

# MONARCHICAL MONSTROSITY IN POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE: A READING OF FEMI OSOFISAN'S *THE CHATTERING AND THE SONG* AND *YUNGBA-YUNGBA AND THE DANCE CONTEST*

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## Abstract

This paper is a thematic study of Femi Osofisan's *The Chattering and the Song* and *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*. Femi Osofisan, in the two plays, exposes the political leadership in Africa as characterized by dictatorship, despotism, tyranny and corruption. The paper provides a theoretical framework where dictatorship is diagnosed and conceptualized. Opinions of scholars are reviewed on dictatorship and the natural dispositions of African rulers to it. From the Marxian perspective, the paper examines the socio-political relevance of the plays to the African society, and Osofisan's disdain for and rejection of such tyrannical tendencies in African rulers that jeopardize the survival of the downtrodden. Besides, the two plays project the playwright's vision in arousing the revolutionary consciousness of the masses to revolt against oppression, tyranny and social injustice in the society. They also exhibit Femi Osofisan's belief in the unity and oneness of the nation. The revolutionary aesthetics of the plays and their dramaturgical essences are also interrogated.

**Keywords:** Femi Osofisan, Drama, Political Leadership, Dictatorship, *The Chattering and the Song*, *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*.

## Introduction

Governance in post-independent African countries is characterized, albeit, painfully and regrettably by leadership crisis, despotism, ethnic chauvinism and hegemony which are avoidable. The freedom, purportedly received from the imperialists and colonialists apparently turned out, like an albatross on the entire continent. The leaders act as if they are under generational imprecation. Self-governance suddenly became a mythological intervention, and

despotism became the cyclic nature of the cosmic universe of African leadership. African leaders displayed bestiality rather than their anthropomorphic nature. Our leaders inexorably fall due to their hubristic acts, and the masses continue to groan in pangs of oppression, dehumanization and subjugation due to the misrule of the leaders. Femi Osofisan, like other post-colonial African writers uses the platform of the theatre to satirize these obvious odious aberrations that have become permanent idiosyncrasies of political leadership and governance in Africa. Osofisan does not only satirize corruption, political decadence in African politics, he indicts the civilian and military dictatorship in Nigeria and in Africa at large. But first, we shall put dictatorship in its proper perspective. Nwabueze (1994) makes a bold attempt at conceptualizing dictatorship. He opines that:

Absolute power transforms a person's natural disposition; its wielder becomes a quite different person after a period of time in the enjoyment of absolute power. Exposure to the arrogance, adulation and blandishments of absolute power invariably turns even a person of a naturally kind, modest and tolerant disposition into a vain glorious, intolerant, immodest and unfeeling person, suffused with a false belief in his superior abilities and in his infallibility, and a desire for unquestioning obedience to his whims and caprices. He comes to think of himself as not only infallible but also indispensable, a demi-god without whom the ship of state would become rudderless, floundering sooner or later. (2)

Nwabueze's anatomy of dictatorship is encompassing. One discovers that dictatorial tendencies are not necessarily innate; they are acquired. Tyranny is basically engendered by exposure to absolute power, which really intoxicates and corrupts. This validates the famous saying of Lord Acton's that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". It is a universal political truism.

Sir Winston Churchill in 1937, as quoted in Nwabueze (1994), gives another similar look at dictatorship when he writes:

Something may be said for dictatorships, in periods of change and storm; but in these cases the dictator rises in true relation to the whole moving throng of events. He rides the whirlwind because he is part of it. He is the monstrous child of emergency. He may well possess the force and quality to dominate the minds of millions and sway the course of history. He should pass with the crisis. To make a permanent system of Dictatorship, hereditary or not, is to prepare a new cataclysm. (4)

A dictator is notorious for his hunger to repress individual liberty and manipulate the people for his own selfish clandestine interests. Mazrui (1990) singles out Sekou Toure as one of the worst dictators in Africa. He opines that:

