THE DEMONIZATION OF WOMAN IN FEMI OSOFISAN'S *WOMEN OF OWU*

Ndubuisi Nnanna
Department of Theatre and Film Studies,
University of Nigeria Nsukka.

Abstract
Critical opinions on Femi Osofisan's ***Women of Owu*** *are largely stereotypical. They lament the plunder of Owu and compare it to that of Troy, drawing some parallels between Euripides'* ***The Trojan Women*** *and Osofisan's adaptation of it. There is a clear effort to assume some kind of historical and cultural affinity between the women of ancient Owu and Troy. But most of these assumptions are apparently contrived. It seems that there has been no attempt to consider Osofisan's play in its own right. This study is an endeavor in that direction. It adopts the Reader-Response approach as a framework to conduct a phenomenological analysis of Osofisan's* ***Women of Owu*** *to discover the extent to which it truly reflects the true picture of the Owu war in the 17th century and portrays the cultural identity of the women of Owu. It also compares Euripides' parent play with Osofisan's version in the context of their individual historical backgrounds so as to establish how each play captures the realities of its specific cultural milieu. The conclusion of this paper is that in an attempt to find parallels to fit into the mold of his source play, Osofisan has inadvertently extrapolated the cultural essence of a society that had little regard for women into the cultural history of an African community, where women had a lot of respect, and in the process has demonized womanhood and given impetus to some flawed assumptions and misinterpretations of history.*

1. Introduction

Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu* is a sordid tale of unimaginable grief. It is a story of extreme plunder, pillage, and dehumanization, especially, of womanhood. Little wonder that its blurb is replete with dolorous reviews that evoke the most intense image of suffering and ravishment.

The play is Femi Osofisan's retelling of Euripides' classic *The Trojan Women* in an African (Yoruba) garb. But beneath the

surface of this gory narrative that so evidently bemoans the fate of some helpless women is a cultural aberration that inadvertently casts African womanhood in a strange mold that could be regarded as demonizing.

This paper adopts the Reader-Response approach in a Phenomenological framework to interrogate the consequence of Osofisan's adaptation of Euripides on the cultural credibility of the Yoruba women he has adopted for his artistic modeling. The first task here is to examine the structure of textual relationship between Euripides' play and Osofisan's adaptation of it, for the purpose of determining if there is mutual enhancement between them or if one text is privileged over the other. The second is to situate both plays within their respective cultural matrices to appraise the extent to which they, individually, reflect the realities of gender value and expectations within those cultures.

2. Background to The Play

With over fifty plays to his credit Femi Osofisan is, undoubtedly, one of Nigeria's, nay, Africa's most prolific playwrights. He is usually categorized among the second generation of Nigerian playwrights, after the likes of Wole Soyinka and J.P. Clark-Bekederemo who are usually considered the forerunners of Nigerian drama.

Osofisan is a trailblazer in his own right for, as Obafemi (1982) rightly says in *The Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre*, he is "… a pioneer of the drama of conscious ideological commitment. His plays deal with topical political issues from a philosophically materialistic perspective" (p. 575). He is usually interested in narratives that capture the peculiar experiences of intersecting social processes, shifting locations and identities. According to Nwabueze (2003):

> Osofisan has consistently attempted to arouse revolutionary consciousness in his readers and audience. His works combine effectively his astonishing expression of anger, frustration, and outrage against Nigeria's socio-political milieu, his penchant for avant-garde dramatic structure, his love of symbolic dialogue and his pre-occupation with political consciousness, mass mobilization and revolution (p. 141).

The themes of these plays usually revolve around deprivation, subordination, exclusion, and marginalization within cultural spaces, and organized social relations. Femi Osofisan has remained an activist of sorts, seeking for an end to injustice and class tyranny in Nigeria. As Awodiya affirms, "… the thematic preoccupation of his works remains the same: a vision of a better society that is free from the shackles of oppression, injustice and corruption" (1996, p. 102). It is, therefore, not surprising that Femi Osofisan would be interested in the story of Owu and the women who were the victims of indescribable injustice and extreme internecine plunder.

