An equally significant song that featured in the National Troupe’s performance of the play is “Ero be dele”.

**Ero be dele**

Ero be dele, de bee, ajo yi ma le o, o le  
 Ka si se bi eru, won ni ko dan n kan  
 Tori ba ko wa yo, ao rohin, ao rohin ao rohin  
 Ao rohin

(Translation)

**Folks! If we arrive home**

Folks! If we arrive home!  
 This journey is not a child’s play  
 Toiling like slaves yields no profit  
 Should fate see us through  
 We have stories to tell

E - ro be de - le be dei-fe a - jo yi ma le o o - le ka si - se be e -  
 3  
 ru won ni ko da n-kan to ri ba ko wa yoo a - ro-hin a-ro-hin o a-ro-hin o a-ro-hin  
 o a - ro-hin.

Music Notation 3: *Ero be de*  
*Death and the King’s Horseman*

In this song the community expresses its fear and panic that all hope is lost and the community is left in the hands of fate to either perish or survive the hopeless situation. The song was sung as background music to heighten the tension-soaked scene between Elesin and Olunde in the makeshift prison cell of Elesin Oba. Olunde feels and expresses total disgust at his father's inability to perform the ritual suicide at the right time. In their words:

**ELESIN**

Olunde? (He moves his head, inspecting him from side to side.)  
Olunde! (He collapses, slowly at OLUNDE's feet.) Oh son, don't let  
the sight of your father turn you blind! Olunde.

**OLUNDE**

(He moves for the first time since he heard his voice and  
brings his head slowly down to look on him). I have no father, eater of  
left-overs. (He walks slowly down the way his father had run - Light  
fades out on ELESIN, sobbing into the ground) (60-61)

This song adequately complements the above scene both aesthetically and functionally. Aesthetically, it matches the atmosphere with the mood and action. Functionally, it integrates the audience into the play as they are made to literally experience the tension between father and son. Now, the audience loses whatever respect they had for Elesin and the song. By involving the audience gives the impression that the audience is part of the drama that is unfolding. This is in tandem with the classical concept of the purgation of catharsis – emotion of pity and fear. The entire atmosphere is saturated by the melancholic effect. However, when this diversion causes enough delay and leads to Elesin's arrest, Iyaloja is unsparing in her criticism of the betrayal as she is generous and accommodating when she thinks Elesin deserves indulgence. She voices out the societal resentment with this highly extended poetic metaphor:

You have betrayed us. We fed you sweet meats such as we hoped awaited you on the other side. But you said No, I must eat of the leftovers. We said you were the hunter who brought the quarry down; to you belonged the vital portions of the game. No, you

said, I am the hunter's dog and I shall eat the entrails of the game and the faeces of the hunted. We said you were the hunter returning home in triumph, a slain buffalo pressing down on his neck; you said wait, I first must turn up this cricket hole with my toes (68).

At some points in the performance, in Scene Five for instance, between Pilkings and Elesin, silence punctuated with an irregular sound of flute becomes an eloquent mode of narration. The stage direction puts it precisely:

A wide-iron barred gate stretches almost the whole width of the cell in which ELESIN is imprisoned. His wrists are encased in thick iron bracelets, chained together; he stands against the bars, looking out. Seated on the ground to one side on the outside is his recent bride, her head bent perpetually to the ground. Figures of two guards can be seen deeper inside the cell, alert to every movement ELESIN makes. PILKINGS now in a police officer's uniform enters noiselessly, observes him for a while. Then he coughs ostentatiously and approaches. Leans against the bars near a corner, his back to ELESIN, he is obviously trying to fall in mood with him. Some moments' silence. (61)

In the above scene, the brief moment described in the stage direction, without dialogue speaks louder than words. The entire auditorium becomes tension-soaked and hearts beat faster in the audience. The tension in the scene becomes symbolically concrete and vivid. Even without lines it is evident that the battle line was, on the one hand, drawn between Elesin and Pilkings, and between Pilkings and the community, on the other hand. There is silence except for an intermittent almost inaudible tune from a flute. Here silence itself becomes a tool of narration, having its own kind of musical ability to reinforce the mood and tragic complexity of the plot.

When the drumming, which signals the expiration of time for Elesin-Oba, is interpreted and understood by Olunde, the rhythm rises to a crescendo and then, suddenly, it is cut off. After a silence, a new beat begins slowly and resonant. Solemn music, interspersed with silence conveys the mood of the tragic reality of Olunde's suicide in place of his father, Elesin-Oba. Yerima's choice of music derives from the folk tradition, an elegy that instructs and presses home the significance of the ritual sacrifice turned-sour, with the death of the

young and promising man. A major point, which Soyinka seems to emphasise, is that instead of the old dying and being replaced by the young ones, the reverse is the case. Pilkings' humanitarian gesture suddenly becomes a tragic ordering of nature, with the young dying before the old. In addition, in averting one death, he causes another, bringing the entire exercise of intervention to ruin and avoidable, yet regrettable catastrophe.

In Scene Five, after Iyaloja had engaged Elesin in front of his cell, some women enter bearing the corpse of Olunde and as they march in, they, in the National Troupe's performance of the play, render the panegyric dirge entitled "Mee gbagbe o, O di gberere". This song, a directorial innovation, replaces the playwright's suggestion of the song "Alele mi le, Awo mi lo" which opens the play. This directorial creativity is inspired because the song "Mee gbagbe o, o digbere" is more appropriate and relevant to the mood of the scene and the thematic preoccupation of the play than "Alele le" which had been used at the beginning of the play. The two songs can be juxtaposed to illustrate the point being made:

**Mee gbagbe o, o digbere**

Mee gbagbe o, o digbere

Lojo Akinogun lo sajo to da're maa bo o

Mee gbagbe o, odigbere

Adiye irana, bo se mi loni ole se wo bo d'ola

Mo rin titi, mo r'okun

Mo rin titi mo r'osa

Mo ti kaye ja, toke ti petele mo ti kogbon ni temi

Mee gbagbe o, odigbere

**(Translation)**

**I forget not! Never**

The day the valiant bid the world farewell

I forget not! Never

Death is inevitable; it will come when it will come

I have traversed the length and breadth of the Universe

I have acquired the best of knowledge

And I have learnt the wisdom of this world

Yet I forget not! Never!

Me' gba-gbe o o - di-gbe-re Lo-jo a -kin'o-gun lo sa-jo

4 to-da re-ma-a bo e-yin ee-yan Me' gba-gbe o o - di-gbe-re

7 A - di - ye i - ra - na a - di - ye e - ra - na bo s'e me lo ni o les e' - wo bo d' - ola

9 bo se wo lo - ni o le s' - emi bo d' - ola Mo rin ti - ti mo r' - okun mo ro - kun, mo ro - kun

12 Mo rin ti - ti mo r' - sa mo ro - sa mo ro - sa Mo ti k' - aye ja t' - oke ti pe - te

15 le mo ti ko - gbo ni t' - emi Me' gba-gbe o o - di-gbe-re

Musical Notation 4: Mee gbagbe o  
*Death and the King's Horseman*

This song is the celebration of a life of heroic deeds. It emphasises the ever-pleasant reverberating memories of the death of a mighty man of valour. It says that even after the death of such a valiant person he/she becomes unforgettable as memory of his/her heroic deeds will never fade in the minds of the people. It articulates the inevitability of death for all living things, yet when a good person dies his or her community will miss him or her dearly. Such is the case of Olunde who honourably takes his life to save his people and redeem his family image, which his father had dented and stained.

Ale le le” is a reminder of the nearness of the time to depart and is therefore not the ideal song for someone who has departed. It is not a dirge but an elegy and in this case a call to duty and warning of failure to perform. A dirge is a song lamenting the death of someone or part of a funeral procession. This song, as articulated by its lyrics, is a solemn song no doubt but not occasioned by death as it says “Awo mi lo” (the initiate is departing) and not that he has departed. It is suitable for Elesin who at the time is getting ready for the journey into the world of the ancestors. Olunde dies a noble death and as such, “Mee gbagbee o” which is a

celebration of the passing of the deceased is more suitable. The director thus ingeniously salvaged the situation by replacing the inappropriate song for the scene in question: “Ale le le” with a suitable one “Mee gba gbe o”.

In order to evoke reaction to the emotion running through the play, Yerima, in one of his director’s notes after a rehearsal (witnessed by this researcher as an active participant having been part of the cast of the production) affirmed that “characterisation in language is spiced with thematic songs and dances synchronized with local instrumentation”. This is evident in the poetry of Elesin at the beginning of the play and the complimentary and significant thematic preoccupation of the “Ale le le” song. Beyond their usage for entertainment and to elicit emotion as it were, however, drums, praise-singer’s chant, and so on, Elesin’s trance music and songs fall under what Wilson defines as indigenous communication (26). Wilson’s taxonomy of traditional media systems further classifies chants, trance, sacrifice, prayers and rituals as “extra-mundane communication which is a mode of communication between the living and the dead, the supernatural or supreme being” (29). With the play, *Death and the King’s Horseman*, Soyinka is able to give a concrete approach to his theory that Yoruba tragic drama originates from the Yoruba worldview as contained in the tragic reality of Ogun’s sacrifice in the abyss. He is able to underline the essence of music in that very important event.

The last song deployed in the National Troupe of Nigeria’s performance of the play is “Lojo moba sun gbalaja”.

**Lojo mo ba sun gbalaja o**

Lojo mo ba sun gbalaja o  
Awo Atata ko gbe mi  
Lojo mo ba sun gbalaja o

**(Translation)**  
**Whenever I pass on**

Whenever I pass on  
Let me be honoured with a decent burial

**Solemn**

Lo-jo mo ba sun gba-la-ja o lo-jo mo ba-sun gba-la-ja - A-wo a-ta-ta ko gbe-mi...

lo-jo mo ba - sun gbe-la-ja -

Musical Notation 5: Lojo mo ba sun gbalaja from Wole Soyinka's  
*Death and the King's Horseman*

This song is rendered in the play as a celebration of the victorious transition of Olunde. Olunde who returns home from London with the intention of burying his father who according to tradition ought to have passed on in a ritual suicide in order to accompany the dead king. When he realises that his father is still alive despite the dire consequence on the community of leaving the king stranded in the abyss of transition and being aware of the attendant shame and dishonour on his family for failing to perform their traditional role when it mattered most, he takes it upon himself to redeem his family glory on the one hand and to rescue the community from the impending doom on the other hand. Iyaloja captures it succinctly:

There lies the honour of your household and of your race. Because he could not bear to let honour fly out of doors, he stopped it with his life. The son has proved the father Elesin, and there is nothing left in your mouth to gnash but infant gums. (75)

This sacrificial act of boldness endears him to his people who give him an honourable burial which necessitates the song.

The song is a reminder of the inevitability of death and in this particular situation calls for celebration because Olunde dies for the common benefit of the society. The song says, that when one dies, the most befitting burial is one given in appreciation of one's good deeds by the community. As it turns out in the play, Elesin Oba whose position calls for the ritual

transition, tactically delays and is arrested and incarcerated. Olunde, Elesin Oba's son, sacrifices himself in order to forestall calamity on the society. As such, the song is apt as employed in this circumstance. Olunde does not think about himself, his youthfulness, his western education, which promises him a rosy life. He gives all up for the wellbeing of his people. The song is symbolic and thematic at the same time. It articulates the fact that the best person is one who lives for the collective good of humanity, and thematic in the sense that it underscores one of the playwright's philosophical preoccupations in the play which is that the future lies in the hands of the youth as it is becoming increasingly evident that the older generation seems to be failing.

#### **4.3.2.3 Post-Performance Phase**

The playwright, Wole Soyinka, was at the Muson Centre, Lagos, on Tuesday 6th of July, 2004 to watch the performance. Narrating the strikingly captivating and restorative story, *Death and the King's Horseman* furnishes the audience with a lively dramatic ostentatious performance, and from the comments of professional dramatists and arts enthusiasts who saw the performance and were interacted with by this researcher, the outstanding success accomplished through the presentation was the masterful use of music and songs. Yerima's interpretation of the play was challenging and at the same time interesting. He saw the play as a dramatic representation of the Yoruba cosmology and a thesis play of Wole Soyinka's concept of the Yoruba/African tragedy as theorised in *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Therefore, he insisted that he must witness the authentic cultural and traditional mode of ritual ceremony as performed in Oyo kingdom, southwest of Nigeria, where the real incident occurred. In order to achieve this, he had to travel to observe the proceedings during the transition of a king and conducted an all-inclusive interview of the Alaafin.

According to Yerima, as eloquently discussed during one of the rehearsals of the play, the unique opportunity of experiencing empirical knowledge in terms of the historical and cultural perspectives of the play, provided him a convincing starting point for the exposition and artistic realization of the performance. Yerima also explained that his motivation for the use of music in the performance stemmed from the fact that Soyinka's attitude to music is profound and functional. Yerima sees Soyinka taking music beyond entertainment or aesthetic considerations to the realm of illustrating the preoccupation of the play and poetically articulating the hard-core traditional African values, such as admonition, correction, information, historicity and self-assessment. He is more interested in pinning music within the context of the play. He does not allow music to overshadow the play. For him, the music functions as a descriptive mechanism in the play. He believes a play director is free to use the songs he feels are relevant to the play. Wole Soyinka pays particular attention to the poetry, the chants and dialogue, as exemplified in the "Not I bird chant" in the dialogue between Elesin and Olohun-Iyo. All these, Yerima explained, are the propelling factors that formed the basis for his approach to the use of music in the production of *Death and the King's Horseman*.

It is noteworthy that the performance of *Death and the King's Horseman* under review, in compliance with the demands of the script, made use of electronic music to realistically represent the Ballroom scene in Scene four (45). "Rule Britannia" was played to entertain the ballroom guests. The playwright chose to use this particular music intentionally to externalise the British imperialist ideology or British supremacy over Africa as articulated in the lyrics.

Rule, Britannia!

Solo: Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves!  
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.  
When Britain first, at heaven's command,

Arose from out the azure main,  
This was the charter of the land,  
And Guardian Angels sang this strain:

Chorus:       The nations not so blest as thee  
                  Must, in their turn, to tyrants fall,  
                  While thou shalt flourish great and free:  
                  The dread and envy of them all.  
                  Still more majestic shalt thou rise,  
                  More dreadful from each foreign stroke,  
                  As the loud blast that tears the skies  
                  But to root thy native oak.  
                  Thee haughty tyrants ne'er shall tame;  
                  All their attempts to bend thee down  
                  But arouse thy generous flame,  
                  But work their woe and thy renown.  
                  To thee belongs the rural reign;  
                  Thy cities shall with commerce shine;  
                  All thine shall be the subject main,  
                  And every shore it circles, thine.  
                  The Muses, still with freedom found,  
                  Shall to thy happy coasts repair.  
                  Blest isle! with matchless beauty crowned,  
                  And manly hearts to guard the fail.  
                  Rule, Britannia! Britannia rule the waves!  
                  Britons ever, never, never shall be slaves

This song speaks volumes about the mind-set of the British as the world's superpower and cultural overlords. The song says that God gave Britain authority to be master of all nations and never to be slaves to anyone, to be commercially and economically superior to other nations and to flourish and outshine others. It is against this racial fantasy that the British regard whatever is unknown to them as either non-existent or ignoble. As such, the Yoruba religious worldview that advocates a harmonious coexistence among the three planes of existence – the world of the unborn, the living and the ancestors – is ridiculous, backward and barbaric. Therefore, the Pilkingses assume their self-assigned angelic responsibility of rescuing Elesin Oba from needless death. This song is as such a musical voyage into the philosophy, ideology and self-acclaimed cultural hegemony of the British imperialists, which Soyinka deflates in the play.

#### **4.4 *The Strong Breed*: A Synopsis**

Similar to Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, music also plays important functions and an aesthetic role in *The Strong Breed* which dramatises the story of Eman who, having fled his home, sojourns as a teacher in Sunma's village. At the approach of Sunma's village's annual festival where it is customary for a stranger to "carry" the pains of the community away, Sunma urges Eman to leave the village to forestall any unforeseen circumstances. Eman remains despite Sunma's persistence that he should leave until it is too late and Eman finds himself entangled in a complex situation.

Eman confronts Jaguna, one of the village custodians of the tradition and Sunma's father, and Oroge and demands the justification for compelling a stranger to be the Carrier, unlike in his own village where the Carrier is an initiate for the purpose. Eman, out of compassion, replaces Ifada the village idiot who has been chosen for the sacrifice. Halfway into the sacrifice, Eman runs away and is pursued by the village elders. While fleeing he goes into trances and sees himself running away from his village as futile. As the custom demands, Eman is caught and hanged; nevertheless, the villagers are disappointed because they think the sacrifice is an effort in futility.

##### **4.4.1 Pre-Performance**

The following discussion about *The Strong Breed* is based on the joint production of the play by the National Troupe of Nigeria and the French Cultural Centre, Lagos on the 21st of October 2002 at the Muson Centre, Lagos. As characteristic of the National Troupe of Nigeria, it invited some professional artistes to collaborate with the regular troupe members. The play director, Ahmed Yerima, embarked on preliminary investigations on the play in terms of its underpinnings, cultural index, socio-religious undertone, the rhythm of the

production and so on. This was sufficiently complemented by the artistic and technical knowhow of his production team.

A great deal of preliminary business was done during the conversation between the director and the production team. For instance, it was during these interactions that the director explored the opinions of the cast and crew about their perception of Soyinka and his works. This enriching exercise prepared the cast and crew for the artistic exploration of the world of the play. Also, during this phase, production logistics such as the availability of the guest artistes, possibility of accommodation for cast and crew around the rehearsal venue and production team recreation were considered.