Sekou Toure as a “philosopher-king” was more lethal than Nkrumah or Kaunda or Kenyatta. One of every five Guineans fled into exile under Toure’s rule. His efforts to create an African version of “democratic centralism” resulted neither in effective centralizations nor incredible democracy. Many of his opponents perished under torture and deliberate deprivation. (14-15)

Moss (1986) is even more critical and blunt in his assessment of a dictatorial system when he says that “if you write something condemnatory of the regime in power they pass the death sentence on your heart” (1827). We can learn a lot from the incisive diagnosis of dictatorship, which Michnik (1998) gives. This should be understood against the human rights background form which Michnik is writing. He juxtaposes democracy with dictatorship and concludes that

Dictatorship emerges from the weakness of democracy and from a lack of consensus on the rules of the democratic game... From many people, the distinction between order and chaos carries greater weight than the difference between democracy and dictatorship... As a rule, dictatorship guarantees safe streets, and terror of the doorbell. In a democracy the streets may be unsafe after dark, but the most likely visitor in the early hours will be the milkman. Democracy is uncertainty, risk and responsibility, but it seldom enforces its policies through violence. Dictatorship means violence daily; it is fear, humiliation and silence. But it is the charm of dictatorship that it liberates people from responsibility; the state answers for everything. You cease to be a citizen and become state property. Dictatorship exists for its enemies: members of the old order, anarchists, revolutionaries and subversives, agents of foreign services, individuals alienated from the national spirit. (18-20)

Dictatorship is not peculiar to African politics. It is a universal phenomenon. Watson and Epstein (1995) report about the dictatorial regimes in Latin America, especially in Argentina. They are of the opinion that

The generals who ruled the country from 1976 to 1983 were especially vicious in their repression of opposition. Generals Jorge Videla (President from 1976 to 1981), Roberto Viola (President from March to December 1981), Leopoldo Galtier; (President from 1981 to 1982), and Reynaldo Bignone (President from 1982 to 1983), who were somewhat to the far right politically of the moral majority in the United States, felt that any means were profitable in suppressing leftist tendencies in Argentina. (41)

Watson and Epstein (1995) describe the oppressions suffered under General Augusto Pinochet. They report that

Augusto Pinochet overthrew the democratically elected socialist-communist coalition government of Chile's President Salvador Allende Gossens... Particularly during the early years of Pinochet's presidency, many leftists, trade unionists, journalists and artists were imprisoned. The lucky ones were forced into exile; the unfortunate majority were tortured or murdered, and/or disappeared without trace the origin of the infamous term, "los desaparecidos", the disappeared. (41)

Similarly, Nwabueze (1994) gives a list of the names of African despots and their tyrannical records from

General Buhari in Nigeria (January 1984 – August 1985); to Field-Marshal Idi Amin's bloody reign of terror in Uganda (January 1971 – May 1978); the barbarous atrocities of Field Marshal (Emperor) Jean-Bendel Bokassa in Central African Republic (December 1965 – September 1979); General Samuel Doe's terroristic despotism in Liberia (April 1980 – September 1990); the ferocious dictatorship of life President Macias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea (September 1968 – August 1979); the monstrous red terror of Lt-Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam's murderous tyranny in Ethiopia (February 1977 – May 1991) described as the bloodiest in the country's 3000 years of recorded history, a tyranny which, it is reckoned, took a toll of some 10,000 lives every month, and in which torture was regularly used, including tying a heavy weight to the testicles, burning parts of the body with hot water or oil crushing the hands or feet, or beating on the sole of the feet, with victim tied to an inverted chair or

hung upside down by the knees and writs from a horizontal pole. (12-13)

Osofisan is very critical of military regimes, which Aluko (1998) refers to as “empirical autocracies and oligarchies” (25). This is because, in most cases, military regimes are very dictatorial, tyrannical, repressive and cruel. In one of his *Guardian* publications entitled: “Birthday of the Gun”, Osofisan (1985) criticizes the dictatorship regime of Buhari and Idiagbon who took power from the corrupt administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. He observes that:

Buhari and Idiagbon, always to be coupled together, were the protagonists who became trapped by their own weakness and then unbending rigidity. They knew quite rightly that they had been brought to fight a war. But unfortunately, in spite of their high rhetoric, they failed to recognize the real enemy and, in the confusion, took on the very people who brought them as their target. They were welcomed rousing, but interpreted that reception as an abject sign of surrender from a routed populace. And they began to see themselves not as leaders of the people, but as their conquerors... For the decrees rained down daily like medieval edicts... They eroded the concept of natural justice by allowing their personal prejudices to come into play, and by sanctioning a brazen display of double standards. Thus they ruined our chance of coming to proper confrontation with the era of the politicians by jailing both the wrong-doers and the true servants of the people, punishing equally both the buccaneering profiteers and the honest businessmen... Buhari and Idiagbon tried to establish a principle of governance based on brutality and intimidation, on coercion and the suppression of dissent. (7)

Osundare (1988) refers to this despotic propensity as the Kabiyesi syndrome, although he argues that this is not peculiar to Osofisan's drama. It also features in the plays of Ogunde's Duro Ladipo's and Ola Rotimi's. Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* (1967) and *Death and the King's Horseman* are also given as good examples. Osundare is so disturbed about this trend that he wonders:

Why, more than all others, the dramatic genre carries such a heavy affliction of the Kabiyesi syndrome. Why, for instance, should a writer such as Soyinka who is patently anti-aristocratic in fiction be so lenient with Monarchism on the stage? One reason that easily suggests itself here is the dramaturgical potential of the institution. Monarchy is a ready-made theatre, complete with dazzling costumes and elaborates ritual. The king is a "natural" hero many of whose attributes already dwell in the collective consciousness of the people. In bringing him to the stage, therefore, the playwright requires little "explanation", and, what's more, achieves that indispensable ingredient of the royal platform: Spectacle. (113)

But Osundare seems to have found some consolation in Osofisan's clever manipulation of the institution of the monarchy to achieve his revolutionary vision Osundare further remarks:

Happily not all the playwrights have allowed the Kabiyesi'skakaki to drown the voice of protest and blind the vision of social change. In the play of some of the younger writers we encounter a kind of ideological perspective which put monarchy where it should be, and advances the straw; their majesties go through rounds and rounds of taunting jeers. In *The Chattering and the Song*, for instance, Osofisan takes us back to Oyo Empire in the time of Abiodun and provokes a fierce ideological battle between Abiodun and Latoye who is, ironically, the

humanist-revolutionary son of the monstrous Gaha... The rallying vision in *Chattering* is to “remake the world” not in the retrogressive image of kings, but in the living dreams and realities of the common people, taking their destiny in their own hands, charting a course towards a future without chains. (112)

Justifying the preponderant use of Kabiyesi syndrome in his plays, Osofisan in *Awodiya* (1993) asserts his position and says:

So I’m saying that there is a clear idealist position which perhaps was quite visible in my earlier work. But when you then become more and more aware of the complexity of the situation, what do you do? Do you continue to merely write about the idealist position, that this is what should be, that in fact the chiefs in the plays should be bad, young intellectuals should be good, and so on? You see, this is what I’m saying, that it becomes problematic for me. So that, a lot of chiefs in my play, and Obas have come out very badly. But then in this particular play, I didn’t see the need to do that. I thought I’d present a different face of this institution. Yes – indeed, there are some Obas who are quite dignified and all that. (92-93)

So, Osofisan consciously makes use of the Monarchy frequently not in a frivolous “bafflingly pervasive” way as Osundare (1988) describes (105), but purely as an ideological and cultural weapon. General AguiyiIronsi ruled the country for only six months in 1966 followed by General Yakubu Gowon who was in power between 1966 and 1975, for a period of nine years. Besides, Osofisan was also conscious of the bloody regimes of Idi Amin of Uganda from 1971 – 1978, Emperor Bokassa in Central African Republic from 1965 – 1979, Jomo Kenyatta who ruled Kenya from 1963 until his death in 1978 and Nguema of Equatorial Guinea from 1968 to 1979 to mention a few.