Commissioned by the Chipping Norton Theatre, UK in 2004 and published by the University Press Ibadan in 2006, *Women of Owu* is a testimony of the depth of Femi Osofisan's creative versatility. The play is a continuation of his interest in the adaptation of European classics. In 1999 he had successfully adapted Sophocles' *Antigone* into what he titled *Tegonni, An African Antigone*. And in 2010 he continued with the publication of a rereading of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. The resulting play, *Love's Unlike Lading: A Comedy from Shakespeare*

was commissioned by The Rainbow Book Club in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

The 2004 premiere English tour of *Women of Owu* was very successful. The play was well received and attracted so many positive reviews. Most of these, as already mentioned, are on the blurb of the published play. They capture the grief and empathy that Osofisan's *Women of Owu* evoke whether on stage or on the page and the very powerful language and lasting images contained in every scene of the play, which are, to say the least, heartrending. Olasope (2013) rightly observes the paucity of scholarly opinions on the play. But the few that exist, as well as his own, follow the same trend as the production reviews. In his article "To Sack a City or to Breach a Woman's Chastity: Euripides' *Trojan Women* and Osofisan's *Women of Owu*", Olasope is of the opinion that the play is "… a play about the sufferings encountered by women during and after war… Owu is looted, desolate and in ruins; psychologically, culturally, politically and economically" (p. 112-113). According to Budelmann too (2007),

> The play is set outside the burning city, not of Troy, but of Owu in Yorubaland, part of what is now Nigeria. It tells about the sufferings imposed by war. Its main mode is empathy and pity for the victims of war, especially the women. Owu is in ruins, and its former inhabitants are constantly threatened by rape, displacement, slavery, degradation, and death (p. 15).

There can hardly be any encounter with the play that would produce a contrary opinion. But in my view such opinions are more automatic than critical. To arrive at a more critical appreciation of the play, this study will suspend already formed knowledge of the text and author. The Reader-Response and

Phenomenological critical frameworks offer the appropriate platforms for this intention.

3. Theoretical Framework

The Reader-Response critical approach allows a reader to complement the writing process through direct impressions formed from a mental engagement with a text. One of the major proponents of the reader-response criticism, Iser, provides a definition of the approach in the preface to his book *Prospecting: From Reader-Response to Literary Anthropology* (1989):

> What has come to be called reader-response criticism provides a framework for understanding text processing, revealing the way in which the reader's faculties are both acted upon and activated. By putting the response-inviting structures of a literary text under scrutiny, a theory of aesthetic response provides guidelines for elucidating the interaction between text and reader (p. vii).

M.H.Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham, (2005) offer a comprehensive insight into the guiding principles of this approach:

> Reader-Response critics turn from the traditional conception of a work as an achieved structure of meanings to the ongoing mental operations and responses of readers as their eyes follow a text on the page before them. In more drastic forms of such criticism, matters that had been considered by critics to be features of the work itself are dissolved into an evolving process, consisting primarily of diverse expectations, and the violations, deferments, satisfactions, and restructurings of expectations, in the flow of a reader's experience. Reader-response critics of all

> theoretical persuasions agree that, at least to some considerable degree, the meanings of a text are the "production" or "creation" of the individual reader, hence that there is no one "correct" meaning for all readers either of the linguistic parts or of the artistic whole of a text (p. 265-6).