The rehearsals commenced with the try-outs conducted in sections in the manner of a seminar. Actors were asked to read in an extremely extemporaneous method. Dancers were instructed to dance, sing and create and perform impromptu. The same procedure was adopted for the drummers. In generating the cast needed, the director in addition to looking out for competent performers also emphasized the importance of dedication to the job and to the ensemble. He was interested in performers whose main concern is with the absolute success of the production. The director emphasised the need for actors, dancers, drummers and singers who could sacrifice their personal engagements without being forced and who would not be distracted by their private interests. From the starting point, the director and his team decided on a collaborative system and defined the code of conduct of the production. Roles were not given before the initial period of rehearsal. A great deal of reading of the play was also executed during this period in juxtaposition with the ensemble development of physical movements. In the process of reading, various people were given different roles to read and the cast evolved naturally as it became obvious who was best suited for each role. Other engagements were collective experiments. The director and his group considered the

best and most genuine and convincing method of narrating the story, while the director played his role of shaping and giving direction to the outcome of all demonstrations.

#### **4.4.2 Performance Phase/Music**

The music section made up of resident drummers from the National Troupe teamed up with some renowned Nigerian singers and chanters such as Ayo Ewebiyi, Kehinde and Taiwo Adeyemo and Seun Abe, to produce rich and inspiring musical interpretations that projected the aesthetic quality of the play in terms of vocal and instrumental renditions of songs. The critical analysis of the use of music in the production under review is discussed as follows. The design team, which included the set designer, Biodun Abe; lighting designer, George Nwajei; assistant director music, Osita Matilda Egbunike; costume and make-up personnel, were also present at the rehearsals to provide suggestions from their professional perspectives and tap inspiration from the demonstrations of the performers to enhance their concepts. The National Troupe of Nigeria's performance of the play on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, 2002 at the Muson Centre Lagos, opened with such an air of celebration befitting a community, which expects a rebirth, especially on the verge of the sacrifice meant to usher in a new kind of life and blessing. With the actors dressed in various enchanting traditional costume and music drawn from the Ijebu speaking area of Yorubaland, one experienced a sense of nostalgia about communal life in general.

As an Ijebu man resident in Lagos, watching the play, seeing actors and dancers costumed in traditional Ijebu clothes, gave me and other members of the audience, as evident from their side comments, a deep sense of nostalgia. It was like being back home and savouring the splendour of communal life. The music rendered was powerful; it stirred up emotions of pity and fear in the audience. We in the audience were in sympathy with the protagonist as his fate is left hanging in the drama. We empathised with Eman, the tragic

hero, as he passes through the traumatic experience in the play and we were gripped with fear imagining ourselves in the same situation.

In a bid to situate the play in a realistic and identifiable locale the director made the Ijebu people and culture become the setting of the play, especially with Soyinka's extensive use of the *Agemo* ritual, which serves as the background and world of the play. In this sense, Ogunba's article, "The *Agemo* Cult in Ijebuland" (1965) became a major research material for a proper conceptualization and location of the play within the scope of its surrounding culture. The first song in the National Troupe's performance of the play is "Eni lodun awa" (It is Celebration Galore)

1. **Eni l'odun awa**

Eni l'odun awa, igba ti wa lode  
Asiko awa maa re,  
Eni lodun awa igba ti wa lode  
Esuru taa wuye, agabo y'omo da ni  
Atefo oniru  
Eeee ah eh, awa o le gbagbe koko tori isu

(**Translation**)

**It is Celebration Galore**

We are the rave of the moment  
It is celebration galore, we are the rave of the moment  
Our harvest is bountiful  
Our trade is prosperous  
Our barn overruns  
Indeed! It is celebration galore

1. Isu gbo l'oko o, a fi gun'yan  
At'omode at'agba, awa de 'be a jeun  
Emu iyan to l'eran  
L'awa o fi pade ebi

(**Translation**)

Our farm produce yields its very best  
The proceeds go round all and sundry  
There is more than enough to eat and drink

2. Lau erebe, erebe lau  
 Owo ile la nlo, ao ma ya'wo fi se o  
 Lau erebe

**(Translation)**

Hurray! Hurray! Hurray!  
 We are self-sufficient and our economy is buoyant  
 Hurray! Hurray! Hurray!

1

**Lively**

E-ni lo dun a wa I gba ti wa lo de A-si-ko a wa ma re o\_\_\_ E-ni lo dun a-wa  
 I - gba - ti wa - lo - de.

E-su-ru ta wu ye A-gba-do yo mo da ni A-te-fo o - ni ru E a e a-  
 wa o le gba gbe\_\_\_ ko - ko to ri i su E\_\_\_

a e

2

I-su gbo lo ko I-su gbo lo ko\_\_\_ A fi-gun yan A-to-mo-de a - ta-gba a-wa de be a-je-  
 un E - mu I - yan to le - ran la wao fi pa

de e - bi

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 6/8 time, key of B-flat major. The first staff contains the lyrics: La-wu e-re-beo e-re-be la u o-wo i-le lan - lo a o ma ya wo fi se o la-u e-re-be. The second staff contains the lyrics: E re be la-u.

Musical Notation 6: *Eni l'odun awa igba ti wa lode*,  
From Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*

This three-stanza song literally expresses happiness and a festive mood. Titled “It is Celebration Galore”, it says of the moment as a joyous one. It emphasises economic prosperity and contentment of the community. It features at the beginning of the play, setting the mood and portraying a joyous people. The audience therefore identified with the village or community in question as everybody desires an atmosphere of peace without which development is a mirage. This song apart from being suitable and aesthetically relevant to the play as discussed above, also underscores the philosophy of Africanism. In it, Soyinka extols the fact that the Yoruba people have a tradition that showcases their thoughts and emotions musically. It also captures the atmosphere of a community in celebration and positive expectation because of observing the traditional rite of purging their society of evils. The mood is one of high spirits, which unfortunately turns sour when the unexpected happens.

The Yoruba love to express themselves musically to the extent that co-wives quarrelling, rather than becoming violent would express their displeasure by singing suggestive, idiomatic and symbolic songs while they go about their normal activities peacefully. This cultural practice, which has almost gone into extinction made settling quarrels easier between aggrieved co-wives as no physical injuries are sustained. It therefore does not come as a surprise that Sunma’s people in the play readily express their happy mood in songs. Music here stimulates the resuscitation of this almost extinct Yoruba cultural

practice. It is however expedient to mention that the song in question was a directorial invention as it does not feature in the text of the play.

However, as the plot of the play unfolds, the lively air of the music, which opened the play, was gradually replaced with another that is more sombre and ominous. Music conveys the mood, comments on the tragic reality and builds tension. Of particular significance is the music rendered during the encounter between Sunma and Eman, especially when she tries to persuade him to leave.

**Igi Igbale**

Igi Igbale le ri o, igi igbale  
O d’omode kii ra’gan bede o, igi igbale

**(Translation)**

**Just a mirage**  
Just a mirage  
Whatever the non-initiate beholds  
Simply a mirage

I-gi i - gba-le le ri o i - gi i - gba-le I-gi i - gba-le le ri o i - gi i -

gba-le o-do-mo de\_\_\_ ki ra gan be-de o i - gi i - gba-le

Musical Notation 7: “Igi Igbale le ri o, igi igbale”a song

The music underlines Sunma’s lack of knowledge about the sacrifice that Eman, who is very much aware of what society demands of him and knows the import and necessity of the ritual sacrifice too well. The song reflects the transition from happiness to an ominous atmosphere. A situation that is festive and expectant suddenly becomes one of suspicion and apprehension as expressed in “Igi Igbagbe”. Music therefore helps to advance the narrative by setting the mood and underscoring the playwright’s preoccupation. Cartey’s opinion that Eman’s death is “the sacrificial act that would interrupt the cycle of unending history and bring to an end

an inherent and tragic history” (Irele, 1978: 210) appears to be buttressed by the troupe’s choice of music as time gradually approaches for the ritual act.

This song is an affirmation of the esoteric nature of ritual sacrifice in the play. Soyinka believes in the inherent carrier motif in Yoruba traditional religion and has woven this drama round it as he does in *Death and the King’s Horseman*. This song articulates the sacredness of religious ritual. Only the initiates understand, as it remains a mirage for non-initiates. In other words, no matter how educated a person or how sophisticated a culture is, African tradition is sacred and sacrosanct and it matters not whether it makes sense to non-initiates or not. Sunma, in the play has western education, and does not understand the relevance or justification of the sacrifice, and vehemently argues that Eman should leave the town. By extension, it can be assumed that Sunma represents the ignorance of the West about African tradition as demonstrated by Pilkings in *Death and the King’s Horseman*. The ultimate goal therefore is to retain, sustain and propagate Africanness regardless of the position of the west about it.

Still on the deployment of music in this play as it was performed by the National Troupe of Nigeria, the song that was rendered when the elders and custodians of the imaginary Yoruba community particularly as demonstrated in the performance under review where Agemo (a famous Ijebu masquerade) featured prominently, is the “Afeni ti kogila kolu” (Except an insane person) song. It added credence to the theatricality of the play. The elders are enraged at the disappearance of Ifada and knowing the implication and consequence of the disappearance should the appointed time for the ritual pass, became angry and agitated. In order to intensify the rage of the moment the song is rendered.

**Afeni ti kogila kolu**  
Afeni ti Kogila Kolu  
Afeni Esu se  
Lole ko l’eshu  
Lole ko lu Sango

A f'eni Eshu fe pa

(Translation)

**Except an insane person**

Except an insane person

Except the bewitched

Can dare Eshu

Can confront Sango

Except one destined to be killed by Eshu

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 12/8 time. The first staff contains the lyrics: "A - f'eni ti ko-gi-la ko lu a - f'eni e-shu'n-se lo-le". The second staff contains the lyrics: "ko l'e-shu lo-le ko-lu san-go A - f'eni e-shu fe-pa". The music is written in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb).

Musical Notation 8: "Afeni ti Kogila Kolu"

This song is a fast rhythm and high tempo song. It connotatively asserts that no one dares to confront Esu, the Yoruba god of justice and retribution. Should anyone dare Esu, he or she will die a shameful and violent death. By extension, the song is a musical attack on all anti-Yoruba culture and tradition. For instance, in the play, Eman an educated person questions the rationale of compelling Ifada to die for the society. The question that arises here is whether Eman is against the tradition of the Carrier or the village Elders' interpretation of the Carrier. Eman does not leave the village when Sunma urges him to. He is not a stranger to the tradition, he stays back to protect poor and helpless Ifada from being offered as the sacrificial lamb. Also, through a series of flashbacks Eman realises that he cannot run from the sacred tradition of his forbearers, himself being from a lineage of carriers. His stance is against the choice of the vulnerable Ifada for the sacrifice and not the tradition itself.

In order to drive home his stance on the issue, he gives Ifada refuge and remains resolute in Ifada's favour.

Eman’s death ushers in the mood of sombre resignation and the indictment that emerges after the act. Yerima points at the stage direction “Almost at once, the villagers begin to return, subdued and guilty” (145). He sees the moral import of the play and supports his argument with Jaguna’s outburst “But did you see them? One and all they looked up at the man and words died in their throats.... Women could not have behaved so shamefully. One by one, they crept off like sick dogs. Not one could raise a curse” (146). “Le e lere kooko” (Farewell) conveyed this mood, lamenting and underlining the mortal situation of every man and death as the end of every being.

**Le e lere kooko**

Le e lere kooko  
Aka bara ni han an o

(Translation)

**Farewell**

Farewell  
We shall meet over there, yonder



Musical Notation 9: “Le e lere kooko”

“Agboko” (The Pilot) song came on board in the performance, rendered by the orchestra. On the surface, it is intriguing that someone who understands the terrain should be entrusted with the steering of the ship of the journey of life. The song expresses conviction on the need to allow the custodian of the culture to be in charge and do what is needed, as they cannot be wrong. The song is rendered just when it seems the audience may be carried away by Eman’s eloquent argument against sacrificing Ifada. Eman is portrayed as an educated person with a logical sense of reasoning. He proficiently and eloquently presents

his advocacy against sacrificing Ifada. Yerima quickly injects this song at this auspicious moment to defend the position of the elders that the Yoruba tradition must not “die”. This song is a reverberating call for the rejection of the hitherto notion that Africa had no culture. It admonishes the audience not to allow western-inspired ideology to triumph over African consciousness and cultural identity. The following are lyrics and notation of the song.

### Agboko

Agboko fo'ne mu we jikawa  
 Amama gboko hun 'gbori wa o  
 Te mo yemo o,  
 E e daada simi niye(3x)  
 Oma gbemi yoko, gbemi yoko, gbemi yoko  
 Teete go re o, dada simi niye

(Transilation)

### The Pilot

Let the seasoned and skilful pilot steer the ship  
 And not the careless and unstable  
 Trust me on this.  
 Steer on, pilot  
 This journey of life, Steer on, pilot

A-gbo-ko fo'ne mu we-ji-ka wa a-ma-ma gbo-ko hun gbo-ri wao Te-mi-ye mo

5 Ee\_\_ daa-da si-mi ni ye\_\_ Ee\_\_ daa-da si-mi ni ye\_\_ Ea\_\_ daa-da

10 si - mi ni - ye\_\_ o - ma gbe-mi yo - ko gbe-mi yo - ko gbe-mi yo - ko

Wa'e - yin o - loo - to

Musical Notation 10: “Agboko”

This song advances the meaning of the play in that it underscores the playwright's preoccupation and concretises the directorial interpretation of it. The author sets out to preserve the sanctity of Yoruba culture. He creates the eloquent Eman to argue against the choice of Ifada for the sacrifice. Just as the audience is being persuaded to see reason with Eman, the song interrupts the audience's flow of thought by calling attention to the fact that the elders, the custodians of the tradition are the party to listen to.

Soyinka uses the play and its music through a profound handling of mythology as an avenue for "universal verities and metaphysical profundities" Okpewho, (1983:4) and as a necessary step to restate the cultural values of the society, especially through the protagonist's recognition and acceptance of a tragic destiny as the price for societal salvation. It is also a statement about political leadership in present-day Nigeria and, indeed African societies, for the need to have leaders who are willing to sacrifice for that desirable change in society, which has remained elusive. Let us take the case of Nigeria, for example, leadership failure has rendered an economically buoyant country impoverished because her leaders failed her. Everyone considers himself or herself first to the detriment of the collective wellbeing and the play, in the view of this study, is perhaps Soyinka's attempt to intervene by challenging and hopefully redirecting the minds of the political elite in a postcolonial Nigeria where old customs and traditions have been abandoned by the western educated elite.

#### 4.4.3 Post-Performance Phase

The issue of sacrifice as an essential component of the traditional people of Nigeria is convincingly advanced in the performance of the play. This is evident in the opening scene of the play:

**SUNMA** [hesitant] You will have to make up your mind soon Eman. The lorry leaves very shortly. [As Eman does not answer, Sunma continues her work, more nervously. Two villagers, obviously travellers, pass hurriedly in front of the house, the man has a small raffia sack, the woman a cloth-covered basket, the man enters first, turns and urges the woman who is just emerging to hurry.]

**SUNMA** [Seeing them, her tone is more intense.]: Eman, are we going or aren't we? You will leave it too late. (115)

This is exemplified in the above, where Sunma tries vehemently out of ignorance of the significance of the ritual to persuade Eman to leave the community in order to avoid being a victim. While unknown to her Eman who hails from a lineage of carriers, understands quite well the spiritual relevance and implication.

The artistic and the literary placement of Soyinka as a playwright was consciously demonstrated by the director, Ahmed Yerima, in terms of the depiction of myths, ritual festivals, particularly in the conception with regards to the function of music, drumming, poetry, proverbs, chants and metaphors. The drama drew a lot of emotion from the audience especially at that critical moment when Eman, recognizing Ifada's reluctance, undertakes the test to be the scapegoat only for him to abscond at the final and most decisive juncture. In the end he is confined and murdered like an animal. The sombre and tragic situation became heightened with the infusion of a dirge rendered in song traversing the temperament of life and death.

The play is intricate in its communication of the storyline as Soyinka dramatises the various problems concealed by the portrayal. This was lucidly and creatively explicated by the director through the deployment of Yoruba traditional music in the form of songs,

drumming, chanting and dancing, which functions as instruments of worship and ritual cleansing and how performers posture as mediator between gods and ancestral spirits and calling upon and illuminating their manifestations. This is evident at the point where the two cleansing rituals are connected throughout the play and are established at the same instance.

In terms of the design and technical concepts of the production, there is a prudent configuration of applicable devices, images and indicators which help to communicate the playwright's and the director's artistic expression, and also enhance the aesthetics of the performance. The capacity for the design/décor, costume, make-up, properties and masks is curtailed for the avoidance of clumsy movements of actors on stage. Directorially, each of the scenes and the dramatic actions of the play corresponded with the others, giving the performers a regulated tempo with the appropriate ritualistic and deeply engaging tragic atmosphere.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Music is used in the performances of the above plays as a tool of narration and element of spectacle. Music is used to externalise the mind of characters, to project their thoughts, and foreshadow actions. It is used to, in some cases, warn or advise the characters. It is also employed as a cultural index and reflection of the Yoruba worldview. There are specific types of music for specific occasions as there are different types of music for different moods and situations. In the performances studied, music is employed to underscore thematic preoccupations, advance the drama, set mood and bridge the periods of scene changes. Music also reflects the Yoruba perception of life.

The directors of the plays of Soyinka under study maximise their directorial independence by not only creatively interpreting the music in *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Strong Breed* but also injecting additional songs to reach their envisaged dramatic crescendo. Music

in the performance of these plays shows Soyinka as a thoroughbred Yoruba man who is at home with the Yoruba tradition. The deployment of music in both plays exhibit the playwright's mastery of Yoruba culture. It enhances the performances and advances the narratives.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE DEPLOYMENT OF MUSIC IN THE PERFORMANCE OF FEMI OSOFISAN'S *MANY COLOURS MAKE THE THUNDER-KING* AND *THE WOMEN OF OWU*

#### 5.1 Introduction

Femi Osofisan is of the second generation of Nigerian/African playwrights (Richards, 1987 and Rubin, 2016) following the literary giants – Wole Soyinka and Athol Fugard. His literary strides and dramatic creativity have earned him global recognition. This chapter discusses the deployment of music in the National Troupe of Nigeria's performance of two of his plays, namely *Women of Owu* and *Many Colours Make the Thunder King*, via descriptive analysis.