### **Discussion of the Plays**

*The Chattering and the Song* is therefore a response to these dictatorial atrocities perpetrated by most African despots and the call for a revolt against oppression, autocracy and dictatorship that will usher in a new society where there will be equality and social justice. Osofisan deplors the dictatorial tendencies and the sit-tight syndrome that is becoming permanent features of both the military and civilian administrations in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. The play is structured into a Prologue, Part One, Part Two and the Epilogue. This is typical of the Aristotelian tradition. Greek plays are generally structured in this pattern, although we do not think that Osofisan really wants to go Greek.

The play opens after a wild party as Sontri is still drunk. This drunkenness is symbolic of Sontri's total moral collapse and rottenness and lack of self-control. It also depicts the alienating consequences of class schism on him, which has made him turn alcoholic as a way out of oppression and class marginalization in the society.

In the Prologue, Osofisan plants the seeds of revolution. According to Awodiya (1996) "the prologue established some capitalists, bourgeois and consumerist tendencies in preparation for an attack" (58). This is announced through the bigger riddle that concentrates on the love affair between Sontri and Yajin. In the riddle, Sontri is a stag while Yajin is a doe. According to Akinrinade (1985), here Osofisan "subtly foreshadows a change in the status-quo when the vampires that suck on the blood of toiling citizens would be relieved of their positions of power" (50-51). In Part One, the focus shifts to wedding preparations. In Part Two, Osofisan takes us to the heart of the play. We have here, the play-within-a play, which is essentially the confrontation between Alafin and Latoye, the oppressor and the oppressed. In the Epilogue, Osofisan signals through Leje that "Red is the Colour of victory. Red feathers are the pride of the woodcock" (54). The final riddle is presented and recruitments are made into the Farmers' movement. The movement is expected to be the hope of the downtrodden. No wonder Leje tells Funlola: "Listen, we can bring you fulfillment if you join us" (52). According to Jeyifo (1985) "the foreground of the

action is the triangle of love and hate between Sontri, Mokan and Yajin. Each has to work out, in the context of an alienating society, a meaning and a rationale for his life, work and love” (52).

The themes of oppression and autocracy become very obvious in the central dramatic scene of play-within-a-play in part two. Here, Osofisan brings history to the stage. He recreates the history of Old Oyo during the oppressive and anarchical reign of BashorunGaha who deposed the reigning Alafin and established a reign of despotism. It was said that he killed all the princes of Oyo except Abiodun because he was crippled in one leg. By the time Abiodun grew up he saw the need for him to challenge and dethrone BashorunGaha and bring sanity into the empire.

The story becomes a good material for Osofisan’s use to achieve his vision. In the play-within-a-play, Sontri acts as Abiodun, Funlola as Olori, Mokan as Aresa and Leje as Latoye. In the playlet, Abiodun is depicted as an autocratic leader. The whole playlet reveals the oppression of the masses in the hands of the despotic rulers. It also shows the gap between the rich and the poor and the determination of the masses, represented by the young revolutionaries like Yajin, Mokan, Leje and Sontri to revolt against the oppressive systems in the society.

Latoye is accused of subversive activities and he is brought for trial before AlafinAbiodun. Abiodun, in a conversation between him and Latoye reveals the reason why he overthrows the reign of Latoye’s father:

Abiodun: Your father was a pestilence on the land. He was a rebel and a usurper... He made this land into a theatre of war, of disease, hunger, and death. I, Abiodun, I was the one who changed all that. I put my foot down firmly on disorder, and established order in its place I brought food to the famished families, replaced fear and uncertainty with the promise of progress and hope... I braved your

father's magic lantern and put my  
blade in his ribs. I killed him, and I  
killed Chaos...