To Reader-Response critics, the effects of a literary work "… psychological and otherwise, are essential to any accurate description of its meaning, since that meaning has no effective existence outside of its realization in the mind of a reader" (Tompkins, 1980, p. ix). The implication of the above assertions is that the meaning of a text cannot be divorced from its effect upon the mind of a reader and consequently should not be dependent on any extraneous assumptions that are not connected with the direct interaction between the mind of the reader and the text. Carlson (1998) affirms the significance of this mind-text engagement by pointing out albeit unwittingly, the creative role of the reader in the interpretative process (p. 292). The Reader is thus by implication privileged over the text. Brenner (2004) calls attention to this privileging by pointing out that:

> One virtue of reader-response criticism has been its allowance- some would say indulgence- of every reader's interaction with the text he or she reads. Diverse though reader-response theorists and practitioners are, fundamental to the theory is its seldom-expressed goal of democratizing the practice of literary criticism. In theory it manipulates readers from subservience not only to the meanings assigned to a text by figures of authority and even its author, but also to the authority of the presumably objective

> text itself and linguistic structures that supposedly control readers' constructions of meaning (2004, p. 1).

Similarly, Freund (2003) opines that "Theories of reader-response seek to revise the aims and methods of literary study not only by reminding us that the reader is an active participant in the production of meaning, but also by impersonating or characterizing, in some form or other, a reader who assumes dominance or authority over a text" (p. 152).

The ultimate goal of the reader-response approach to the appreciation of literature is the discovery of hitherto ignored or hidden meaning devoid of extraneous interference. Obviously a reaction against the Formalistic and New Critical methods that deemphasized the role or even importance of the reader in the production of textual meaning, reader-response sought to reinstate the significance of the reading process as a means of protecting literary appreciation from the straight-jacketed interpretations that, all too often, stultify scholarship. As Robert (2001) enunciates:

> By redirecting our critical focus away from the text per say and toward the reading of the text, we shall not only better understand what we have been doing all along as we were reading and talking about our reading but also gain new sensibilities that should enable us to read in new ways and achieve new insights (p. 1).

Although the reader-response approach yields to several methods of literary criticism, the phenomenological analytical process is one of its most complementary frameworks. This is because phenomenology, too, preaches a focus on the object of interpretation and closure of assumptions not immediately experienced. Howells (1999) also explains that:

> Phenomenology is a philosophy of consciousness which attempts to avoid the reefs of dualistic views such as empiricism and idealism by putting aside preconceptions about the relationship between mind and world. It sets out to go beyond naturalistic epistemology to describe afresh how consciousness relates to the world of phenomena (p. 6).

The usual predilection of the mind is to interpret new phenomena with data from previous experiences. This, of course, would result in interpretations that may be affected by biases and assumptions that are actually unrelated to the immediate phenomenon. Therefore, phenomenological criticism "..desires to study only the eidetic aspects of phenomenon without allowing our presuppositions and ideas that are not immediately given to that act experience to interrupt our interpretation of that experience" (Owolabi, 200, p. 134). To achieve this deliberate exclusion of extraneous influence, phenomenological critics adopt "bracketing". In this way any potential interference is more or less shut out of the immediate material.

4. The Phenomenology of War in the Plays

The phenomenology approach here "brackets" the assumptions derived from previous studies of Femi Osofisan and his *Women of Owu*. It is important to note Osofisan's revealing disclosure in the "A Note on the Play's Genesis"; "So it was quite logical therefore that, as I pondered over this adaptation of Euripides's play, in the season of the Iraqi War, the memories that were awakened in me should be those of the tragic Owu War…" (*Women of Owu* vii).

The aftermath of that massive allied assault with the individual and group socio-psychological reconfigurations that resulted from it, on both sides of the divide, is still a major source of global anxiety till date. It is instructive that the motivation for both *The Trojan Women* and *The Women of Owu* was a concern for the ravages of war and the extreme oppression of the weak by the strong, which is comparable to the Iraqi war of 2003. The Iraqi War was a modern-day plunder of mammoth proportions. It was an epic demonstration of the supremacy of might over right and the tyranny of power. Iraq's unprovoked annexation of her gulf neighbor, Kuwait, provided a convenient excuse for the (capitalist) Allied Forces, led by the almighty America, to whip the recalcitrant Saddam Hussein into line and punish him for his unrepentant anti-imperialist idiosyncrasies. In less than a year the oil-rich gulf nation was literally reduced to rubble. This concern for the ravages of war and the extreme oppression of the weak by the strong is the basic ideological thread that connects both plays.