#### 5.2. Femi Osofisan: A Biography

Femi Osofisan's theatre is a radical type, geared towards mobilization of energy in dismantling every form of oppressive apparatus against the collective. This kind of dramatic verve, artistic energy and creative effervescence for spectacular theatre, is not without its influence on his dramaturgy. Coming from a background of folk tales, myth and songs as well as the Apidan (mystic) theatre and the Alarinjo theatre which Biodun Jeyifo (1984) describes as "traveling theatre", he was obviously enthralled by the academic yet fluid merger of traditional lore, Yoruba cultural aesthetics and with the narrative skill of Soyinka. He explains his unforgettable encounter (Banham, 2006), the starting point of his own foray into the dramatic world of language, spectacle and commitment was his experience of the production of *Kongi's Harvest*. He explains:

This one was totally mesmerising. I was entranced by the scenic effects, by the costuming, the play of lights and colours, the dancing, and the music. I had never seen anything like this ... the evening was like an initiation into what true African theatre should be. (Osofisan, 2001: 46)

Born in 1946 in Erunwon, Ogun State, Osofisan had his primary school days in Ifo, another area in the state, before attending Government College, Ibadan and later the University of Ibadan. His upbringing was deep in the culture and folk tradition of his people. This is evident in his plays that integrate traditional forms, such as storytelling, mime, songs, dance and rhythm, proverbs, and the way he constructs and deconstructs reality, as elements of the narrative form peculiar to his Yoruba environment and background. According to Ododo (2016), these “folkish elements” are not limited to folk narrative, riddle, chants, proverbs, incantations among others, which served the dramatic purpose of earlier dramatists. Soyinka’s deft and skilful utilization of these cultural elements influenced Osofisan’s dramaturgy in several remarkable ways (Osofisan, 2001).

However, unlike Soyinka who glorifies the exotic past of the Yoruba race, Osofisan channels his own artistic energy toward purposes that underline his views about the role of arts in general and theatre in particular in promoting awareness and national consciousness. According to Richards, “Osofisan radically scrutinizes tradition, mining its lore and philosophy in order to critique its material foundations and questions its relationship to present conditions. In so doing, he fashions a dramaturgy seemingly more equipped to meet his society’s challenges” (1995:224).

Growing up was not without some literary activities and influence especially from his teacher and headmaster of his school, Derek Bullock, whose enthusiasm greatly energized Osofisan’s own innate artistic quality. From Bullock’s simple makeshift stage and the Arts Theatre, Ibadan, Osofisan blossomed as a writer. He has always been particularly concerned about striking a relationship with the masses and through his work, to “engage the interest and belief of the audience, by the use of flexible dramatic forms...in which are embedded traditional African elements of music, dance, songs, drumming, mime and improvisation” (Awodiya, 2006: 50).

From the humble beginning of *A Restless Run of Locusts* (2003), Osofisan gradually transformed into a mature and eclectic dramatist of note by embracing a dynamic theatre of experimentation with form, and making flexibility a hallmark of his stagecraft, as opposed to sophisticated theatre. “The drama which our people savour is still one in the mould of ‘total theatre’, which includes music, dance and spectacle” (20). He gave this in a large dose in his plays that utilize the combination of these theatrical elements.

Soyinka’s significant influence on Osofisan’s dramaturgy stands out—a fact he seems not tired of stating in unequivocal terms. For example, in an interview, he states; “His [Soyinka] example has always influenced me, so even before I began to write at all I was already under his influence as somebody who deserves to be emulated. I am still very much influenced by him” (Ododo, 1988). Such process of “apprenticeship” under a world-acclaimed dramatist and cultural icon will obviously rub off on Osofisan who, just like Soyinka, utilises the myth and ritual of his people, though not in the manner of Soyinka eventually and history through what Yvette Hutchison describes as “engaging with the recognisable socio-political realities of contemporary Africa” (2006: 208). For example, Yoruba gods feature prominently in his works, not to be revered, but merely as metaphors for engaging with reality. For instance, he demystifies Olokun and Elusu in *No More the Wasted Breed*, and portrays Esu as deceptive and unreasonable in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*.

In such situations of dramaturgic manipulation, Osofisan perceives them as “metaphors of some of the enduring qualities of society” (Awodiya, 2006: 48). As such, unlike Soyinka, his own “critical use of myth, ritual and theatrical form” (208), has produced instead, “the most imaginative and powerful works in the Nigerian English language theatre” (Dunton, 1992: 67).

### **5.3 A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE DEPLOYMENT OF MUSIC IN THE 2009/2010 THA 404 SPECIALISED PRACTICAL PROJECT IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CREATIVE ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS' PERFORMANCE OF FEMI OSOFISAN'S *MANY COLOURS MAKE THE THUNDER KING***

Femi Osofisan gives great credence to the purpose of drama to confront and resist undemocratic tendencies to emancipate the people. The scope of his work is evident that he has a significant understanding of his culture. The substance of his drama is the experimentation of songs, music and dance employed so as to extrapolate the creative and aesthetic reflection of his society and also to communicate his vision, just as he has imaginatively demonstrated in his plays. *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* and *Women of Owu* will be analysed in this section.

#### **5.3.1 *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King*: A Synopsis**

The choice of this particular performance rests upon some significant considerations. It was a performance done in partial fulfilment of the award of Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Arts (Theatre Option) in the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Nigeria. The performance was the culmination of four years of training and research in the art of playmaking and play production. It is a model performance where students of Theatre Arts have to display the extent of the acquisition of play production skills; as such, concerted effort was devoted to it. Knowing that their lecturers would examine the production, the students did their best to be creative with their interpretation of the script. Part of the play production skills they have to demonstrate is their understanding of the fundamentals of music in play productions, therefore they intensify efforts to deconstruct and reconstruct the music in the play. They invented and composed fresh music to suit the play.

In addition, Femi Osofisan watched this particular performance and when addressing the team at the end of the viva adjudged the production to be an informed creative

interpretation of the play. Another factor that is instrumental to the choice of this particular performance is the fact that this researcher being a lecturer in the department has over the years observed productions in the department and found this production an exemplary aesthetic and artistic interpretation of the play. Therefore, the performance qualifies to be analysed in terms of the use of music, which is the focus of this study. In order to have a coherent perception of the use of music in the play performance, this segment examines the subject matter under pre-performance, performance and post-performance phases.

The play tells the story of Sango, a successful warrior and king who has conquered more towns and villages than his father, Oranmiyan, who with all his conquests is not satisfied. His major desire is to accomplish an unprecedented feat, which is, to marry Oya, the princess of the river, Osun, the princess of the Forest, and Oba, the princess of the mountain. Though he succeeds in marrying Oya and Osun through the help of Alagemo, his effort at getting to marry Oba is subverted through a plot hatched by his generals – Gbonka and Timi – with the support of Oya and Osun, as a result of jealousy and rivalry. Osun is well blessed with children, but Oya is barren but when Osun decides to help Oya, she is then taken to Yeye Iroko with whom Oya makes a vow that if she is given a child by Yeye Iroko, the child shall be given to Yeye Iroko as a sacrifice.

The attempt by Oya to be the only wife of Sango makes her conspire against Osun and Alagemo, by alleging that they are both lovers. This results in Sango banishing Osun and then placing a death sentence on Alagemo by having him walled up in a vault. Oya deceives Sango that Gbonka and Timi are plotting against him. This makes Sango to order a fight between them which results in Gbonka beheading Timi. Having been victorious in the fight, Gbonka challenges Sango to a fight, which results in Sango losing his throne to Gbonka. Sango's inordinate ambition to become greater than his father, Oranmiyan, leads to the loss

of his kingdom, his wives Oya and Osun, children, his friend and spiritual mentor Alagemo and his faithful and powerful generals Gbonka and Timi.

Through the Yoruba worldview, Osofisan in *Many Colours Make the Thunder King*, remoulds the history and myth of Sango – the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning, who was also a king of Oyo, a Yoruba kingdom – in an artistic and creative manner to recreate the past in a bid to rejuvenate and preserve African sensitivities. He “assumes the traditional role of Igunnu, the masquerade storyteller who features annually in the Yoruba festival of communion with ancestors, to emphasise the continuum in leaders’ crave for excessive power and their predatory desire to subdue others. Osofisan’s main concern in the drama is the conception of the narrative as a correlation to political administration in Nigeria. He likens it to the self-serving and despotic propensities discernible in the ruling class, which threatens the progress of the nation, regardless of her abundant wealth.

Like in some plays of Osofisan, folktales and myths are employed to challenge the domineering and oppressive political structure in post-independence politics. As Garuba concisely puts it, Osofisan’s knowledge of his society through history, legends, myth and folklore nourishes his socialist vision for a better tomorrow (1997). In a similar line of thought, Richards in her observation of Osofisan’s Yoruba cosmology in his dramas submits that ‘The Nigerian historical development and the mythical, legendary and the folklore experiences, through the Yoruba worldview, are adequately represented in the plays of Osofisan not only for a cultural reason but also for the purpose of pedagogy’ (1996).

### 5.3.1.1 Pre-Performance Phase

In an interview, Ibukun Fasuhan (2010) the director, explained that his choice of the play was motivated by the fact that he needed something challenging that will task his creative skills, something captivating in terms of its composition of African total theatre and Femi Osofisan's *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* was just apt for him. The directors for the various plays staged by the Final Year students were chosen, based on individual strengths and capacities, and in his own case, he was already directing plays in the University of Lagos for other purposes, so this exposure gave him an edge over others.

The director cast the play, with the assistance of his stage manager, strictly on merit, taking note of suitability, flexibility, stage presence and vocal quality. Some professional resource persons such as Wale Ajakaye, Ayo Orobiyi and Deborah Ohiri, were invited to assist with the composition of new songs for the play. Although Osofisan wrote some songs in the script it was very hard to find their rhythms, as they were not notated. In order to overcome this challenge, the director invited the above professional musicians to assist in creating suitable rhythms for the songs in the script and to compose other songs that were germane to the artistic and aesthetic realisation of the play. Determined to realise the performance within the context of total theatre, the director brought in some professional drummers and a choreographer in the persons of Uche Obi, Isioma Williams and Akiniyi Ifayemi to assist with the dance.

The characters and their cultural backgrounds were the main motivation for the types of music, songs and chants used in the performance. The director researched into the various traditions that produce and practice some songs and chants peculiar to the deities in the play who are mainly from the Yoruba culture from the South-West of Nigeria (Fasuhan, 2010). Some of the lines/dialogue in the drama also determined the choice of songs appropriate for some moments and situations in the performance. The Bata drums associated with Sango

were the major musical instruments used in the production. This is because the character of Sango is central to the play. Other musical instruments used comprised *Dundun*, *Gbedu* and *Djembe* drums because of their cultural significance to the play. *Bata*, a percussion musical instrument, features during Yoruba religious and traditional ceremonies. *Dundun* is the Yoruba talking drum and it is traditionally deployed as a royal musical instrument. *Gbedu*, also a percussion musical instrument is played during Yoruba traditional ceremonies.

Since the cast and crew were mainly students, rehearsals were scheduled for morning hours between 7 A.M. and 9 A.M. and evening periods from 5 P.M. to 7 P.M. The first exercise was the play reading so that the students could be familiar with the story. This was followed by character analysis, the historical and cultural backgrounds of the play along with the discussion of the directorial concept. Then the director embarked on the blocking of the play, concentrating on a flexible rehearsal schedule to accommodate the other rehearsals that the students were part of. The dance rehearsals were conducted separately under the coordination of the choreographer –Lewis Bassey. The director also rehearsed with some actors individually and this gave room for him to brush up the actors, especially Igunmu played by Oke Olawale, who had issues with enunciation and general lines delivery. A whole week was devoted to several run-throughs of the play. In all, the entire rehearsals were within a period of two months (Fasuhan, 2010).

The play director explained that the flexible and sometimes individual rehearsals were very interesting and helpful to him because he had more time with the actors, and they could dissect the role better. He also explained that working on the play as a director actually improved his directing skills because he was inspired by the playwright's dramaturgy - alienation techniques such as storytelling, play-within-a-play and emotional distancing. He found useful the experience of embarking on research into the play, particularly the cultural aspects of the Igunmu character. He wanted the character to depict the typical traditional

Igunmu magical display that would make it increase in length and reduce all of a sudden, but he was told that that it could not be achieved unless the real Igunmu from the traditional shrine was made to play the role. After that hindrance, he tried to explore other means of achieving his aim by giving two long sticks to the actor to experiment with, but he had to abandon the idea because he was warned about the danger and the cultural implications of representing such a sacred act on stage. He consequently removed that section from the play performance.

### 5.3.1.2 Performance Phase/Music

The performance of *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* by the students of the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, on 21st August, 2010 was watched by a large turnout of audience to the full capacity of the two thousand-seater University of Lagos main auditorium. The fact that “songs can form the superstructure to acting” (Ogundeji, 2003: 23) was quickly expressed from the moment the play started. The sense of celebration usually heralded by the appearance of *Igunnuko*, the narrator and embodiment of the people’s sacred values and tradition, was captured by the music introduced, “Mari wo yee e ye”. The song is as follows:

#### **Mari wo yee e eye**

Mari wo yee e ye  
 Agan yee e ye  
 Mariwo tuyeri yeri agan tu  
 Yeriyeri Mariwo eda giri wa woran etc

#### **Great Acolytes, Let’s Celebrate**

Great Acolytes, let’s celebrate  
 Custodians of our cults, let’s celebrate  
 Acolytes come forth in your multitude  
 Great Acolytes come be part of this celebration

The image displays musical notation for a song in 12/8 time, featuring a call and response structure. The notation is organized into four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line.

- System 1:** Labeled "CALL" and "CHORUS". The vocal line has two phrases: "Ma-ri-wo yee- ye\_ e" and "Ma-ri-wo yee- ye\_ e". The piano accompaniment has two phrases: "a-gan yee e" and "a-gan yee e".
- System 2:** Labeled "3". The vocal line has two phrases: "Ma-ri-wo yee ye\_ e" and "Ma-ri-wo yee ye\_ e". The piano accompaniment has two phrases: "a-gan yee e" and "a-gan yee e".
- System 3:** Labeled "5". The vocal line has two phrases: "Ma-ri-wo tu yee-re yee-re" and "Ma-ri-wo e da gi-ri wa wo-ran a-gun tu ye-ri-ye". The piano accompaniment has two phrases: "a-gun tu ye-ri-ye -" and "a-gun tu ye-ri-ye".
- System 4:** Labeled "7". The vocal line has the word "ri". The piano accompaniment has the word "ri".

Music Notation 11: “Mari wo Yee e”

This song was high-pitched and fast tempo, accompanied by rich and robust traditional percussion instruments. It was like an opening glee, a clarion call to the stakeholders – the acolytes and the custodians of the cults - to troop out en masse and celebrate. The opening scene of the play was a convocation of the Yoruba deities for a community celebration. Prototype of a town crier, the call and response song with its loud rich musical accompaniment roused the people and set the mood for the all-important communal festival.

As found in the text, *Igunnuko*'s appearance aside, being often at a celebration is significant in a number of ways. First, it helps to portray the communal essence of the people's way of life. Since it is usually during harvest, a time when the community gives thanks to their gods for bountiful farm products, it also points in the direction of rebirth, a new lease of life, when vegetation flourishes and there is plenty to eat and sell; a period of new life for all. Osofisan uses the opening scene, in some of his other plays such as *Morountodun*, *Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest*, as a way to "tackle audience participation in his dramaturgy" (Obafemi and Abdullahi, 2003: 63). In their opinion, Osofisan categorizes his audience into 'integral' and 'integrated' audiences. The integral audience forms a corporate part of the play, while the integrated audience is the theatre audience, who are also sporadically drawn into the performance" (163-4). "Mariwo yee", is a call and response music, which suggests that everybody is a participant; everyone considers himself/herself a co-celebrant in the festive situation, which heralds the arrival of Sango and his war generals, signalling the beginning of adventure and the nucleus of the play itself.

The song functions in two ways, namely, to underline the awesomeness of the power of Sango the Yoruba god of thunder and, second, to draw attention to the personality whose myth or legend the audience have come to experience in his ritual/spiritual and material existence. Another dimension to the general choice and use of music in the play, as explained by Fasuhan, was informed by the overriding thematic concern glimpsed in the text. He explained that ushering in Sango with the music underlines the gravity of the task he would later attempt to accomplish, the task of taming his overambitious warlords, which later turned tragic. Thus songs (music), in a performance, are not about entertainment only. "They encode, and decode the messages therein" (Obafemi and Abdullahi, 2006:164).

With the use of another song in the performance, the players underscored the need for all stakeholders to be proactive, well-guarded and consistent in their activities towards the

maintenance of stability and peace in the community, with a metaphoric song “Agbami Lawa”, (A dicey situation). In Part 1 Scene 11, Alagemo perfects Sango’s scheme to take Oba, the princess of the mountain, as wife and engages Oya, Sango’s most senior wife, with the justification of Sango’s desire to marry Oba:

**Alagemo:** Olori, you are prevaricating. You know as much as anyone else that the mountain is your senior sister! Her breast feeds and suckles all of us. Your waters begin from mountain springs. If they dry off, your rivers will die, Oya. Your forests, ayabaosun, feeds on the ores of the mountain, on numerous unknown ores womb. Olori, ayaba, and you, generals, I’ll wait. If Sango comes and with his lips he says – not yet, so be it! I’ll wait till he is ready. (39)

As the tension mounts and Oya’s envy metamorphoses into anger, she bursts out angrily:

**Oya:** Ah Osun, we must nourish the mountain, but not necessarily by bringing her into the palace! Generals, let us unite forces, and we shall break Alagemo’s hold on the king. (40)

After Alagemo has let out Sango’s desire for a third wife in the person of Oba, the princess of the mountain, Oya’s anger becomes venomous, her jealousy increases and she sets the stage for domestic politicking and a campaign of calumny, thus creating uncertainty. This imbroglia is similar to circumstances in real life where envy, selfishness and suspicion may lead to cataclysm. The song thus warns the dramatis personae and audience to gird their loins against the disaster that such acts may produce.