Latoye: You killed my father because you  
needed his blood to mix your  
bricks... My father was a plague,  
and you killed him. But you,  
Abiodun, you are the new plague!  
The new spot to be scraped out!  
(38-39)

Abiodun overthrows the regime of Latoye's father because he sees Latoye's father as a rebel, a tyrant and a usurper. But as soon as he gets to the corridors of power, he himself becomes more intoxicated with power and he begins to do the very things he accuses Latoye's father of. This is typical of most African military rulers. When General Babangida overthrew the regime of General Buhari in 1985, he accused the regime of tyranny and high-handedness. He was very critical of the draconian decrees promulgated by the regime especially the notorious Decree Four that empowered the Chief of Staff to arrest and detain any citizen or person that was of security threat to the country for six months without any trial. In his maiden broadcast to the nation, President Babangida in *The Guardian* of August 29, 1985 explained the reasons for a change of government:

When the former military leadership, headed by Major General Mohammadu Buhari assumed the reins of government, its ascension was heralded with the most popular enthusiasm accorded any new government in the history of this country... Regrettably, it turned out that Major-General Buhari was too rigid and uncompromising in his attitude to issues of national significance... Major-General Tunde Idiagbon was similarly inclined in that respect... He arrogated to himself absolute knowledge of problem and solutions and acted in

accordance with what was convenient to him, using the machinery of government as his tool. (13)

The regime of Babangida is generally adjudged to be the worst in the annals of the history of Nigeria. The reason why President Babangida succeeded in his dictatorial policies was given by Nwabueze (1994). He opines that:

IBB as President was the repository of the full plenitude of the military government's absolute power, which he exercised as a personal ruler unrestrained by any law whatever... He was to all intents and purposes, the sole legislature of the Federal Military Government (FMG). (4)

This, in fact, makes nonsense of his coup d'état against Buhari's regime. The reign of Alafin Abiodun is full of oppression and Latoye reminds him during the confrontation:

Look around you. Look into your past, Look into your future. What do you see? Always the same unending tale of oppression. Of poverty, hunger, squalor and disease! Why? Ah, you and your people, you are the soil on which the Alafin's tree is nourished, tended until it is overladen with fruit! And yet, when you stretch out your hands, there are no fruits for you! (42)

To each of the gods, Edumare gave power and fragility, so that none of them shall ever be a tyrant over the others, and none a slave... Yes, Abiodun, yes Olori! Sango eats, Ogun eats, and so do the eborá of the forest! But in your reign Abiodun, the elephant eats, and nothing remains for the antelope! The buffalo drinks, and there is drought in the land! Soldiers, seize him! He is ripe for eating! (45)

The injustice and oppression in the society are further reflected in the disposition of Sontri and his young revolutionaries. That is why Sontri becomes restless and fierce. No wonder why he violently attacks Funlola for setting free the weaver birds:

Who has a mother who's on the verge of  
bankruptcy, with a father struggling in the ruins of  
half a century of sin! Motives! You'd sell the birds  
to start a Save My Parents from Damnation Fund!  
(16).

He is angry with the unjust system and wants a revolution. Moka on the other hand is obsessed with school. This is as a result of the emotional torture he is going through brought upon him because of the pressure of the society. His loss of Yajin to Sontri is enough trouble for him.

When a society gets to this messy situation, it makes rebellion and revolution inevitable just as Popper Karl (1966) says in Nwabueze (1994) that a rebellion is justified,

Under a tyranny which makes reform without  
impossible. The working of democracy rests largely  
upon the understanding that a government which  
attempts to misuse its powers and to establish itself  
as a tyranny (or which tolerates the establishment of  
tyranny by anybody else) outlaws itself, and the  
citizens have not only the right but also a duty to  
consider the action of such a government as a crime,  
and its members as a dangerous gang of criminals.  
(5)

The confrontation between Abiodun and Latoye thus becomes inevitable. Here, according to Olaogun (1988) "Osofisan sides with the oppressed. Latoye becomes the true hero through his emancipation of the guards, while Abiodun becomes the villain because he has used his position to oppress and exploit" (46). Osofisan thus enhances the people's revolutionary consciousness of protest against social injustice and the dictatorial rule of Abiodun

through the call for unity and for membership of the Farmers' Movement. In the Epilogue, the riddle of the thread and the loom reveals that the masses must work together in unity to dismantle the oppressive superstructures, as Funlola converses with Leje:

Funlola:           Our weave and our shuttle, body and  
                          Soul...