Like its source play, *Women of Owu* opens with lamentation and an epiphany. The patron god of Owu, Anlugbua, appears to two women against the backdrop of the smoldering Owu. Anlugbua has taken the form of an old man and queries the women about the carnage he beholds before him:

ANLUGBUA: Tell me, dear Women-
You seem to come from there-
What's the name of the city I see
Smouldering over there?
WOMAN: Stranger, you don't know? Look at
My tears! That was once
The proud city of Owu, reduced to ruin
Yesterday- (1)

This encounter initiates the pathetic story of the play. Owu is burning. The once strong city has been plundered by the Allied Forces of Ijebu, Ife, and Oyo soldiers who have razed Owu, decimated her adult male population and unleashed untold bodily and mental humiliation on the women. The Women of Owu are utterly devastated. The two women narrate their collective ordeal to the equally grief-stricken Anlugbua. In this scene, too, the author seems to betray the first hint of an impending textual dilemma: the actual cause of the war. In an apparent reference to the Iraqi War scenario one of the women mentions that the Allied Forces had penetrated Owu town under the pretext of freeing it from the tyranny of a despot:

> **WOMAN:** …. For seven years we had held them off,
> These invaders from Ijebu and Ife, together
> With mercenaries from Oyo fleeing south from the
> Fulani forces. They said our Oba
> Was a despot, that they came to free us
> From his cruel yoke! (2)

From this allusion to the Iraqi War, during which that country was invaded on the excuse of liberating it from Saddam Hussein, one of the women flip-flops to another reason for the war;

> **WOMAN**: Ancestral father, the armies of Ijebu, Oyo and Ife,
> Who call themselves the Allied Forces,
> Under the command of that demon
> Maye Okunade,
> Caused this havoc.

ANLUGBUA: Okunade? Not the man I know? Gbenagbena
Okunade, the one endowed by Obatala
With the gift of creativity, to shape wood
And stone into new forms? The fabled artist
Who also dreamed those arresting patterns on virgin cloth?

WOMAN: The very one! But when his favourite wife,
Iyunloye, was captured and brought here, and given as
Wife to one of our princes, Okunade became bitter, and
Swore to get her back. Shamed and disgraced,
He abandoned his tools and took to arms….
Maye besieged our city for seven full years
Because of a woman, and would not go away!
For seven full years, the people of Owu
Suffered and refused to open the city gates (5-7).

In the preceding exchange it is clear that the author used Woman as a voice to introduce some element of faithfulness to the original text, for of a truth the immediate cause of the Trojan War was Helen, the errant wife of Menelaus. But in the third scene, Lawumi, Anlugbua's mother (a goddess and former princess of Ife) introduces another dimension to the genesis of the war. She attributes the destruction of Owu to haughtiness:

LAWUMI: Good, let the Owus eat that superiority now!
They sacked the Ife army, and took back
The Apomu market. But that was their undoing,
Because I led them on. I made them attack
The Ijebu traders at the market too,
Yes, I made sure of that! Recklessly

They looted the stalls of the Ijebu, killed many
And sold the others into slavery! And of course
As I expected, the Ijebu rose in response
And sent their dreaded army up against the city.
That was the beginning of the story
Whose consequences you see now before you! (19-20).

The above obviously calls to mind Euripides' textual undertone condemning the sacking of the Island of Melos. Thus, we see that Osofisan has tried to accommodate his sentiments about the Iraqi war, the root cause of the Trojan War, and Euripides' veiled caution against the brutality of the Melos onslaught into one textual umbrella. If all these possible reasons for the Owu tragedy were allowed to run their individual courses in the play, there might have been plot confusion. But from Scene Five only one causal thread is allowed to persist: the culpability of Iyunloye.