**Agbami lawa**

**This is a dicey situation**

Agbami lawa  
K’olobele mo bele  
Agbami lawa  
K’olobele mo bele  
Kala pere gba pere o,  
Oloko mi wa ko,  
Agbami lawa

This is a dicey situation  
Stakeholders be prepared  
This is a dicey situation  
Stakeholders be prepared  
Everyone should gird their loins  
And do their bit  
This is a dicey situation





Musical Notation 12: Agbalami

It was embellished with the use of symbols peculiar to the riverine areas (symbols such as canoe, paddle, basket etc.). The music equally buttresses Obafemi’s claim that “no traditional performance can be conceived outside of poetry”, because of the fact that “songs and folktales, on the one hand, and music and dance, on the other, could also be considered to be part of verbal arts such as folktales, proverbs, riddles, incantations etc., song being the commonest” (14). For example, Sango’s state of despair and anger that no matter what he does, he can never be greater than his father draws attention to the foolishness and utter stupidity of our quest sometimes as human beings. His insistence on solving the riddle that seems to constitute an obstacle to the realization of his dream and the resolve to embark on the journey to actualise the dream is introduced by a chant:

**Iba a gbo ee, agbo mojuba**

**Homage to the Powers**

Iba a gbo ee, agbo mojuba  
 B’omode mi lo sawo ajuba  
 Agbo e Agbo mo juba o

To the powers that be, I bow in homage  
 He who desires to “belong” must bow in homage  
 To the powers that be, I bow in homage



Musical Notation 13: Iba Agbo

The song, “Iba Agbo”, serves as an incantatory chant for the innermost secret of the void to be opened for the knowledge therein to be embraced. It features in the play when Sango desperately searches for power to break his ancestors’ records. He appeals to the

powers of the land to empower him to transcend the feats of those before him. This song therefore externalises the thoughts and aspirations of the tragic hero. Though the song is rendered by the orchestra, it is actually a musical projection of the mind of the tragic hero and as such used as an incidental song. The song gives the audience a peep into Sango’s emotional and psychological plight. Sango is seen as a leader with vaulting ambition, who is prepared to go to any length to realise his goal even if it entails pledging his soul to the forces of darkness. This portrayal reminds one of Christopher Marlowe’s play *Doctor Faustus* (1604) and its eponymous hero, Doctor Faustus. Little wonder then that like Doctor Faustus, Sango suffers a catastrophic fate. This song as such is deployed functionally and aesthetically.

In the same vein, Sango’s quest for greatness is captured in chant-like music, “Mo r’awo loko”, which also makes use of metaphors of dreams, ancestral names and the sense of hope that governs the adventurous mythical king as he embarks on his journey and especially when he meets with Oba.

**Mo r’awo l’oko**

Mo r’awo l’oko  
 Ala I l’ase mo r’awo loko  
 Igba yi lo se pade  
 Mo r’Adeleye at’Osunbunmi  
 Won ni Durojaiye waa nile  
 Ala i la’ se, mo r’awo loko

**Behold! I found a mystic blessing**

Behold! I found a mystic blessing  
 This is a dream come true  
 A divine destiny par excellence  
 I found Adeleye (Royalty) and Osunbunmi (deific gift)  
 Deific gift accompanied with longevity  
 This is a dream come true

**Free Rhythm**

Mo ra wo\_ lo ko A la-i la se Mo ra wo lo-ko I gba yi lo se pa de Mo ra de le ye

7  
 A to sun-bun mi won ni Du-ro ja - ye wa ni le o A - la i - la se



Musical Notation 14: “Mo r’awo l’oko”

Sango, in his physical, psychological and intellectual search for an unprecedented feat meets Oba. Her timeless beauty captivates, overwhelms and mesmerises him to the point of enchantment. His joy escalates profoundly. At such an indescribable moment of happiness, the orchestra musically captured the mood with this song. Beyond aesthetics, the song underpinned Sango’s weakness, which is an excessive yearning for the opposite sex and an inordinate preference for one wife over the others.

His open display of matchless affection for Oba provokes his other wives Oya and Osun’s jealousy. It makes them connive with his warlords, Timi and Gbonka to abort his marriage proposal to Oba. This connivance serves the function of the plot and sets the pace for the eventual campaign of calumny that culminates in Sango’s catastrophic end. This song plays multifaceted roles; it helps to emphasise the incidence that advanced the course of the play, expresses Sango’s character traits, enhances mood and heightens audience entertainment.

“Da Mama a Jagun o” (Let us say no to war) is another song that is aptly deployed in the play. It is rendered after Sango successfully sets Timi and Gbonka against each other and both prepare for war. The orchestra, this time functioning like the Greek chorus, sings to warn the warlords of the dire consequences of inter-tribal war and advise the community against encouraging the warlords to go to war. Therefore, the song is both a warning and an appeal. It is like other songs before and after it has set the appropriate mood for the scene, captures the tempo, situates the reflective ambience in a right perspective, and integrates the audience into the world of the play.

## Da Mama a Jagun o

Da mama a jagun o,  
B'ogun ne se po to  
Ojo ogun pari ema sukan opin o  
Ona oku ti ku, da pa malu e je a pogun e  
Temi yemi me bu jija mo tana o pin o

## Let's Say No to War

Let's say no to war  
Given the nature of wars  
Their ends are unpredictable  
The dead do not celebrate  
Trust me, this is absolute truth

Musical notation for the song "Da mama a jagun o". The notation is in 12/8 time, with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The melody is written on a single staff in treble clef. The lyrics are written below the staff, aligned with the notes. The lyrics are: "Da ma-ma-a ja-gun o B'o-gun ne se po to O-jo o-gun pa-ri e-ma su-kan o pin o O-na o-ku ti ku da pa ma-lu e-e je a po-gun e o te-mi ye - mi, mee bii bu ja mo ta-na o-pin o".

Musical Notation 15: "Da mama a jagun o"

Apart from the brutality of war, which the song clearly underscores, its aftermath is also of concern, especially the pains of coping with grief, guilt and melancholy that are all. They do not fail to point out the role of women in the success or failure of any political leader or structure. Oya's quest, her manipulative actions through Alagemo and her wilfully taking advantage of Sango's absence to advance her own desire to have children was couched in music, which derived from the Yoruba Ifa corpus.

According to a Yoruba myth, Oya's fiery temper is more violent and destructive than the fire from Sango's mouth and the thunder-conjuring power of his *Ose* (wand) put together. This mythical reality is properly captured in the song "Aya rooro j'oko lo". Its lyrics and relevance are evident as follows:

### Aya rooro j'oko

Aya rooro j'oko  
Oya lee ju Sango, aya rooro j'oko lo

### The wife is more ferocious than the husband

The wife is more ferocious than the husband  
Oya's temper is more ferocious than Sango's fire

Aya rooro j’oko lo

The wife is more ferocious than the husband

Musical notation for 'Aya rooro j’oko lo' in 12/8 time. The first staff contains three measures of music with lyrics: 'A-ya roo-ro jo-ko lo', 'A-ya roo-ro jo-ko lo', and 'O-ya le ju san-go'. The second staff contains one measure of music with lyrics: 'A-ya roo-ro jo-ko lo'.

Musical Notation 16: “Aya rooro j’oko lo”

Music is also deployed to highlight Oya’s overriding jealousy which causes the entire land, and not only the palace unnecessary and avoidable disaster. As it always happens, whenever disaster strikes in the confines of the rulers/oppressors’ homes, it has a way of spreading to affect the masses, especially in such a community of close-knit relationships. Sango’s exit in disgrace couched mixed music of lamentation, regret and relief all at the same time. Osofisan’s idea of utilising myth to address contemporary reality is given impetus by the use of the music, which accompanies the ambitious leader of men.

**Alele ti le**

Awo milo

Alele ti le

Awo mi lo

Ero oja o digbe se

**The transition hour has come**

The initiate transitions to the world beyond

The transition hour has come

The initiate transitions to the world beyond

The journey of no return has commenced

Musical notation for 'Alele tile' in 4/4 time. The first staff contains five measures of music with lyrics: 'A-le-le ti le', 'a-wo mi lo', 'A-le-le ti le', 'a-wo mi lo', and 'E-ro o-ja'. The second staff contains one measure of music with lyrics: 'o di-gbo-se'.

Musical Notation 17: “Alele tile”

This dirge laments the tragic transition of Osun, Oya and Sango and underscores the fact that death, after occurring, is irreversible. The tragic death of Osun, a kind-hearted fellow, and the death of Oya as well as the final disgrace of Sango himself all play out as a

statement by Osofisan about the excesses of political office holders. Rather than preoccupy themselves with the well-being of the electorate, they often engage in adventures and projects that do not benefit or bring profit to the generality. Contemporary situations continue to underscore the relevance of the play. Music, which functions greatly in its theatrical realisation, has come to the fore as not merely an appendage to the narration, but also as a significant part of the entire play.

Conclusively, the choice of music in the performance in question underscores the thematic thrust, which addresses brutality that characterises the Nigerian nation as at that time. Not that these events are not bad in themselves, but that government purportedly instigates some officials to worsen the situation. Therefore, in their own way, the students creatively interpret the play to comment on socio-political turbulence and the irresponsibility of the government in that regard. The helplessness of the masses in the face of upheavals and turbulence as Sango and his military commanders, Timi and Gbonka, wage wars upon wars that do not improve the lot of the people. This is represented in the performance by the commentary on various policies of succeeding governments in Nigeria, which in their short and long terms do not yield any positive results for the hapless citizenry.

### **5.3.1.3 Post-Performance Phase**

According to the director, Ibukun Fasuhan, the performance got a lot of commendations from members of the audience, which included the playwright, Prof. Femi Osofisan, professional artistes, members of the public and students from the University of Lagos and other universities. Professor Osofisan specially praised the director and his cast and crew for making a success of such a complex and challenging play, especially as students. The audience enjoyed the African traditional atmosphere and the energy of the performance. This became evident in the information this researcher gathered from unstructured interviews with

members of the audience after the performance and the amount of applause and standing ovation the audience gave the cast during and after the performance.

They were fascinated by the iroko tree used by the Yeye Iroko character. It was very real to them, especially when it opened and yeye iroko appeared from within the tree. It looked massive on stage so the audience were amazed by the spectacular appearance of the Yeye Iroko, which was very convincing to them. The audience also commended the scintillating performance of Sango played by Patrick Diabuah, his electrifying movements and dances on stage were complemented by the robust and captivating rhythms of bata music and his deep and rich resonating voice gave life to his character. The audience also commended the various dances in the play, which were inspired by the fantastic music from the singers, chanters and drummers.

#### **5.4 A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE DEPLOYMENT OF MUSIC IN THE NATIONAL TROUPE OF NIGERIA'S PERFORMANCE OF FEMI OSOFISAN'S *WOMEN OF OWU***

##### **5.4.1 *Women of Owu*: A Synopsis**

Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu* is an African adaptation of Euripides' *The Trojan Women* – the story of a people and a beloved city destroyed by the brutality of war. The play has its origin in history, around 1821, when the combined forces of the armies of Ijebu and Ife in the Yoruba kingdoms in the south west, along with mercenaries recruited from Oyo refugees fleeing downwards from the Nigerian Savannah region, sacked the city of Owu after a seven-year siege. Owu was a model city-state, one of the most prosperous and best organized of those times. The Allied Forces had attacked it with the pretext of liberating the flourishing market of Apomu from Owu's control. Owu closed the gates of its formidable walls, but it soon had to face the problem of drought when the rains stopped during the siege. This was a boon to the Allied Forces. Finally, in the seventh year they entered the city, and

subdued it. These Allied Forces determined that the city must never rise again, reduced the place to rubble, and set fire to it. They slaughtered all males, adults and children, and carried away the females into slavery.

Osofisan employs traditional circumstances, encounters and dispositions to extrapolate the subjects of persecution, savagery, banishment, conflict, manipulation etc. In doing this, traditional African forms of music, oral tradition, poetry and nuances are merged to produce an egalitarian society. This underscores Osofisan's belief in collective heroism and the zeal to break from a past, which is long past its usefulness.

#### **5.4.2 Pre-Performance Phase**

Osofisan was around and available to direct the play. He handled the casting session assisted by a production team supplied by the National Troupe. The troupe called for auditions. There were several reading sessions before Osofisan arrived at a final cast. The National Troupe has a policy of engaging guest artistes to complement their crop of in-house artistes. So there were a couple of guest artistes invited for the production such as Makinde Adeniran, Sola Awojobi and Kehinde Adeyemo. Osofisan worked with the artistes and musicians of the National Troupe to realise the music for the production. He usually would tell them what he wanted and they would produce the notes and rhythm.

The National Troupe created some new songs for the production, perhaps to reflect contemporary issues. Some of the songs that came with the play that the director considered obsolete were discarded. Traditional musical instruments, especially the ones that produce rhythms, such as *Dundun*, (talking drum) gong, and flute, were considered suitable for the production. It was observed that there was emphasis on acquiring drums that were used to perform the Owu dance that is synonymous with Owu people, such as *Sakara* and *Ogodo*, a semi-rotund calabash played with finger rings.

According to Shaibu Hussein who was the personal assistant to the Artistic Director of the National Troupe of Nigeria, Osofisan adopted a liberal style, which also allowed the actors to have input. He did not have a rigid style of blocking the actors on paper and insisting that they keep to the blocking. He was always telling the actors to work around what they were comfortable with. In addition, because the actors and dancers were experienced, he mostly guided them with his notes during the different phases of the production. The schedule was done in such a way that various activities, such as general exercises, reading, blocking, segmented rehearsals, songs rehearsals and run-throughs were incorporated accordingly. The various stages a play passes through from choice to performance were realised as apt and suitable for the production of the play. The rehearsals of the play spanned about eight weeks and then the last week was dedicated to dress and technical rehearsals. As the rehearsal was on, the technical crew was perfecting the mise-en-scene.

The scenes and/or situation motivated the choice of dances in the production. Arnold Udoka choreographed the dance with assistance from some long-standing artistes of the National Troupe who hail from that cultural background. They helped in interpreting the dances and instructing the guest artistes as the case may be. The relationship between the director and the troupe members was cordial.

### 5.4.3 Performance Phase/Music

In this play, Osofisan combines myth, history and contemporary politics, which characterise the Nigerian nation since independence. A chilling atmosphere pervaded the Cinema Hall I, National Arts Theatre, Iganmu, and Lagos, Nigeria at the presentation of this epic performance of the classic tragic tale of the barbarity and recklessness that provoked brutal wars. It reminded one of the experience of the horror of the Nigeria/Biafra War which deliberately was a part of the Nigerian history that the play itself alludes to.

Music, in the performance under review, played a fundamental role. It was employed as a description of dramatized action. Music, in some instances, functioned as a narrative technique, offering vivid actions that words could not describe. One of such instances was the opening of the play. The play began with a powerful stage description of an atmosphere of unprecedented horror, pain and sorrow. However, the audience only saw this as an aftermath of a scenario, as it had no access to the stage description. Music was then used to fill the gap created by the non-existent oral expression of the situation. The actual stage description reads:

It is the day after the sack of the town of Owu Ipole by the Allied Forces of Ijebu, Oyo, and Ife. The night before, the king, Oba Akinjobi, had fled from the town, with some of his high chiefs and soldiers, leaving his family behind. The allied forces slaughtered all men left in the town including the male children; and only the female children have been spared and made captives. The scene is an open space close to the city's main gate, which used to serve as the market but has now been demolished. Visible in the background is the city itself in ruins and smouldering. Along the broken wall are the temporary tents of the old market, built of wooden and bamboo stakes, and straw roofs in which the women are being kept. The Chorus of women, still invincible in the dark, is singing the dirge, "Atupa gbepo nle felepo". (1)

As detailed as this stage direction is, the audience did not have access to it and thus did not know what happened the day before. There was no narrator to tell the audience what had happened in order to capture the magnitude of the precarious and tragic situation. But the

introduction of “Atupa gbepo nle felepo” (Lamp yield your oil) did not only articulate the gory situation, but also captured the mood and greatly involved the audience in the emotional, physical and psychological trauma of the situation.

**Atupa gb ‘epo nle f’elepo**

Atupa gb ‘epo nle f’elepo

*-Refrain:*

Irawo wo, orun o ran,  
Osupa o tan mo o,  
Ale le le

Alejo lode loganjo oru

*-Refrain:*

Irawo wo, etc...  
Oja oro lomako de o:

*Refrain:*

Irawo wo

Oro iku de ni t Alagangan!

*-Refrain:*

Irawo wo  
Ko ma seni to le yee bo o!

*-Refrain:*

Irawo wo etc...  
Atupa gbeponle felepo:

*- Refrain:*

Irawo wo etc...

**Lamp yield your oil**

Lamp yield your oil to the oil seller

*-Refrain*

The stars are down, the sun retired  
The moon refuses to light  
The night

A stranger comes in the dead of night

*-Refrain:*

The stars are down, etc.  
Has brought his merchandise of pain

*-Refrain:*

The stars are down, etc.

Death of course is what he sells

*-Refrain:*

The stars are down, etc.  
And none of us can refuse to buy!