Leje:                Shall order the world in new designs...

Funlola:           Shall order the world in fresh designs...

Leje:                If we dance as one...

Funlola:           If we strive together... (55)

This is a call for solidarity among the downtrodden and the peasants to fight against injustice in the society. This is why Ilori (1987) says "the play has its blatant Marxist ambience" (22). Similarly, the recruitment into the Farmers' Movement aims at revolutionizing the society. The import of the Farmers' Anthem is to wipe out oppression completely:

When everyone's a farmer  
We'll wipe out the pests  
In the land  
No more injustice  
Labour's for all  
No more oppression  
All hands to hoe

When everyone's farmer  
We'll burn out the weeds  
In our lives  
No alienation  
Working on the farm  
But brothers and sisters  
Sharing everything. (56-57)

The introduction of the Farmers' Movement can be seen as a metaphor from the teaching of Karl Marx and Friedreich Engels (1980) that:

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature; it has simplified the class antagonisms – society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. (80)

Osofisan, therefore seeks an end to the tyranny of Abiodun, which typifies the situation of the military leadership in Africa, through a revolution. Through a revolution, liberation is imaginable. This is in alignment with the view of Fanon's (1966) when he opines that:

The mobilization of the masses, when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man's consciousness the idea of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history. In the same way the second phase, that of the building-up of the nation, is helped on by the existence of this cement which has been mixed with blood and anger. (94)

Referring to Fanon's idea of violence and revolution, Jinadu (1980) says "the "toad", a member of the lower class which leads to the defeat and arrest of Alafin and his wives means victory for the masses over dictatorship. The play ends on a positive note that revolution in Africa will come and succeed because it will involve dynamic and committed revolutionaries who have not allowed themselves to be corrupted by the rottenness of power or corroded by the glittering of wealth, but whose lone goal is to build a

constructive society in which there will be no oppression, tyranny and injustice.

The use of music, dance, songs, riddles and games enhances the revolutionary tendencies of the play. Even the confrontational climax of the historical drama which Obafemi (1982) “describes as a confrontation between magic and anti-magic” (27) is rendered in song, poetic incantations, dance and other sensorial rich devices which give the audience some satisfaction.

Besides, the utilization of the traditional performance mode “IworiOtura” as background music, song and dance all makes the play as an example of popular theatre. That is why Awodiya (1996) says that “Osofisan’s theatre of mass appeal manipulates, in all his plays, the ingredients of African cultural traditions” (66).

Osofisan (1978) acknowledges that Soyinka’s *Madmen and Specialists* party influenced his writing of *The Chattering and the Song*. According to him,

That play also partly influenced the writer’s own ambitious drama. *The Chattering and the Song* in which an attempt was made to probe the state of hysteria and upon a group of very sensitive youths, the ultimate chaos and pathos of our intimate relationships in such circumstances. (156)

In spite of the influence, *The Chattering and the Song* is one of the most successful revolutionary plays ever produced in Nigeria. Osofisan further explores the theme of despotism and the struggle for democracy all over the world in *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*. The playwright states this unambiguously in the Programme Notes to the text:

The temptation to read this play as a purely Nigerian phenomenon will be strong, but must be resisted... This fever of freedom, which first erupted in Eastern Europe, finally spread to Africa, starting from the Benin Republic next door to us, then moving rapidly to Gabon, Togo, Ivory Coast, and so on. Right now,



Zambia and Kenya are in the grip of this desperate struggle between recalcitrant despotisms and liberation ideologies.

This is what the play is about – the struggle, all over Africa, between self-perpetuating regimes and democratic forces. We in Nigeria have tried to distort the issue, by framing it into an opposition between soldiers and civilians. But this is a false dichotomy. Indeed, in most parts of Africa, the longest and most vicious governments are the one-party states run by civilians. And all of them have piled up a record of massive foreign debt; of mass poverty, as contrasted to the opulent lives of a small, super-rich elite; of inept and corrupt bureaucracies; failures and failures everywhere. (xiv-xv)

Osofisan in this play satirized the failure of leadership in Africa in relation to the dictatorial and sit-tight tendencies that are becoming characteristics of most African rulers. The annual festival of Iyeneri, the priestess is in progress with pomp and pageantry. The Mayesoge Girls, The Jeosunwon Girls and The Arooroton Girls are set for a dance competition with Osingin, Rokeke and Gbemisola as the star dancers.