To qualify for condemnation, Iyunloye is cast in the mould of a whore, a temptress, and a witch. As soon as the infamous Maye makes his first entrance he rejoices with malicious satisfaction for the opportunity to get back at Iyunloye:

MAYE: … This is a happy day!
Yes at last, the day I have been waiting for, dreaming about!
The woman is in my hands at last, that,
Shameful whore I called my wife! There she waits now,
Inside there, trussed up with others
Like a common slave! Yes, Iyunloye! …
I am going to make her suffer as much as she made me.
She'll beg, and crawl in the sand till both her knees
Are in tatters. And then I'll kill her (46).

Iyunloye becomes the bug that must be eliminated to return health to the perished body politic of Owu. For the moment Erelu forgets her role as protector/guardian, she suspends her recognition of Maye as a common enemy and addresses him as if he were a messiah of sorts:

> **ERELU**: Oh you gods, how strange your ways!
> So you are still there after all, giving pain one moment
> And then joy the next! So with all your mischief, you can still
> Mete out punishment to whom it is due
> I salute you, Maye, for being the hand of justice!
> **MAYE**: Do I know you?
> **ERELU**: Kill your wife, Maye Okunade, and you will have my blessings.
> **MAYE**: What strange prayers! What's she done to you?
> **ERELU**: I am the Erelu Afin of Owu. That should tell you who I am.
> It was my son your wife bewitched and led us to this calamity (47).

As if it is not enough to throw Iyunloye up as a licentious vermin, Erelu goes on to paint her as a medusoid personality with the powers of vitriolic enchantment and transformative hypnosis:

> **ERELU**: Let her death be slow and cruel. But be careful!
> When they bring her out here, turn away your eyes, I beg you,
> Don't look at her.
> **MAYE**: That's a funny request.

> **ERELU**: Maye, I know what I am saying! Women like her are dangerous,
> Especially to their lovers. Once they catch you, you're are hooked
> For ever. They have such powers of enchantment, eyes
> That will set cities ablaze. You know what I am talking about,
> The proof is over there. One look at her again,
> Believe me, all your anger will melt away (47-48).

The negative characteristics that Iyunloye is garbed in obviously represent a form of demonization. Among the gods it is Lawumi, another woman, who is so demonized. She is made to admit responsibility for the woes of Owu. She does so when she meets her son, Anlugbua, in the third scene of the play:

> **LAWUMI:** It's about Owu, your city.
> **ANLUGBUA**: My former city, you mean?
> You are satisfied, I hope, with your work.
> **LAWUMI**: So you know.
> **ANLUGBUA**: It had to be you, mother! That such
> A disaster would happen here, and I not know
> About it. But why did you do it?
> **LAWUMI**: They had to be punished!

Lawumi's reason for the destruction of Owu is that the Owus became power drunk and attacked the erstwhile weaker Ifes. When Anlugbua reminds her that Ife had attacked Owu first she replies that the attack was justified because the Owus had broken an ancestral law by selling their fellow Yorubas into slavery. It is instructive that Anlugbua is well aware of the history of the war. Yet he claims ignorance of the Owu carnage during his discussion

with the two women in the first scene. It is apparent, then, that Anlugbua shirked his responsibility to Owu: the city that venerated and worshipped him. His city. But he is not condemned for this negligence. Some other person/goddess had to take the blame. Is this apportioning of faults gender-determined? Would Anlugbua's "maleness" have been diminished if he was made to admit culpability in the ominous fate of Owu? Lawumi becomes not just a punitive scoundrel but also a fatuous avenger who delights in punishment just for the sake of personal superbia. Not satisfied with the destruction of Owu she seeks to punish the Allied Forces for desecrating her shrine in the course of plundering the city:

> **ANLUGBUA**: Well, I hope you are satisfied now!
> **LAWUMI**: No. The city is in ruins, all right, but I'm not satisfied.
> **ANLUGBUA**: No? What more can you want, mother?
> **LAWUMI**: These Allied Forces, they need to be punished in their turn.
> **ANLUGBUA**: What!...
> **LAWUMI**: Because they too, they have no regard for me.
> Just imagine, when they set the town on fire,
> Desperate men and women ran
> To my shrine for protection. But do you know,
> These Allied Forces, the very soldiers
> I gave my total support, did not spare them
> Can you believe the insult!...
> To cap the insult, look! They have set fire to my shrine! (20-21).