*-Refrain:*

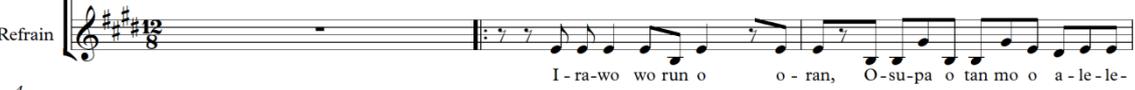
The stars are down, etc.  
Lamp yield your oil to the oil seller

*-Refrain:*

The stars are down, etc...

## ATUPA GBEPO NLE FELEPO

Call 

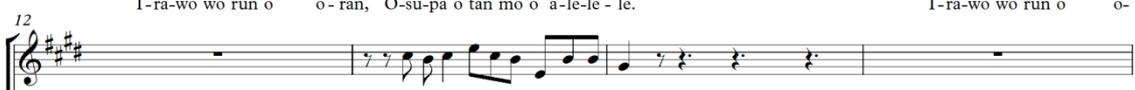
Refrain 

4 

8 

12 

16 

20 

24 

26 

Musical Notation 18: “Atupa gbepo nle felepo”

This elegy is a lamentation not from the backstage sang by an orchestra but rendered by the people on stage, which made it a musical externalisation of the pain, sorrow and agony of the villagers. It therefore solicited the empathy of the audience.

Osofisan's social concern is particularly pungent in this play, which recalls his focus in *Reel, Rwanda*, another of his plays that centres on the brutality of war in the East African country, Rwanda. In this play, Osofisan's style of dramaturgy of "expository speeches that detail the genocide" (Dunton, 1992: 140), is also adopted in the case of the pitiable women of Owu who recall the peace and bounty that the once powerful kingdom enjoyed before the invasion by the Allied Forces. It also helps to highlight the significance of what he also considers the need to "establish an adequate record of historical process and our ability to reach a consensual acknowledgement of this" (140). That seems to be, among other things, the thrust of *Women of Owu*, especially if the encounter between Anlugbua, the ancestral god of the people and his grandmother, Lawumi, is anything to go by. Such knowledge serves to connect the import of the music rendered when the two ancestral beings (Anlugbua and Lawumi) meet. Gesinde, the Army General's message bearer, comes in to address the battered women, including the Erelu.

It is understandable then when silence seemed to envelope the theatre when the play began and the song of tragic immolation from the battered women of Owu, led by Erelu, who could not even sing at the top of their voices in lamentation, but resigned themselves to fate. Equally fitting was the choice of music by the performers, which was a combination of dancers of the National Troupe and a number of professional performers drawn from the Lagos metropolis. The state of decay, horrible smell and squalor was synonymous with nightfall, darkness, sudden dawn or eclipse at noon that the import of the music carries with it. "Alele ti le" thus became a kind of funeral music to say farewell to the dead and remind the living that danger is not yet over.

**Alele ti le e, oja yi ma poju re de o**  
 Alele ti le e, oja yi ma poju re de o  
 Iran okunkun ko ba mi loja o dile o  
 Okunrin lada, eyi ti mo se ni be loju  
 Akii je lori moyo o,  
 Ara oja o dile o

**Night falls suddenly and the market tumbles**  
 Night falls suddenly and the market tumbles  
 spread everywhere  
 Fed up I am with this fate  
 Enough, our souls cry  
 Enough of this fate

Musical notation for the song 'Alele ti le e, oja yi ma poju re de o'. The notation is in 4/4 time, key of B-flat major (two flats), and consists of three staves of music. The lyrics are written below the notes.

5  
 8

A-le-le ti lee o-ja yi ma po-ju re de o i-ran o ku-ku ko ba mi lo ja o-di-le o  
 o -kun-rin l'-ada, e-yi ti mo-se ni be lo ju a -ki-i je lo ri moyo o  
 a -ra o -ja o -di - le o a -le-le ti le

Musical Notation 19: Alele ti le e, oja yi ma poju re de o

Osofisan's most important concern expressed in the play has to do with the condition and situation of the most vulnerable members of the society — women and children, as well as the extent of the toll of brutality on them as a collective. Budelmann recalls the opinion of Osofisan in his article entitled “*Trojan Women in Yoruba Land: Femi Osofisan’s Women of Owu*”. According to him, drawing on Osofisan, women and children are the ones who suffer most from the effects of war - brutalized, 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. Euripides must have chosen in his play to concentrate on these victims in order to further highlight the horror and brutality of war. This is a message, which is particularly pertinent today, with Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria, Libya etc. (Buldemann, 2006).

It is thus appropriate to hear the women sing and lament their tragedy with the music “Oju Ogun le”, as if to further emphasise their apparent tragic reality.

### Oju ogun le

Oju ogun le, igbe igbe ibosi o  
Won pa'run, won pa'gba pa 'rinwo  
Ati raka apa o ka won

### The battle is fierce

The battle is fierce, indeed, and bloody  
We fell in batches, our strength not a match  
Confusion and horror we bear

The musical notation is presented in two systems. The first system includes a 'CALL' part and a 'CHORUS' part. The 'CALL' part is on a single staff with lyrics 'O - ju oo - gun le' and 'won'. The 'CHORUS' part is on a single staff with lyrics 'I - gbe i - gbe i - bo - si o i - gbe'. The second system also includes a 'CHORUS' part with lyrics 'p' - orun won pa - gba won pa - rin - wo' and 'I - gbe i - gbe i - bo - si o i - gbe'. The music is written in a key signature of two flats and a 12/8 time signature.

Musical Notation 20: "Oju Ogun le"

The brutal murder of Erelu Afin's grandchild, which represented the future of the people smashed against the wall, concluded the bitter and complete annihilation of the people. The description of how the child's skull is smashed against the trunk of a tree, the meanness of the act and the totality of the bloodshed in relation to the cost of Iyunloye's betrayal of Maye Okunade, who swore vengeance on Owu and the irrationality of Iyunade's betrayal were wrapped up in the song. It can best be seen as an elegy for a people who once stood together in peace. But are now engulfed in a brutal and painful bloodletting, looting and rape. The tragic fate is likened to a heavy whirlwind, which swoops down and sweeps the entire kingdom from the ground and smashes it against a boulder, turning it into bits and pieces that are extremely difficult to piece together.

Music is able to convey mood, anger, resignation and distress in a way dialogue and movement could not have been made to do. It becomes the most important tool of dramaturgy at the last point in the performance, which is the materials of an epic narrative very much familiar to the audience's immediate reality.

**Aja kubo**

Aja kubo  
 Mee ri me maaa  
 Me maa mu bo aja gbomo gba

**Whirlwind**

Whirlwind  
 Where has it taken the child  
 To where nobody knows

6  
 A-ja ku bo ku bo o A-ja ku bo ku bo o A-ja ku bo ku bo me  
 10  
 ri mee-ma mee-ma mu-bo a-ja gbo'-mo gba A - ye lo - ja o a-won kan  
 so - ri a-ye ko-do won mi sa lo I - ji n - la kan lo-ja ni gbe - ri - o

Musical Notation 21: “Aja kubo kubo”

At the end of the tragic play, the god Anlugbua tries to underplay the tragedy by giving the people a ray of hope. Even at that, the hope is not tangible and certainly not desirable. At the height of the people’s confusion and being totally forlorn, Anlugbua consoles them with the following words:

**Anlugbua:** Poor human beings! War is what will destroy you! As it destroys the gods. But I am moved, and I promise: Owu will rise again! Not here, not as a single city again – Mother will not permit that, I know – but in little communities elsewhere, with our cities of Yorubaland. Those now going into slavery shall start new kingdoms in those places. It is the only atonement a god can make for you against your senseless volition for self-destruction. You human beings are always thirsty for blood, always eager to devour one another! I hope history will teach you. I hope you will learn. (Scene 5)

It is at this point, on hearing that they are doomed to be scattered, that the people begin to lament their plight about the uncertainty of the future. The people see the future as being bleak and cry out pitifully that the whirlwind take them to where they had no clue. Thus, as in the beginning of the play where the “Atupa gbepo nle felepo” song vividly captures the mood and sets the stage for the unfolding catastrophe, the “Ajakubo” song aptly concludes the play.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Femi Osofisan's plays under study, expectedly, are rich in Yoruba music. Music is used in both *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* and *Women of Owu* as incidental, transitional, narrative technique and cultural index. Music, in both plays, sets mood, deepens the conflict and heightens the suspense. Osofisan reconstructs the moribund aspects of African tradition. Music, in both plays, reveals Osofisan as an ingenious radical dramatist. He uses music as an agent of cultural rebirth and change. Music in the plays enhances Osofisan's dramaturgy and underscores the concept of total theatre.

## CHAPTER SIX

### COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MUSIC IN SELECTED PRODUCTIONS OF WOLE SOYINKA AND FEMI OSOFISAN'S PLAYS

#### 6.1 Introduction

Soyinka and Osofisan are master dramatic storytellers whose creative inspirations significantly come from their immediate environments. Soyinka is a first-generation Nigerian playwright while Osofisan belongs to the second generation. Both of them draw from indigenous sources to garnish their dramaturgy. They exhibit different ideological positions while employing similar indigenous materials in their plays.

This chapter focuses on the points of convergence and divergence in their use of local materials, particularly indigenous songs in the exploration of their preoccupations and theatrical aesthetics. The performances under study are juxtaposed with a view to comparing how effective music is used in them. An attempt is made to discuss how the employment of music in the performances differentiates the religious, social and political stance of the two Nigerian drama and theatre icons.

#### 6.2 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MUSIC IN SELECTED PRODUCTIONS OF WOLE SOYINKA AND FEMI OSOFISAN'S PLAYS: A COMPARISON

Soyinka utilizes music as he does language, for its evocative and ritual essence. Because the “numinous area of transition”, he argues, is the very centre of the tragic muse, music is thus “an echo from that void, from the “fourth stage” (1976). Music comes in as a willing collaborative partner in Soyinka’s drama of death, through which he is able to forge a complementary aesthetic partnership that allows his creative ingenuity to be expressed to the fullest, in engaging social situations, through mytho-poetic language that itself has come under heavy criticism as earlier indicated.

In *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka dramatises the ritual of supreme sacrifice, relying more on language and characterisation combined with music (a major vehicle of narration), dance and drumming to depict the Yoruba metaphysical world of the unborn, the living and the ancestral world. Since cultural elements such as dance, music, chants and diction in *Death and the King's Horseman* are at the physical and metaphysical planes, the inherent aesthetics can also be better appreciated at these two levels. Subsequently, taste and perception of these cultural aesthetics demand a foreknowledge of the Yoruba worldview, coupled with a sound grounding in Yoruba language, through which this world is enacted in the play. Though the play is written in English, the playwright consciously uses English language to capture the Yoruba worldview. For instance, readers with a sound grounding in Yoruba language can only best appreciate the subtext in the following lines.

**Elesin:**           Death came calling.  
                          Who does not know his rasp of reeds?  
                          A twilight whisper in the leaves before  
                          The great Araba falls. Did you hear it?  
                          Not I! Swears the farmer. He snaps his fingers round his head,  
                          abandons  
                          A hard-worn harvest and begins a rapid dialogue with his legs.  
                          (Scene One, 11)

“Death came calling”, though said in English, is actually a transliteration of *Iku de* into English language. The native speaker of English would rather say, “One is battling with death”. In addition, “He snaps his fingers round his head, abandons a hard-worn harvest, begins a rapid dialogue with his legs” in English language simply means, “he abandons everything, and runs away”. Non-Yoruba language speakers would need additional information to understand what is meant by “begins a rapid dialogue with his legs”.

Iyaloja’s line “You want to look inside the bridal chamber? You want to see for yourself how a man cuts the virgin knot?” (Scene Three, 36) is a Yoruba language expression of “do you want to see how a woman is deflowered” There are other instances in the play. The point

being made is that though the play is written in English, the Yoruba characters speak Yoruba in English and as such, readers would need knowledge of Yoruba language and its associated idioms to fully understand the play.

Soyinka employs music to enhance mood and character interpretation. The status and deliverance of Elesin-Oba to the world of the play are depicted with the use of music. Music, while entertaining in the play, also calls attention to the centrality of Elesin-Oba to the subject matter of the play.

Elesin-Oba enters along a passage before the market, pursued by the drummers and praise-singers. He is a man of enormous vitality; speaks, dances and sings with that infectious enjoyment of life, which accompanies his actions. (Scene One, 9)

The enactment of this mood, rendered highly impressive by the strength of music, also has to do with the power, privileges and honour Elesin-Oba shares with the departed Alaafin, hence the need to accord him the same royal reception as he prepares to meet him for continuity. It is also instructive to point out the fact that the symbol of the actual historical setting, Oyo, is the *sekere*, the rattle, a musical instrument, which accompanies the *dundun*, the talking drum and *gbedu*, the deep-throated drums of royalty. Praise-Singer heightens the excitement of Elesin-Oba's entrance into the market, with his lyrical chant that eulogises, cautions and recollects the past to strengthen the will of the king's horseman. He gives an insight into Elesin's mission in the market with this. It is also significant that some of the speeches in the drama, which can hardly find expressions to convey their authentic meanings, are translated into music, chants, and dance as channels of cultural expression and communication. Just as we find in the following dialogue between Iyaloja, the women and the praise singer:

**Iyaloja:** (dancing round him sings) He forgives us, he forgives us. What fearful thing it is when the voyager sets forth but a curse remains behind.

- Women:** For a while, we truly feared our hands had wrenched the world adrift in emptiness.
- Iyaloja:** Richly, richly robe him richly. The cloth of honour is alari, Sanyan is the band of friendship. Boa-skin makes slippers of esteem.
- Women:** For a while, we truly feared our hands had wrenched the world adrift in emptiness.
- Praise singer:** He who must, must voyage forth, the world will not roll backwards. It is he who must, with one great gesture overtake the world.
- Women:** For a while, we truly feared our hands had wrenched the world in emptiness.
- Praise singer:** The gourd you bear is not for shirking. The gourd is not for setting down at the first cross or wayside grove. Only one river may know its content.
- Women:** We shall all meet at the great market. We shall all meet at the great market. He who goes early takes the best bargains. But we shall meet and resume our banter. (155-156)

Dasylya (1995) informs that in language, the song of the Not-I Bird is a poetic metaphor meant to serve the traditional function of an epic simile, as reflected in the example below:

Death came calling;  
 Who does not know his rasp of reeds?  
 A twilight whisper in the leaves before the great Araba falls.  
 Did you hear it?  
 Not I! Swears the farmer  
 He snaps his finger round his head abandons a hard work harvest and begins  
 a rapid dialogue with his legs.  
 ‘Not I’ shouts the fearless hunter, ‘but it’s getting dark, and this night-lamp  
 has leaked out all its oil.  
 I think it’s best to go home and resume my hunt another day  
 ‘But now he pauses, suddenly lets out a wail: ‘Oh foolish mouth, calling  
 down a curse on your own head!  
 Your lamp has leaked out all its oil, has it?’  
 Forwards or backwards now he dare not move.  
 To search for leaves and make *etutu* on that spot?  
 Or race home to the safety of his hearth?  
 Ten market days have passed my friends, and still he’s rooted there rigid  
 like the plinth of Oranyan (150).

Soyinka's transliteration of the proverbs and poetry in the play, not only serves the purpose of investigating linguistic correctness but also to denote cultural and linguistic location. The superior linguistic change in the sections in which Yoruba culture prevails reconstructs stereotyped concepts of music and produces an innovative kind of linguistic procedure and incorporates elements characterised by dialogue; it takes a different perspective from the regular theatrical conversation. Audiences who are not accustomed to Yoruba language and cultural expressions are likely to have challenges with comprehending the message due to the poetic nature of the language, which is identified with Yoruba proverbial tradition. Soyinka's post-independent inclination to retrieve and recuperate his Yoruba/African culture, which had been under attack by colonial authority, is represented by Simon Pilkings in *Death and the King's Horseman*.

There is a parallelism between Soyinka's use of music in *Death and the King's Horseman* and the operatic theatrical mode in terms of translation of spoken words and interpretations of musical expressions. Martin Esslin (1987: 88-89) draws attention to Friedrich Nietzsche's view on this connection:

Opera undoubtedly a form of drama, owes its origin to the assumption by Renaissance schools that the dialogue of Greek tragedy was sung rather than spoken. While today the text in opera tends merely to form a 'pre-text' for the music (and is often well-nigh unintelligible), its musical notation can be seen as having sprung from an attempt of fixing that all-important sign system of acting, the vocal enunciation and delivery of the text. The music that accompanies the singing also provides powerful 'subtext' by indicating the mood, the hidden thoughts and the emotions of the characters.

Generally, musical renditions (vocal and instrumental) essentially tell stories in powerful poetic vocabulary. This corroborates the fact that Yoruba musical expressions occur within the framework of the interface between language (words) and music. Aside aesthetic principles, Soyinka pays particular attention to the conversation and communication of poetic virtues in the phraseology. In furtherance of the portrayal of tradition in his dramaturgy, music comes in as a willing collaborative partner in Soyinka's drama of death, through which

he is able to forge a complementary aesthetic partnership that allows his creative ingenuity to be expressed to the fullest, in engaging social situations, through mytho-poetic language. *The Strong Breed* also displays the ingenuousness of music, dance and dialogue. Music is used in it to create a feeling of nostalgia and magnificence of pre-colonial communal life. “Eni lodun awa” (It is Celebration Galore) states happiness and a festive mood. It accentuates economic fortune and satisfaction of the people. The audience is made to identify with the community and wishes to recreate it in the present. This song underscores the philosophy of Africanism as Soyinka strongly extols the fact that the Yoruba people have a tradition that displays their thoughts and emotions musically. Music in the play rejuvenates Yoruba cultural practices that have faded away. It conveys the mood, comments on the tragic reality and helps to build tension.