The dance competition is abruptly stopped by IyeToun while Iyaloja wants the competitors to go into the real business. She later informs the people that some people are planning to disrupt the celebration. Obviously, she is referring to the Yungba-Yungba group. The members of the group consist of Ayoka, Dunbarin and Laboopo who are all in masks. They threaten to disrupt the competition unless their demands are met. The kernel of their argument is the denial of their democratic rights. This is summarized by Dunbarin:

Iyeneri is a usurper; she has been running the shrine illegally, beyond the limits of the authority first granted to her, and purely according to her whims! For years she has been exploiting our ignorance, and

our generosity, and our indifference! If the festival must continue, then Iyeneri must step down now! She must surrender her powers!

Besides, the annual festival used to be an occasion for the selection of a new priestess. But Iyeneri has subverted that now for an occasion for the picking of husbands alone. Ayoka is so much hurt and infuriated about the whole situation that she says:

It is no fancy, believe me! But as you can see, all that tradition has been changed! One person has usurped the post! For ten years non-stop! Ten years! Should we continue to accept this? That's how it used to be my friends! In the past any of us here could be the priestess! It was never the birthright of a single woman! It was not a personal legacy of anyone, to be passed down the family line! No! (25-26)

Iyeneri has remained in office as priestess for ten years. She has changed the rules of competing for the post of the priestess in order to hinder others from contenting the position. The youths, especially are angry with her. This behaviour is typical of most African leaders who are in the habit of perpetuating themselves in office using various crafty, undemocratic and unconstitutional devices. The reasons given by Iyeneri for taking over as the priestess of the shrine and why she wants to remain in power are worth examining. Iyeneri mentions all these to Aperin, her Interpreter:

The past! It is convenient now to lie about it, is it? Such enmities! Such senseless battles! How our women wasted themselves in reckless feuds, and planted the seed of poison in the minds of our young! History... all that! That was what we came to stop. What we have succeeded in stamping out! Yes, Iyeneri did that! We restored peace! We brought reconciliation among the families. In the land, laughter became possible again!

Iyeneri assumes the position of the priestess in order to bring reconciliation and stop all forms of reckless feuds in the land. In spite of all this, we see three families later, on the verge of disintegration. The military too clings to power because it wants to wipe out corruption, defend the territorial integrity of the nation and provide food for all the citizens. Iyeneri cannot boast of any reasonable achievement under her administration. Hence, the agitation for freedom and true democracy now becomes a must. The agitation is championed by the Yungba-Yungba group led by Ayoka. Ayoka tries to explain to her mother why she decides to join the group:

Mama, this is no frivolity. What we are fighting for is no insane thing! We do not like the way you our elders have been running this land. A land of so much vitality but such abundant misery! We see so much agitation around us everyday, but hardly any movement. We hear orders being barked all the time, orders! Orders! But very little achievement! Well, it's our future that is at stake! And we will not continue to sit by and just watch! No! It is your turn now to stand aside! For we want to move and we shall move! We younger women, we believe we can change things here, turn things around, and we are going to! That was why we formed the Yungba-Yungba! (30-31)

The issue of freedom is of great importance to the Yungba-Yungba group. Ayoka reiterates this when she says:

The issue of freedom of choice must not be negotiated. Iyeneri must step down now, this season! We must reclaim our rights; re-establish the principles of merit and of free choice! We will have a competition but, only when it is agreed that the winner will be installed as the next priestess, as the

practice used to be. (26)... The issue of freedom,  
nothing in the world can substitute for it. (46)

The demand for freedom is thus resisted vehemently by Iyeneri. She attacks Ayoka, the leader of the Yungba-Yungba group by sending her the “twin image of Osugbo” which has the power to turn the victim into a mad person. This is an attempt to permanently crush the demand for democracy and freedom. Reacting to this attack on Ayoka, Labopo, another strong member of the Yungba-Yungba group says:

Leave her alone, will you? Let her talk! What kind of leader do we have here, what kind of priestess at the shrine, who is prepared to turn people insane, just to keep a post she has usurped? (100)

Many human rights activists have suffered detention without trial, imprisonment, torture and murder from the hands of dictatorial regimes.