So Lawumi is reduced to a petty conceited bickerer who does not care about all the bloodshed and pillage that Owu suffered but who

is more concerned about her selfish resplendency. She is made to fit into the routinized image of the fussing vainglorious woman. Perhaps the women mentioned above were presented in such negative light for the purpose of remaining as close as possible to the parent play. This raises the question of whether Osofisan's *Women of Owu* represents the truth of the Owu war or if it merely complements Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, even at the risk of historical misrepresentation.

In classical Athens women were not respected. Chinenye Amonyeze calls attention to this gender imbalance during the classical Greek period (46) Olasope (2013) also observes that " In Homeric society and most pre-industrial states, women were treated as chattels, objects and victims taken in marriage by capture or contest and subjected to a sharp sexual double standard (p. 117). So the portrayal of women as weak, wicked and wayward in classical literature is consistent with the cultural reality of the Attic society. On the contrary, Yoruba women had some respect. They were usually integrated into the mainstream of the political economy of Yoruba communities and were in control of huge commercial enterprises. Ogbomo's (2005) conclution on this is that "Yoruba women were probably among the most influential and wealthy, equal and independent in Africa because they concentrated on commerce" (p. 361). As a matter of fact the famous Madam Tinubu of Badagry, known for her economic and political prowess, was an indigene of Owu. Owu women were among the richest and most politically active of all Yoruba women.

Comparably, therefore, whereas it could be argued that Euripedes' play truthfully reflects the reality of the lived experience of classical Greek women, the same could hardly be said about Osofisan's adaptation and the Yoruba woman. Thus Osofisan's version of Euripedes' classic merely privileges the

latter. Analyzing the 2004 London production of Osofisa's *Women of Owu*, Gotrick (2008) captures the fact that "In most cases the aim of Osofisan's intertextuality is to oppose the rewritten drama, but there are also cases where he intensifies the message of the original drama" (p. 82). *Women of Owu* is one of such cases. Indeed, as Osofisan himself admits in an interview with Olu Obafemi:

> Yes, I find it that I have done a lot of adaptations, or if you like, re-readings. They can be broadly classified into two, you see, if you look at them from the angle of how they came to being, their genesis. The first are those that were commissioned. In these, I am mostly responding to a given brief, to the specific demands of the sponsors. You know, they give you a certain agenda, which you more or less have to comply with, and so your freedom as an artist is somewhat curtailed (Olasope, 2013, p. 138).

Similarly, he tells Olasope, in reaction to a question about striking a balance between his adaptations and the original texts, that:

> I have to admit that other considerations sometimes come into play…It always depends on the circumstances leading to the adaptation…. Now with the commissioned work, that is, the *Women of Owu,* I felt obliged to stay close to the original work, keeping to the basic outline, while merely substituting Yoruba rituals for the Greek. It was an obligation that I felt I owed the sponsors (2013, p. 17).

Osofisan clearly does not make excuses about his having had to stay as close as possible to the original text, even to the detriment of his own version, to satisfy the obvious imperial interests of his Chipping Norton Theatre sponsors. It is, therefore, very interesting

when scholars like Weyenberg (2013) resolve that "There are indeed notable correspondences between the stories of Owu and Troy. In Osofisan's rendition, the Owu war similarly started over a woman…" (p. 143). This is a nonsensical conclusion. Weyenberg should have limited her sweeping statement to the two plays and not to Troy and Owu. Osofisan was not chronicling the history of Owu in his play. As a matter of fact, in popular Yoruba oral history the Owu war was not fought over a woman. Instead, the Apomu market incident that actually escalated to the Owu carnage is said to have started from an argument over a few bunches of alligator pepper.