Soyinka uses music to reaffirm his stance on the “carrier custom” in Yoruba traditional religion. Music as employed in the play reveals that African tradition is sacred and sacrosanct. The “Agboko” (The Pilot) song warns that we should not allow western ideology to triumph over African perception and cultural identity.

Osofisan’s theatre is decidedly marked by a pervasive deployment of a fusion of folk music with popular music. He draws materials from the immediate environment of his audience, and he purposely uses music as the mainstay of his dramaturgy in most cases. The reality of his play, *Women of Owu*, is expressed more from the quality and ambience engendered by the music deployed. Aside from serving the aesthetic requirement in the drama, dirges are fundamental to the Yoruba conception of life and death. They function as a ritual of transition from the material to the celestial world and equip the dead with a metaphysical reality that allows them to connect with their relations and equally serve as a link between the utmost creator and humankind. The African oral literature and the dirge as a feature of oral poetry, along with songs, dance, drama and other types of creative idioms

portray the different emotions, the pathetic concept of life and the expectations of the people for a saintly or extra-mundane intercession to provide life that is more desirable. Merely reading the transcribed and paraphrased song/music texts printed on the back of the book as the author's message does not provide objectivity to them compared to the experience encountered when they are chanted during performance.

Osofisan's use of his indigenous Yoruba culture in terms of integrating music, mime, dance and dialogue constituents of total theatre, and the attributes of Yoruba traditional celebrations has tremendous impact on the audience as it permeates and incorporates them in the dramatic action. This draws up the audience to be immersed into the performance of the play. The straightforwardness and intelligibility of Osofisan's language, his simple and understandable method of writing, the convincing prosecutions and circumstances in the play, the personalities that are realistic and most significantly the productive deployment of narrative technique, paradoxes, songs, music and dance in involving the audience account for his unique influence on contemporary Nigerian theatre.

In a similar disposition, Osofisan's *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* celebrates a rich blend of traditional Yoruba percussion instruments such as bata, dundun, sekere, agogo and so on to achieve the required linguistic and various dramatic effects, which contribute to the aesthetic appeal and elucidation of the subject matter. It also helps to achieve the ritual theatre of Sango as a Yoruba legendary figure who is celebrated and worshipped by his many devotees all over the world.

All Yoruba divinities have special types of musical instruments associated with their worship. Bata music which is dedicated to the worship of Sango is compatibly and elaborately deployed to express his threatening exasperation when he becomes autocratic and excessively ambitious, depicting the typical greed, power drunkenness, and corrupt nature of modern African leaders. The prologue scene is a melting pot of celebration of songs, drumming and

dancing to establish the conflict in the drama and introduce other deities such as Oya, Osun, and the ancestral spirits such as Alagemo, Igunnu and the entire members of the community.

Musical intervention in some of Osofisan's plays is so pervasive that such plays almost approximate to what may be called musical theatre. In the plays, music is not just an appendage or a part of the narrative process; it is a narrative in its own right. The songs in the plays are skilfully manipulated to lend support to the focus of the plays. As our analysis of *Women of Owu* and *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* has shown, most of Osofisan's plays are, to a large extent, realised in music.

Osofisan's African narrative mode of telling his story also borrows from Yoruba tradition that invests a great deal in music, not just to entertain but also to instruct. Moreover, as earlier noted, traditional musical instruments such as sekere, dundun, gangan and agogo often feature prominently. Ayo Kehinde (2006: 171) notes:

This technique is traditional, although the content is modern. Everything in the technique suggests that the narrative act of storytelling: the moonlit night, the call-response introduction or opening, the intimate rapport between the audience and the performer, interventions, digressions, meta-narrations, dramatic illustrations and critical interplay with the audience.

He states further that the plethora of songs in Osofisan's plays accumulate details, statements and imagery. In all of these, Ibitokun (1995: 97) finds Osofisan's reconstruction of oral tradition, myth and utilization of music as synonymous with Nigeria's (Africa's) affirmation of her stance "from pantheistic, monarchical, determinate universe to a revolutionary, nationalistic, Nietzschean cosmos where man's potentials or possibilities are great."

Music, for Soyinka, functions as a vital tool of promoting communalism, derived from its very specific cultural origin and embedded, most importantly, in the notion of rites, ritual and cultural aesthetics, which equally stem from life force, identity and civilisation, that project the understanding of the African essence and sensibilities. In supporting these views,

Maduakor (1986) is also of the opinion that with the use of music Soyinka is able to evoke nostalgia, violence, and death. In the case of Osofisan, as already argued, music plays a significant role in his dramaturgy. Almost all of his plays require a measure of the infusion of music. This has come to be realised as the mainstay of his narration.

Music in the performances of Soyinka's plays under investigation was deployed with the intention of involving the audience emotionally in the play. The songs underscore the playwright's philosophical stance on the sacredness of the African cultural heritage. Music in the performances elicited from the audience the feeling of sympathy and empathy for the world of the plays. One was manipulated not to query the portrayal of the Yoruba (African) culture but to abide by it and be religiously devoted to it. Soyinka promulgates his mind-set on the pre-eminence of the Yoruba (African) culture. Osofisan arrives at the same destination via a different route as he uses music to not only promote African rich cultural heritage but also to deconstruct, reappraise, reconstruct, reaffirm and propagate a postcolonial aesthetics in Yoruba (African) culture.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

This chapter concludes that Soyinka and Osofisan are at home with Yoruba cultural heritage and generously utilise it in their plays. However, they have different positions on the future of some aspects of Yoruba cultural heritage. Their different perspectives reflect in the employment of music in their plays. Wole Soyinka who is of an older generation uses music to underscore his belief in the sacredness of the African culture, which he represents with Yoruba culture. Soyinka believes that African cultural heritage must be preserved in its totality. This he advocates in his plays with the use of music.

On the other hand, Osofisan's position is that, good as Yoruba cultural heritage is, there is the need for its deconstruction and reconstruction in tandem with contemporary

reality. He criticises those aspects of Yoruba culture that he believes have outgrown their relevance. In order to drive home this position, in his plays he relies substantially on the use of music. Conclusively, both veteran Nigerian dramatists are of different ideological stances and make this evident in the use of music in the exploration of the thematic preoccupations of their plays.

**CHAPTER SEVEN**  
**FINDINGS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

**7:1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the findings of the study, highlighting and summarising its subject matter and conclusion. This study discovers that music is used to reflect the subjective underpinnings and compositions important for the essence, character and statements in Soyinka and Osofisan's plays. As a method of preserving their culture, history, and identity, Soyinka and Osofisan explore oral performance traditions from their Yoruba culture, combining music and dance to achieve a total theatre dramaturgy. The study also captures the meeting and departure points between the two playwrights as regards their employment of music in the exploration and articulation of an African worldview.

**7:2 Findings**

Both dramatists use music on two significant levels. On the one hand, they innovatively deploy music to deconstruct the colonial experience, reassert their cultural identity and project a rejuvenation of the idyllic African past. On the other hand, it was discovered from the study that music is used as a narrative medium to enhance dramatic aesthetics. Soyinka and Osofisan, in their plays under study, use music to rejuvenate Yoruba philosophy, wisdom and tradition, most of which colonialism eroded. Take for instance the "Alele le le" (Transition hour is here) says as the initiate journeys into the world beyond, should he renege, he would become an object of ridicule and disrespect. The song highlights the fact that without signing written contracts, the Yoruba people and by extension African people remained bound by verbal agreements. The repercussion of dereliction or betrayal is, depending on the weight of dereliction or betrayal, premature death, madness, banishment, impotence, barrenness and misfortune of various kinds. With this belief, the Yoruba people

are guided by the principle of fair play and decorum even before the advent of imperialists who presented the Yoruba people as indecorous and a people without history and tangible tradition. As such, apart from this song serving as incidental music in the play, it is advertently used to resuscitate this aspect of the Yoruba worldview. In so doing, Soyinka underscores the fact that the Yoruba people had a system of social justice in place prior to the advent of colonialism. This is a deconstruction of the Eurocentric mind-set about Africa: a deconstruction of the imperialist picture of Africa and a call for the restoration of the glory of Africa.

Equally in “Ojoje” (The die is cast), the song says, no matter what, this is a necessary assignment, it is the chosen who must bear the yoke, that is the divine arrangement. A ritual is binding. This song, beyond the world of the play, makes a fundamental statement by categorically pointing out the fact that prior to the advent of colonialism Yoruba people had established codes of conduct. They had traditionally assigned responsibilities, which are culturally sacrosanct and significant to the corporate existence of the people. This song therefore reminds Africans and informs the imperialists that Africa had a glorious past and therefore should be accorded her rightful status and her glory restored.

In the same vein, the “Mee gbagbe o, o digbere” (I forget not! Never) song captures the Yoruba philosophy of doing good and the sacredness of service to humanity. The lyrics say, “I can never forget the day the valiant bids the world farewell. Death is inevitable; it will come when it will come. I have traversed the length and breadth of the universe and acquired the best of knowledge, learnt the wisdom of this world, nevertheless I cannot forget that the good that one does that lives on after one is dead”. This song articulates the belief in service to humanity as the best legacy that will withstand the test of time. It means that it was not colonialism or its religion that preached humanism to Africa. It had been part of Yoruba cosmology. This is a rejection of one of the falsehoods of colonialism that there was no form of civilisation in Africa prior to the colonial era. The Yoruba, as evident in the song, already

had an enduring sense of humanism in place. This is a call to reclaim the stolen honour of Mother Africa.

Soyinka further uses music to articulate the Yoruba belief in the supreme God of the universe in the song “Afeni ti Kogila Kolu” (Except an Insane person). The song says it is only an insane person that can dare to confront Sango or Esu; whosoever dares it will pay the ultimate price. These two deities, in the Yoruba worldview, are lieutenants of the supreme God. The song therefore reasserts the fact that the concept of the Supreme God was not new to the Yoruba people prior to the arrival of the British on African soil. Therefore, it was lack of understanding of the culture and tradition of the Yoruba that made the colonial masters think the Yoruba people and by extension, Africans, were pagan.

The song “Agboko” (The Pilot) is an appeal to allow those who mean well, who are seasoned and skilful to steer the ship of corporate existence. It is a call not to allow misfits, the intellectually shallow to hold the mantle of authority for the prosperity of posterity. This is a clear indication that the Yoruba society had a credible system of governance and selecting their leaders in place before Britain forced her system of governance on the people. This song had existed before colonisation and it states the opinion of the Yoruba people that life is a complex phenomenon and needs competent leadership to derive its best for the people. Yet colonialism paints Africa as a people subordinate to the West. Her post-independence literature’s clear agenda is to retell the African story by rejuvenating her past glory that colonialism eroded. This is clearly exemplified in a song that distinctly articulates the Yoruba principle of governance.

Osofisan, in similar circumstances, celebrates Yoruba tradition. The song “Mari wo yee e eye” (Great Acolytes, Let’s Celebrate) calls out to the custodians of the people’s culture to troop out for celebration. Though it is a celebration mode in the play, the call extends to the world outside the play. It is a clarion call to the Yoruba people all over to team up and celebrate our tradition and cultural heritage, to give new strength and passion to the exaltation

of what is ours, thus calling for a veneration of African identity. In like manner, the song “Agbami Lawa” (This is a Dicey Situation) speaks beyond the world of *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King*. It describes the reality of the African situation that calls for everyone to work together to reclaim Africa from the bondage of colonial imperialism. The song urges all stakeholders to be prepared as the task of reclaiming Africa is not an easy task.

Osofisan’s preoccupation is to reconstruct Africa. He echoes the creation of a new world based on the foundation of her cultural legacy. This position resonates in the song “**MO R’AWO L’OKO**” (**BEHOLD! I FOUND A MYSTIC BLESSING**). This song says - a mystic blessing has been found, a divine destiny, royalty and longevity. Though an incidental song, it speaks volumes about the excellence of African cultural heritage. Beyond the world of the play, it is an outright celebration of African cultural heritage. The playwright sees a new Africa as being excellent, royal and deific. It inspired the need to reconstruct the Western conjecture, which misrepresents Africa.

The “Atupa gbe ‘epo nle f’elepo” (Lamp yield your oil) when translated in parts reads thus:

Lamp yield your oil to the oil seller  
The stars are down, the sun retired  
The moon refuses to light the night  
A stranger comes in the dead of night  
-Refrain:  
The stars are down, etc  
Has brought his merchandise of pain

This song captures Osofisan’s stance on the right nature of Africa. In the song, Osofisan clamours for a resuscitated Africa from the ruins of imperialism. Imperialism left the land forlorn, its stars and sun are weak and its moon refuses to light the night. The land has been plunged into total darkness because of colonialism. But not all hope is lost as the land can still be salvaged if recreated, hence the lamp should make its oil readily available for all the stakeholders. The prime prize is the restoration of Africa to its glory eroded by the dastardly act of colonialism.

In other words, Soyinka and Osofisan share common ground on the need for the reclaiming of Africa from the bondage of imperialism. But whereas Soyinka advocates the restoration of Africa's past glory, Osofisan articulates the recreation of Africa. Soyinka uses songs to resuscitate and celebrate Africa's glorious past while Osofisan uses song to advocate the rebirth of a new Africa.

The study establishes that music is used in the selected plays of the dramatists to demonstrate the Yoruba perception of music as an eloquent art form, and a complementary instrument for oral interchange and correspondence of non-verbal messages in harmony with other art forms such as functions of poetry, chants, dirge, and elegy.

Soyinka and Osofisan through the incorporation of music, drumming, poetry, chants, metaphors, riddles, proverbs and dance as musical language formulate a confrontational stance against imperialism. Soyinka and Osofisan specifically use music and dance in their plays to make African theatre/drama an appropriate form in the literary world by depicting African culture and civilization as a veritable tool for condemning imperialism and reclaiming Africa's greatness by asserting through music that Africa was most unfairly treated by colonialism and yearns for her history to be rightly and justly rewritten.

The research also revealed that as components of traditional African theatre, music and dance are artistic cultural indices that Soyinka and Osofisan utilise predominantly in their performances. The playwrights' use of music is not for sheer aesthetics in play productions, but to demonstrate that music performs additional utilitarian purposes. Music is used to engender the mood, strengthen the dialogue and reinforce the actions as portrayed in the selected dramas. It was also discovered that music contributed to the actualisation of the socio-cultural realities of the plays and advanced multifaceted experience to audiences. It was also clear that music as an attribute of culture is performed in association with birth, death, marriage, religious festivals, rituals, initiation ceremonies, installation/coronation and other

social functions. Moreover, it was established that Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan's plays are unique and exceptionally distinguished for the aesthetic and thematic use of music to display the Yoruba cosmology. The Yoruba have a rich oral tradition, culture and history and they are recognised to be the makers and lovers of music, a stimulating spectacle that spreads through all aspects of their lives. To gain a full understanding of the Yoruba world, it is important to understand the nature of her music.

It was also discovered that the appropriation of musical instruments as speech substitutes is regarded by the people not just as speech but also as music in its own right. Taking into account both the grammatical structure of the Yoruba language/speech and its characteristic register, the study also established that such connection between tonal depth and manoeuvring, combined with musical accent engender a continuity of oral communicative styles with unpredictable levels of mental and social importance. The study established also that for the Yoruba, music and drama or more explicitly, theatre, are interwoven.

The Yoruba musician is at once a dramatist, actor, composer and choreographer. He functions in several capacities, which underscores the importance of music to the ritual and cultural sensibility of the people. The study found out that in terms of the music in the drama of Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan, there is no ambiguity about their ancestral origin. Though there were other contending issues such as the literary legacies and traditions of European culture, the traditional Yoruba influence on their works, particularly with regards to the use of music absolutely outweighs these issues. It was also discovered that although the musical intervention in their dramatic compositions function at different conceptual levels, they have evidently demonstrated that Yoruba musical performance is word driven, particularly in the deployment of wordplay: signs, repetitions, images and effective multi-vocal devices reinforce their dramatic quality.

### **7:3 Summary**

The thesis is an exploration of the use of music in African drama with emphasis on selected play productions of two prominent African dramatists: Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan. It addresses the social and cultural factors that condition the use of music in modern Nigerian theatre and examines the artistic potential of this practice that has come to be described as total theatre. The study examined and established the relevance of music as an effective and aesthetic communication tool in the projection of vast socio-cultural worldviews of the Africans. It discussed the nature and usage of music in Nigeria and by extension Africa.

In addition, it examined the functional purview of music as deployed in the performances of selected plays of Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan. It identified and analysed the aesthetics of the music deployed in the selected performances. The study examined the ideological underpinning and thematic structures responsible for the kind, nature and varieties of music and musicality as employed in the works of Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan. It investigated how music functions as narrative medium in the selected performances. It also critically compared how music is used in the selected plays of the two playwrights under study.

The study employed comparative and descriptive methods. The data for the research came via primary and secondary sources. The performances were observed, the researcher participated in some of them and interviews were conducted. For secondary sources, a robust library search was carried out. Fundamental issues concerning the importance of music and the traditional uniqueness in African society were addressed in this study. Several scholars who have highlighted the essence of music were identified and their positions discussed.

The literature review focused, among other things, on the significance of music in African drama and theatre. The study established the connection between the Yoruba popular travelling theatre and the perception of the indigenous performance. The central place of music in socio-cultural development, compositional procedures, and the interrelationship of music with other art forms in dramatic presentations was examined. The summation of the review explained the work done by scholars on music in African drama and theatre and consequently acknowledged African traditional perspectives.