Moreover, Osofisan addresses the issue of the corporate existence of the country. To some Nigerians, it is no longer useful for Nigeria to remain a single nation. The three major ethnic groups should therefore exist separately. Osofisan is of the view that as long as we insist on tearing one another apart, the tyrants will always triumph. The message is made clearer in the following conversation:

Ayoka: That is what you need to help us teach our people. A tyrant triumphs only on our errors. A tyrant triumphs only on our errors. If we insist always on anarchy, on tearing one another apart on the smallest disagreements, or in needless clashes, then someone is bound to come who will profit on it, by imposing his power on us, in the name of peace. And gratefully, oh so gratefully we will accept his

coming, till he has trapped us in his  
net...

Dunbarin: Freedom is sweet, but only when  
the people work for it.

Laboopo: And it lasts only with our constant vigilance.

Ayoka: That is the meaning of Yungba-  
Yungbalyaloja! That is all we wish  
to teach our people. (107)

When the people of a nation are living in disunity, the people will always be calling for a “messiah” to take over; who will eventually, misrule the people. This is reinforced in the story of Song, Drum and Dance. Song, Drum and Dance are daughters of one woman called Felicity. Each of these daughters can represent each of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria: Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba.

At one time or the other, each of these groups had threatened to secede. Just like Song and Drum and Dance need one another to bring a perfect harmony, these ethnic groups must co-exist and work together in peace if Felicity (Federal Republic of Nigeria) must survive. This point is well made in the song rendered by Aperin and All:

My friends, so the lesson is clear  
That if, Felicity must last,  
Men must join hands, work as one,  
As those sisters did before –

For Discord is our foe  
It puts its wedges in our weft;  
Let’s learn from Song, and Drum and Dance  
How we need to live as one

For happiness is our goal,  
Yungba-Yungba’s the name of sweetness –  
Let’s all join hands and work as one  
And sweetness will fill our lives! (117-118)

In the Epilogue, we have the dance of the maidens with the dance competition coming first. The dance competition involves the selection of a new queen. The duties and responsibilities of the winner are highlighted. The judges have been carefully picked. The rules of the game have been spelt out. The competition is made open to all. The winner of the competition will thus succeed Iyeneri as Priestess. This is Osofisan's idea of full democracy where the rules of the game are laid bare before all and the election is made open to all who are interested to participate. The idea of banning politicians who are considered "enemies" of government and allowing only those governments is interested in is hereby rejected. This will ensure stability for the political leadership in Africa and in the world in general.

### **Conclusion**

Osofisan is an optimistic writer. He thus achieves his vision as stated in his Programme Notes where he says. "There must be hope out of all this, there must be hope. A new generation, with a vibrant and restorative ideology must step forth and take control" (xv). Only then can Africa have a hope. This wave of optimism has been summed up in the inaugural hymn of Africa by Agostinho Neto (1984). According to him, only the hymn can take us beyond decay towards redemption.

This distress at being human  
When in the mudhole reptiles entrench  
and worms make ready to consume a handsome  
child in an obscene orgy of cruelty.

This delight at being human  
when the dawn comes up, sweet and strong  
over the resounding intoxication of the hymn  
of the earth  
dismaying worms and reptiles.

And between the distress and the delight  
a great track from the Niger to the Cape

where marimbas and hands, drums and bands,  
voices  
and hands raise in harmony in the inaugural hymns  
of Africa to come. (49)

The song summarizes Osofisan's ideological vision for the African continent. According to Osofisan, the African continent can be redeemed when we accept the spirit and the letter of the song.

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