#### **7:4 Conclusion**

This study leads to the following conclusions. Music is not and should not be treated as an appendage or a mere aesthetic adornment in theatrical productions. While it may be argued that music often serves as an embellishment in many productions, it is wrong to regard it only in that light because it serves other utilitarian functions such as, conveying pedagogical messages, expressing didactic facts and disseminating information. Music is also used to bridge scenes in play productions. As one of the arts that make up theatre as a composite art, music is an independent though sometimes complementary art which can be employed as a narrative device in its own right. Although it is often combined with dance, since it seems that the two arts evolved simultaneously, music sometimes stands out in play performance, often existing in an ostensible capacity as a narrative event. The fact that it narrates however, does not mean it does not enhance the aesthetic appeal of a play performance. Thus, music can serve as both embellishment and narrative device. Some theatrical genres, such as dance, often summarily combine both the aesthetic and the narrative aspects of music.

Without music in the plays under study, they will be performances in lacking meaning and substance. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, for instance, the ritual that music accompanies much of the actions in the play functions in an ostensive capacity as both a cultural index and a narrative device. The mode and form of the music gives the ambience a

clearer understanding of both the story and the cultural context of the performance. As a play on 'transition', the ritual music employed also narrates the process and stages of the protagonist's (Elesin's) physical and spiritual transmigration.

Both Soyinka and Osofisan draw their music from Yoruba culture. (Culture both in its popular and pristine forms). The various songs used in their works still take some steps further into the metaphysical and spiritual consciousness of their people. The study has opened a new vista into music scholarship within the context of theatrical performance. It has pointed to the need for professionalism in musical composition and notation in theatrical productions. The researcher, through the aforementioned is also prodding other researchers to investigate and conduct new studies into the use of music in the works of other African dramatists, to broaden the discipline of theatre and by so doing expanding the boundaries of knowledge.

It is through the concerted determination of theatre artistes in Nigeria and other African countries that traditional African theatre can take its rightful place amongst the theatres of the world. The summation of the foregoing also suggests that Africans should construct expressions that could suitably describe their music. The study shows that further investigations should commence on the classification and meaning of expressions that are used in music in African theatre and this should be a challenge to other researchers in ethnomusicology.

The study concludes that music, like literary art, is a veritable tool for the articulation of a people's philosophy and cosmology. It is important for African dramatists, producers, and directors of indigenous theatre productions who do not have any background in music to employ the services of experts in music composition to ensure professionalism. Related to the above is the need for playwrights and directors and would-be playwrights and directors who are interested in using music to interpret their works to have a basic formal music

education in fundamentals, voice-training, and others that would help in crystallising their imaginative and artistic concepts. The music and theatre departments in our universities and other tertiary institutions can support by designing certificate programmes, refresher courses, and organise occasional symposia to improve the level of these theatre practitioners to conform to universal requirements.

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## **INTERVIEWS**

Sotimirin, Tunji. "Interview with Femi Osofisan" at the Arts Theatre, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 2010

Sotimirin, Tunji. "Interview with Shaibu Husseini" at National Theatre, Iganmu, Lagos, on 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2010

Sotimirin, Tunji. "Interview with Ibukun Fasuhan" at the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Lagos on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2010

Sotimirin, Tunji. "Interview with Wole Soyinka", at Terra Kulture, Tiamiyu Savage, VI, Lagos on 26/09/2010

## APPENDIX I

### INTERVIEW WITH PROF. WOLE SOYINKA CONDUCTED BY TUNJI SOTIMIRIN AT TERRA KULTURE, VICTORIA ISLAND, LAGOS ON 26<sup>TH</sup> OF SEPTEMBER, 2010 AT 12:15PM

**SOTIMIRIN:** In *A Dance Of The Forest*, there are some music, dances prominent in the games of the half child, the triplets, the spirits of the pachyderms, palm and precious stones and in *Kongi's Harvest*, The Ege of King Danlola, Daodu's and Aweri's Anthem which seem to have some similarities. From which source are they drawn?

**WOLE SOYINKA:** The Aweri's anthem was composed by Akin Euba. I invited him to compose it "The pot that will eat fat... its bottom must be scotched". But the others are from traditional sources. I don't know what their titles are. It's a long time I've written them. I don't know what their titles are.

**SOTIMIRIN:** In *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Kongi's Harvest*, which music and songs were deliberately brought into the plays for aesthetic effects?

**WOLE SOYINKA:** In *Death and The King's Horseman*. I used largely traditional music. When you say what songs were brought into the play for aesthetic effects that is for you to decide. I bring in the music because I feel it is integral to what I look for from the traditional repertoire to bring in the effects I want. The playful ones, and then the very deep dirges and so on. Especially the king of drumming which accompanies the Elesin through the transitional phase. I don't think I am looking so much for aesthetic or dramatic effect. In *Kongi's Harvest*, Ema gun yan Oba Kere. That one for instance is adapting certain tonalities of Yoruba music.

**SOTIMIRIN:** As in your great plays, *A Dance of The Forests*, *Death and The King's Horseman* and *Kongi's Harvest*, there is the centrality of songs and music, how possible is it to perform these plays without them?

**WOLE SOYINKA:** The answer is, it will be a different play if the music is not part of it. Yes, it will be a totally different play.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Generally speaking what's your opinion about music in play performance?

**WOLE SOYINKA:** Well...There's opera which is virtually all music. When you have music in plays, it's a different kind of effect than its all dialogue. I have written plays without any music involved.

**SOTIMIRIN:** How do you assess the use of music and songs by other Nigerian dramatists?

**WOLE SOYINKA:** No I don't. You do.

- SOTIMIRIN:** What role did music play in the realization of the theme and structure of your play *Kongi's Harvest*?
- WOLE SOYINKA:** Again it's not for me to decide.
- SOTIMIRIN:** From which source did you draw the 'Not I' chant and was it meant to underscore the dexterity of Elesin Oba's theatricals or the fear of the future role he is expected to play?
- WOLE SOYINKA:** I didn't use the chant...in 'Not I'. Each time I directed the *Death and The King's Horseman*, I prefer that the story teller to you know...I have seen productions by other people and they do the same. They let the Elesin, the story teller interpret the chant. I think that was one where they had the drummers on stage, but very very little. The whole idea is to use the human voice.
- SOTIMIRIN:** Do you compose the songs in your plays or do you delegate others to compose for you.
- WOLE SOYINKA:** I compose most of the songs. Some are straight forward traditional songs.
- SOTIMIRIN:** Most of the music in your plays are drawn from some deep reservoir of traditional Yoruba culture. How do you think a non-Yoruba director will cope with plays like: *Death and The King's Horseman* and *Kongi's Harvest*?
- WOLE SOYINKA:** My advice to them is get a Yoruba assistance. Somebody who really knows the source, I have seen a production where they tried to use some other kinds of songs. It just did not work for me... because there is something which I am looking for, and once it's missing, the play is lost.
- SOTIMIRIN:** Thank you, Prof.

## APPENDIX II

### INTERVIEW WITH PROF. FEMI OSOFISAN AT THE ARTS THEATRE, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, ON THE 14<sup>TH</sup> OF AUGUST, 2010.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Good evening Prof. Sir, why do you deploy music in your plays?

**OSOFISAN:** Well the most obvious reason is entertainment. Music entertains. Everybody enjoys music, the melody etc. But also through that entertainment, it's easier to convey meaning, message. If the lyrics are well written, consciously getting that message that you want to give them. It's our African way of entertaining.

The reason is that music gives pleasure and therefore it's a very good means of passing on messages.

**SOTIMIRIN:** We know that in the African context as you said music enhances play performance. In fact it is performance itself. Is this what informs the centrality of music in your plays?

**OSOFISAN:** Yes. As I said music is a common ingredient in a professional theatre, therefore in trying to present modern theatre, one goes back to this traditional element. And I find it a rather pleasing way of passing messages without necessarily boring people with the message and oppressing them with your point of view. And everybody likes a song immediately you begin to find out the words and then you begin to sing the thing, and so you know unconsciously you pass on the message you want to do. And sometimes the tune is taken from popular culture. The tunes that are already known by the people, by the audience. And then I change the lyrics to pass on my own message. That comes from traditional culture. This is common to all traditional artists.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Sir, do you compose your own music or your songs or do you collaborate with other musicians?

**OSOFISAN:** Well... it depends. Actually I wrote an article about this as a tribute to Tunji Oyelana. When we started, I never knew I could write any song at all, when I started writing for stage and I loved to use music. I never knew I could write any music at all. I mean I never at all. I mean I never learnt music and so I had to depend on others. And the person I depended on mostly was Tunji Oyelana. But then Tunji is not always around...that's the problem. But when we were doing *Kolera Kolej* and *Chattering* and the songs, it became a problem. I went around with Wale Ogunyemi and Jimi Solanke. Wale to write the songs and then to surprise myself, I wrote the first song-the farmer's song in the *Chattering and the Song*. But that didn't still convince me that I could do all these, so it was Tunji who was in charge. So whenever I wrote my plays, I just pass them to him marking out where songs were needed and Tunji would supply the songs and music.

When he went away, he wasn't around and I had a problem. That was when I em...which one was it now...I think it was *Midnight Hotel*. Originally we had only one song and we had started rehearsals. The song had not been

written, we already had a date to perform and finally I wrote one which everybody liked but it didn't fit into the moment – so we were rehearsing every day. Then I write another one which was again like everybody but didn't fit into the moment. So I wrote another one, and by the time I had written about four songs, then it occurred to me that rather than throw away these songs, I should weave the entire play around the songs. Rather than making the play, the dialogue the central thing, the songs should be the central core. The play should go around the song. So I re-conceived the entire play to go around the song. The serious issues were then dealt with in the songs – so I had to invent a new way of singing them which was to have them written out and given to the actors. This was why I invented the Song Master who actually distributes the songs. You would not believe that on the first day of performance we went out to the audience to get a few people to join us to come and sing. I mean this is generally how my plays develop. So that gave me more confidence and I began to write more songs. I find it yet too difficult because all I do is just listen to Tunji's song and that will give me an inspiration. And I would go ahead and write my own. So in the end I became more confident and wrote many songs. All the songs in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* I wrote. Although I still prefer Tunji to write the songs for me. Mid-Ni

**SOTIMIRIN:** What you mentioned just now about *Midnight Hotel*...when you think of the alienation effect...The Brechtian epic method prevalent in your plays emanated from your inclination to all the epic plays actually because you wanted the content to actually tally with the meaning. You started with epic theatre.

**OSOFISAN:** Yes...Brecht had developed a method, but that method existed before him. The only thing is that he was the first to theorize them. In our traditional theatre for instance, plays were done in the public square with no set. They had to use empty space, they had to perform.

The point of course is that over the years, one has developed a certain confidence that allows you to do such experiments without any fears. The stage is a house of illusion and it is unbelievable how far you can get once the audience collaborates. They know it's an illusion; they are there, and you can get away with many things as I have said before. The muses of Esu are common and very important in my theatre. Accidents which you have to resolve. When I wrote *The Raft*, the spectacle on my mind was of the Raft breaking up. That was supposed to be the central focus of the play. I mean that was the image I started with. The Raft and then the splitting up and then the storm. That was it. When started, we wanted to get money to build this thing, money never came. Eve of the production we all sat at the theatre wandering what to do. Do we cancel it? So I had to go back to the theatre language itself. So I had mats in my office. Let's bring these mats and see what we can do. When I brought the mats, we went to Oje market and bought more mats. A friend of mine was visiting so we just took his car. So we just forgot about the Raft and used mats and the thing was even more powerful. So you have to if you are willing to let the theatre art act itself out.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Do we refer to that as a symbolic way of doing things or is it an accident sir?

**OSOFISAN:** What I mean is – it just may be more dramatic in this sense. But it is not peculiar to theatre. Things happen and it happens in science. The man who discovered the law of gravity...he said he was sitting under the tree and an apple fell on his head. That was an accident. The artist too responds to all these and it brings confidence to harmonize these things because it's an accident. It was not planned that way. You plan to build a Raft, you put all the expenses, you were promised money and the thing didn't come and I just went back to what we had done with *Chattering and the song*. Those who were here would remember the very first production of *Chattering and the Song*. It had an elaborate set. Dexter built an elaborate set.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Dexter Lindsey?

**OSOFISAN:** Yes. He was the director of the U.P.C. Unibadan Performing Company. But by the time we wanted to revive it, there was no money to build the set. The person to bring it kept promising... let me not mention names. There was no set so we just improvised. It was not Dexter this time, this was somebody else. This was about six months later and there was no set and we had to improvise a scene and said sorry the actors had an accident so we can't continue with the performance, so if you have watched the play before you people can join us and if it doesn't work out. People can take their money back. So the actors thought of it and we just put a frame and made a door. And what a wonderful experience we had. It just allowed that play to pick up. We could not have been carrying elaborate set around. Doing it in the round became even much better than doing it in the proscenium. That was just by accident and we said well if we don't build the set what can we do? Should we give up and do something else? And some of the songs came because there were no other solutions at such moments.

**SOTIMIRIN:** How?

**OSOFISAN:** Well in the sense that when you write, you sit down and write it's on your table but when you get to the theatre it's a different thing. And so you see that moment is not working. I'll give you an instance, the exchange between the Olori and the Ayaba in the *Chattering and the Song* when I wrote it, the year I wrote it the thing worked, so we said the only thing to do – Wale Ogunyemi and I – may his soul rest in peace- we went to his office, we sat down trying to translate that song into Yoruba and it took us a whole day you won't believe it. Just to translate Aye o ni pon mo wa lori. Any way I don't think you've ever seen the play perform and so you won't know what 'am talking about. In fact it just occurred to me recently that not many people have seen the *Chattering and the Song*. May be we should bring it back on stage, but know that's the kind of thing I mean, let the stage talk back, let it express itself.

**SOTIMIRIN:** How do you feel about music in performance generally?

**OSOFISAN:** We say music, it is assumed that we are saying the same thing. But you know that there are different kinds of music. There is music that is bad even when the melody is good, if you have bad singers the whole thing will fall. When you say music...we have to make sure that it's well done. This is not really always possible because there is an assumption that everybody can sing, once you are black you can sing and so there is no need to train your voice and so

if you get to the play. You'll hear all kinds of gritting voices people singing so that is the opposite of what we want. Bad music will just be counterproductive. You have to talk of good music good singers with well-trained voices.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Are you talking of music in play performance whether music in drama or dramatic performance?

**OSOFISAN:** Well. I assumed that since the question is being passed to me. I assumed that it's music in drama. And again it has to be used judiciously.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Reason?

**OSOFISAN:** Because there are some people who think that they can get away with a play that every moment you just put music, then dance. Let them sing and dance and the play is saying nothing. So everything has to be integrated. The music has to have a meaning within the play. If it doesn't then you distract people and you don't see anything. I saw some productions in Lagos at the National Theatre which I disagree with. It seemed as if they thought they could solve all their problems with music. They just put as much music and as much dance as possible to the script. I didn't always agree with that so that's what I am talking about.

**SOTIMIRIN:** May be they were bent on doing an opera or something.

**OSOFISAN:** Eh. It's all right. They wanted a new approach, which is okay.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Let's look at *Yungba – Yungba* and *Twingle Twangle*. These are plays which derive some of their strength from interplay of songs and dramatic structure; could you explain the reasons for the choice of songs in the play?

**OSOFISAN:** Well *Yungba-Yungba* is a musical context; therefore I don't have to explain. I mean that's what we came to do. It's a context. The singers and dancers. The families try to use music as a motif for politics, people's competition and leadership. And again to make it easier for the audience to follow and understand. The audience loves music, loves dancing different from just going there and preaching to them. When you write articles in the newspapers, that's different thing, you write an essay, these are different levels of communication. In the theatre you have to try and get close to them. And I thought music was a good motif. So is an all women thing so you have them singing and dancing.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What about *Twingle Twangle*?

**OSOFISAN:** Well *Twingle Twangle* is a traditional motif common to all cultures so that becomes a rite of initiation. But here because of the peculiar situation we are in between a military approach and a civilian approach. I tried to use this metaphor of the twins for that. It's a folk tale of course there are songs. Songs are very important in folk tales.

Tunji wrote all the music in; *Yungba-Yungba* and I wrote the one for *Twingle Twangle*. But mind you let me say that there are plays, which have no music. You have plays where music doesn't feature at all, plays from Africa that must have music. You can get into this cliché that if it doesn't have music then it's

not an African play. Some African plays have. African plays will have music, some will not have. It doesn't mean they are like Africans. A play like *Birthdays Are Not for Dying* does not have music.

**SOTIMIRIN:** But it's modern.

**OSOFISAN:** But are we not modern in Africa? When did you sing and dance last? Unless you go to a party. How many times do you sing? (Laughter)

**SOTIMIRIN:** But sir plays that have African historical background. For instance in the *Chattering and the Song*, you referred to the old Oyo Empire is a folk tale as you said and it's somehow difficult to divorce both from imbibing music. But *Birthdays Are Not for Dying* even if you want to play music, you will still play all the, I mean like stereo playing at the background is that music but that one is a little bit modern.

**OSOFISAN:** Are you saying Africa is not modern? There are places in Nigeria where the entire family doesn't speak a single African language. They speak English all the time. You won't hear a single Yoruba word or Ibo or any African language. And they are Nigerians. So it depends. If you situate a play in the Nigerian senate would the senators be singing? If the play is situated in the past in the traditional setting; you have to follow the mode of the period. But if the play is situated in the senate law court, are you going to say law court is not Africa? Senate is not African and it's modern African and so that is also African. When I did the *Restless Run of locust*, there's no music in it. We have plays like that. When I decided to do *Mid-night Hotel* and all those *Mid-night* plays, I used principally modern music. I did not use traditional music, that's a dimension of African. Africa is diverse, so we have anything but coats and tie. So we recognize that Africans have become multiple, diverse, complex.

**SOTIMIRIN:** The music in your plays, will you say it dictates the content or the content dictates the music?

**OSOFISAN:** Well it depends, usually when I am composing, Tunji and I, the way we work we have not been able to work that much because of his movements and so on. But in the past what used to happen was that Tunji would begin with the tune, we would bring out his guitar and we would work it out and I'll say no, I don't like that, change it, do this.

And we'll finally agree on the tune. So when I have that tune then I write the rest of the lyrics. I just write the first few lines. But so those lines will dictate the kind of tunes. But then, I now go and write the rest of the lyrics. So that's usual thing. So it's both ways really. Sometimes it's the tune that I have in my head first, sometimes I have the lines, I don't have the tunes, and I would work and work in my head before I finally get the tune I want. So, sometimes it's the lines but which ever indications once you start working at it.

**SOTIMIRIN:** How would you describe music in the African experience?

**OSOFISAN:** Music is an aspect of life whether African or European. I don't think anybody can explain it. What I just find nowadays though is that we are not doing justice to ourselves in Africa because we all seem to have resigned ourselves

to only one definition of music. That is the music that is available for dancing. If it's not danceable then it's not music. But there's music for contemplation. In fact as an artist it will inspire you to creating. You are just there listening to it, and it will inspire you. Or as a student you want to read, you put some music in the background that just fits your reflection. This is not for dance. But all our musicians are only playing dance music. We are not allowing ourselves into the other dimensions and in traditional music played in the palaces at different moments for sacrifices e.t.c. when the king is sleeping, they play a certain type of music, which you can't dance to, but it tells you that the man is sleeping or resting. So the younger ones particularly are affected by this, they think only music for dancing – hip hop.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Do you employ music as an ideological instrument in your works.

**OSOFISAN:** That's what I just explained that I want music to carry some message therefore; I want it simple and melodious so that it can appeal to a wide section of the audience. Simple again, so that it won't be too difficult to follow, then I can write in the lyrics which will give the message which I want it to preach.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What role will you say music plays in realizing the theme and structure of your play *Tegonni*?

**OSOFISAN:** The same role that it plays in every other play. Sometimes the music is just to re-inforce the mood of that scene, sometimes to give a message as I said. It depends on who is directing. It has the potential of inspiring musical compositions because you have a mixture of cultures there. You have Antigone herself. The western European music there then you have the colonizers so a bit of both. Sometimes it's a dirge lamenting the death of somebody. Sometimes it's a song of abuse when they abuse the white colonizers.

**SOTIMIRIN:** How will you assess the use of music by other writers?

**OSOFISAN:** I think generally everybody has caught up with the notion that it's just to enhance a section of the play. What we are not sure about is how they have been able to integrate this into the whole plot. Sometimes it's just decoration. Something has just happened, you don't know where to go, you just put music there, people sing and dance and they go away and so on. Sometimes it's just used for interludes. But the best plays are where the music is really integrated into the narrative sequence, into the story itself not just as an appendage that you can cut away.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Soyinka too uses music, how will you compare your own use of music to that of Soyinka?

**OSOFISAN:** Tunji also composes many of Soyinka's songs. Tunji has been quite active and nobody has really paid him enough credit. He also worked with Bode Sowande. We have many things in common. Very much in common. It is difficult to say now because when we started we were very critical of Soyinka and others, but he has been involved over the years.

**SOTIMIRIN:** You mean?

**OSOFISAN:** Soyinka has been involved. So what you say about the early plays cannot be said any more of the later plays. *Take Beatification of Area Boy* or *Opera* or *King Baabu*-they have satirical songs. I strive for a more popular audience therefore, I will simplify, not be as complex whereas Soyinka is more complex. One tries to reach the grass root but I think in the end, both of us share the same characteristics in our approach to music. Just the levels of interpretation are different.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Are your songs deliberately chosen to compliment the plays. Theme or enhance the structure?

**OSOFISAN:** I really don't know what that question is intended to be but it is both, the plays enhance the themes. I have told you that in the *Mid-night Hotel* how the songs came to be the central thing. They are in fact the play that's a different and structure from say another *Raft*. The play is very central; the songs just come in at various moments to enhance the play.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Are you trying to say that is an opera?

**OSOFISAN:** Well in an opera almost thirty percent of the dialogue will be song, and they will be chanted. The interesting thing is that I can't invent a comedy plot. It's difficult for me to sit down and write a play from the beginning to the end. I haven't been able to do it yet. So I always depend on some previous plays. It is difficult for me to invent a plot by myself.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What do you think of music in general in Nigeria?

**OSOFISAN:** There are many things wrong. I don't think our media is really doing enough justice. First of all I think music should go back to the secondary school curriculum. Music and history, I regret that I never learnt the guitars and I don't think I can play any chord anymore. But I think music should go back to the curriculum as it used to be; and then the media is not helping, you open any radio and its foreign music all the time. Preponderantly; and they will say this is what people want, but people want it because you have created the table. Even if you don't like a piece of music by the time you hear it ten different times, you are bound to like it. They have been playing these foreign artists. In fact I praise their ingenuity. I don't know how they discover these foreign artistes. Some that are so observant take this as our model. Because that's what they say people want to hear and this is what is selling. And they create market for the foreign artistes promoting foreign culture and bastardizing our own. And that's the pity of it, because no matter how we try to copy we can never be like them. The fate is not totally bleak, we have some who are trying to merge the two, to take from traditional music and take some foreign music and create a new form and take some foreign music and create a new form and all that but it's a bit worrisome, you cannot tune the radio and hear indigenous music. And if you want to hear Nigeria artists, it's a special hour. One special hour; whereas the thing should be the other way round. It has affected the younger ones. It's a great pity. We are not saying we should play traditional music the way our fore fathers did, but they should give it a chance to develop.

### APPENDIX III

#### INTERVIEW WITH MR. SHAIBU HUSSEINI CONDUCTED BY TUNJI SOTIMIRIN ON THE 15<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 2010 AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE, IGANMU, LAGOS.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What motivated the choice of the play, Was the troupe marking any event?

**HUSSEINI:** I think the Olowu of Owu kingdom had requested for a performance by the National Troupe to mark the anniversary of his coronation or something to do with the kingdom and Professor Ahmed Yerima who was Director General of the National Theatre and National Troupe proposed that we produce Osofisan's Women of Owu since it was ready and had something to do with the kingdom. The idea was to package the production here, perform it in Owu and then stage it in Lagos at the National Theatre for theatergoers. It eventually wasn't staged in Owu town, but it was staged in Abeokuta to receive former President Olusegun Obasanjo who is a native of Owu. And it was performed at the National Theatre as planned.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What motivated the choice of the director?

**HUSSEINI:** Well Professor Osofisan wrote the play and since he was around and was available to direct, he was contacted. But importantly, Professor Yerima had during his eventful tenure at the National Troupe and National Theatre instituted a director's in residence scheme that gave experienced directors the opportunity to come in and direct productions for the National Troupe. Accomplished directors like Prof. Niyi Coker, Prof Segun Ojewuyi, Ben Tomolaju, Nicholas Monu and Niji Akanni have been invited under the scheme to direct productions for the National Troupe. So Professor Osofisan came in under that platform to helm the play which he also wrote.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Who was responsible for the casting?

**HUSSEINI:** Professor Osofisan handled the casting session assisted by a production team supplied by the National Troupe. The team put out a call for audition, artistes showed up and they were auditioned by Prof. Osofisan. There were several reading sessions before he arrived at a final cast. I should think that there were actors that were specially invited but they participated in the reading session and where they couldn't fit, Prof replaced them with the talents he auditioned via the exercise.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Were there any guest artistes, apart from the regular troupe members? If so, who were these guest artistes?

**HUSSEINI:** I need to check the programme note to be sure of the guest artistes that featured. But certainly, there were guest artistes. The troupe has a policy of engaging guest artistes to complement the crop of artistes they have in house. So I will make that confirmation and revert. But I know that Gloria young was in the production.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Why were they chosen to play their roles in the play?

**HUSSEINI:** Well most certainly because they fitted snugly into the roles. Prof wrote the play and so he knows what he wanted in terms of cast and crew and he picked those who could deliver. I don't think there were any other reason outside the fact that they fitted the roles they were cast to play.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Who was in charge of music?

**HUSSEINI:** Professor Osofisan worked with the artistes and musicians of the National Troupe to realize the music for the production. He usually will tell them what he wanted and they will produce the notes and rhythms.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What motivated the choice of music/songs chants, e.t.c

**HUSSEINI:** Well some were created, perhaps to reflect contemporary developments post the writing of the play but the play already has some songs and chants cut out. We must not forget that it was not the first time that the play was being performed. Certainly, it would have been performed even by a cast directed by osofisan so the songs and chants are all set. But there could be additions or modification as the muse permits.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What types of musical instruments were used and why?

**HUSSEINI:** Traditional musical instrument especially instruments that can produce the right rhythms suitable for the productions. I note that there were emphasis in acquiring drums that were used to perform the owu dance that is synonymous with the owu people.

**SOTIMIRIN** Can you describe Prof. Osofisan's style of directing?

**HUSSEINI:** I think he adopted a liberal style---the style that also allows the actor to have his input. He didn't have a rigid style of blocking the actors on paper and insisting that they keep to the blocking. I always hear him tell the actors to work around what they find comfortable with. And because the actors and dancers were experienced, he mostly guided them and with his pre, during and post rehearsals notes, they were able to follow through.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What were the rehearsal procedures?

**HUSSEINI:** Well they had tights for general exercises, reading, blocking of scenes, run-throughs, segmented rehearsals, rehearsal of songs etc.

**SOTIMIRIN:** How many weeks/months of rehearsals?

**HUSSEINI:** I think the rehearsals spanned about 6 weeks and then the last week was dedicated to dress and technical rehearsals. I recall that as rehearsals was on, the technical people were placing set materials including risers and backdrop

and they also marked entry and exit points. We can safely say that rehearsals spanned about two months.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Was there any song composed by the director - Prof. Osofisan himself?

**HUSSEINI:** Of course yes. And there were some that were adapted.

**SOTIMIRIN:** How did he interpret the songs in the play?

**HUSSEINI:** I don't quite get this question.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Were there dances in the production? If so, who was the choreographer and what motivated the choice of dances?

**HUSSEINI:** The scenes and or situations motivated the choice of the dances. Arnold Udoka choreographed but with assistance from some long standing artistes of the national troupe who are from that cultural divide. They helped in interpreting the dances and instructing the guest artistes as the case may be.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Can you share any interesting moments you observed about the director's relationship with the troupe in the course of rehearsals and performance of the play?

**HUSSEINI:** The relationship was cordial except that there were moments when certain production needs may not come when required because of bureaucracy. But as a former public servant, I don't think Prof, was surprised because he knew how government works. It's a different ball game getting funds to work as theatre pressure demanded in the public service.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What was the audience response during and after performance?

**HUSSEINI:** Great. They found it impressive. They connected to the story. They sang along when the cast sang and shoved on their seats during some of the dance moments. There were moments of sadness and laughter too. I think they enjoyed it.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Can you describe the categories of people in the audience? were there celebrities, Art/Culture Administrators, Professional/Amateur Artists, Business people e.t.c

**HUSSEINI:** It was mixed. Government officials, those from the private sector, celebrities, arts and cultural administrators, fellow artistes and theatergoers generally.

#### APPENDIX IV

##### INTERVIEW WITH MR. IBUKUN FASUNHAM CONDUCTED BY TUNJI SOTIMIRIN ON THE 12TH FEBRUARY, 2010 AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS, LAGOS

Good afternoon sir, my name is Tunji Sotimirin. I am conducting a research on the deployment of music in some productions of Femi Osofisan's plays. By virtue of the significance of your production of *Many Colours*... the performance has been selected for study. I would like to ask you a couple of questions in your capacity as the director. Your response will be greatly appreciated and duly acknowledged.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What motivated the choice of the play?

**FASUHAN:** I chose the play because I needed something that is very challenging and will task my creative skills. Based on the fact that I staged the play during my final year days, I was tired of seeing plays that were not really captivating in terms of African total theatre, and I chose *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* because of its rich content in terms of music, poetic dialogues, and the dance.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What motivated the choice of the director?

**FASUHAN:** Directors were chosen by our lecturers based on individual strengths, and because I have been involved in directing plays in the University of Lagos, I was chosen to direct and decided to pick *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King*

**SOTIMIRIN:** Who was responsible for the casting?

**FASUHAN:** I was responsible for the casting, but with the help of my stage manager; Motunrayo Olajide. To make things very easy for me, I decided to mix my course mates with some goods actors in 300 level to pair with other amateur actors in lower levels. Since Sango, Alagemo Oya, Osun, Gbonka, Timi, and Igunun are pivotal roles to the play, I gave it to very strong actors, who had some sort of chemistry in terms of acting in school.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Were there any guest artistes, apart from the regular troupe members? If so, who were these guest artistes?

**FASUHAN:** I wasn't dealing with troupe members for the production. But the guest artistes I invited were Folashade Orobiyi, and Deborah Ohiri, who assisted me in terms of composing new songs for the play. Though Osofisan wrote some songs, at the back of the script, it was very hard to find rhythm to them, so I decided that I was going to employ someone, since music is one of the major thrust of the performance. I also called in some professional drummers to assist in the show through Lewis Bassey who was the choreographer for the production.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Why were they chosen to play their roles in the play?

**FASUHAN:** The people I chose were because of their expertise in the area of music, and composition. With this two people, I was assured on the area of music, and needed to focus more on acting.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Who was in charge of music?

**FASUHAN:** Orobiyi and Deborah Ohiri were in charge of the music.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What motivated the choice of music/songs chants, e.t.c

**FASUHAN:** The characters and cultural background were first and foremost the motivation for the music/song and chants. We had to research into tapa songs, and chants that are peculiar to the different deities namely Alagemo, Sango, Oya, Osun, and Igunun for the play. Some lines also motivated the choice of the songs in the play.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What types of musical instruments were used and why?

**FASUHAN:** We used bata because of the portrayal of Sango in the play, which of course cannot be avoided. Also we used omele meta. We used the molo and djembe drums due to the African nature of the play, and also the gbedu drums. These are drums peculiar to the African culture, and without it, the play is incomplete, and can't be considered an African play in the first play.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Can you describe Prof. Osofisan's style of directing?

**FASUHAN:** Because Osofisan did not direct the play, I cannot describe his style of directing

**SOTIMIRIN:** What were the rehearsal procedures?

**FASUHAN:** Since I was working with students, I had to rehearse mostly in the morning hours from 7am to 9am, and evenings from 5pm. I first started with reading the play so that the students can familiarize themselves with the play, then I went on to character analysis where we also discussed the history of the cultural societies discussed in the play. After this I started blocking. I had more of pocket rehearsals since the students were having other rehearsals, and I cannot possibly have everybody at rehearsal at once. I also had dance rehearsals separately which Lewis Bassey; the choreographer, coordinated. The pocket rehearsals helped a lot because I had enough time to brush up my actors especially Igunun played by Oke Olawale, who had issues with his enunciations and lines delivery. Then I had a week long rehearsals where I ran through the play.

**SOTIMIRIN:** How many weeks/months of rehearsals?

**FASUHAN:** I cannot remember vividly the number of months I used for rehearsals, but I think it should be two months.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Was there any song composed by the director - Prof. Osofisan himself?

**FASUHAN:** Since I am the director, there was no song composed by Prof Osofisan. The only songs I used were those that he wrote as the playwright.

**SOTIMIRIN:** How did he interpret the songs in the play?

**FASUHAN:** Not applicable

**SOTIMIRIN:** Were there dances in the production? If so, who was the choreographer and what motivated the choice of dances?

**FASUHAN:** *Many Colours Make the Thunder-King* is filled with dances, and this was handled professionally by Lewis Bassey. The choice of dances were motivated by the characters, the culture the play depicts, and the situations in the play.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Can you share any interesting moments you observed about the director's relationship with the troupe in the course of rehearsals and performance of the play?

**FASUHAN:** I think the pocket rehearsals were very interesting for me because I had more time with my actors, and we could dissect the role better. This made me a better director, because I also got some ideas from the playwright. Another fascinating moment for me was when I was researching into the play. The character of Igunun gave me lot of issues in terms of depiction. I wanted to depict the typical Igunun that could increase in length and reduce all of a sudden, but was told by the major people who were Igunun carriers, that I cannot achieve that unless they come to perform the role themselves. After this hindrance, I thought of trying to use the long sticks, to depict the igunun, but I declined because of stage accidents, and was even warned that if I tried to represent the reality on stage, they will surely get to know. Since I was not ready to lose my life, I cut that out completely and reduced my level of research for the play because I got to some point where I didn't get some in-depth information because I wasn't initiated into some specific cult. I then told my costumier to make a costume made of calico material, and then put a basket inside that is attached to the head of Igunun, to give him a false height.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What was the audience response during and after performance?

**FASUHAN:** I got a very good response from the audience because the performance was not what was expected from students, and in fact Prof Osofisan commented on the performance that he had to come and see it since he didn't believe students could stage the play because of its complexities. He even told me that I was very ambitious for picking the play, though he said there was some parts cut in the play that he didn't like, and I told him my restrictions.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Can you describe the categories of people in the audience? Were there celebrities, Art/Culture Administrators, Professional/Amateur Artists, Business people etc.

**FASUHAN:** I called some celebrities whom I had worked with in professional shows to see my major debut as a director, and also of course Prof Femi Osofisan to see the performance. I called in Wale Macaulay to see the performance too. Students also came to see the performance en masse.

**SOTIMIRIN:** What were the general comments about the play?

**FASUHAN:** People generally liked the African nature of the performance and the energy throughout the performance. Another fascinating thing I used that people liked was the Iroko tree used by Yeye Iroko. The audience first thought the tree was very heavy but was amazed when it opened to depict Yeye Iroko appearing from the tree. The audience commented about Sango's great performance played by Patrick Diabuah, and the dances in the play. The play was later used as University of Lagos convocation play to measure the extent to which people liked the play.

**SOTIMIRIN:** Thank you very much for your time. I sincerely appreciate it.