Of course Taiwo (1997) may be right to suggest that "Indeed African dramatists have found an affinity between Europe and the continent, in terms of cultural diversity and specificity… (p. 121). But this situation is hardly peculiar to Africa and Europe. Affinities exist between various global cultures and these constitute one of the driving forces of cultural globalization, despite the obvious imbalances that all too often mediate such interactions. In Osofisan's (1999) seminal essay, "Theatre and the Rites of 'Post-Negritude' Remembering", he laments that:

> Eagerly and enthusiastically, we consume the movies, CD-ROMs, records, books and magazines, comic cartoons, etc; produced in Hollywood, India, or Japan. But nobody elsewhere watches our own football matches, or cares about the ongoing debacle in, say, Sierra Leone. Nor about the disastrous oil spillage ravaging the delta region of the mighty River Niger and its peoples, conquered by the mighty (1999, p. 2)

One could also wonder why European playwrights are not in the habit of churning out adaptations of African plays. The process of adaptation is equally controlled by a similar attitude as that which concerns Osofisan above. It perpetuates the notion of High and Low art, which is elitist and hegemonic in nature and validates the superiority of artistic products considered by dominant groups as significant. In the defining structure of literary adaptation there is a privileged and a deprived text, an autonomous and a dependent one, a hegemonic and a subservient one, because adapting is a form of borrowing. The relationship between lender and borrower is, necessarily, hierarchical. It is a largely osmotic relationship but the end product is hardly ever an equalized concentration of cultural realities.

5. Conclusion

Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu* is, undeniably, a fine work. But in an attempt to find parallels to fit into the mould of his source play, the playwright has inadvertently extrapolated the cultural essence of a society that had little regard for women into the cultural history of an African community, where women had a lot of respect, and thereby has given impetus to some flawed assumptions and misinterpretations of that history. In an apparent bid to satisfy the arbitrary demands of his commission, the author of *Women of Owu* seems to have ignored the peculiar localized realities that shape the cultural lived experience of indigenous African Women distinct from their Classical Greek counterparts. By attempting to present a sort of metanarrative that totalizes the condition of women as a universal reality the play, deliberately or otherwise, demonizes womanhood.

References

Awodiya, M. P. (1996). Form and technique in Femi Osofisan's plays." *African Literature Today*, 20, 102-19.

Brenner, G. (2004). *Performative criticism: experiments in Reader-Response*. Albany: State University of New York.

Budelmann, F. (2007). Trojan women in Yorubaland: Femi Osofisan's*Women of Owu*." In L. Hardwick & and C. Gillespie (Eds), *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds* (pp. 15–39). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carlson, M. (1998). Psychic polyphony. In W. G. Brandt (Ed.), *Modern theories of drama: A selection of writings on drama and theatre, 1840-1990* (pp. 288-98). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Freund, E. (2003). *The Return of the reader*. New York: Routledge.

Gotrick, K. (2008). Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*: Paraphrase in Performance. *Research in African Literatures*, 39(3), 82-98.

Howells, C. (1999). *Derrida: Deconstruction from phenomenology to ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Iser, W. (1989). *Prospecting: From reader-response to literary anthropology*. Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Nwabueze, E. (2003). *Visions & re-Visions: Selected discourses on literary criticism*. Enugu: Abic Publishers.

Obafemi, O (1982). Revolutionary aesthetics in recent Nigerian literature. *African Literature Today*, 12, 118-36.

Ogbomo,O. W. (2005). Women, Power and Society in Precolonial Africa. In S. A. Ajayi (Ed), *African Culture & Civilization*. Ibadan: Atlantis Books.

Olasope, O. (Ed.). (2013). *Black Dionysos: conversations with Femi Osofisan.* Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2013.

Olasope, O. (2012). To sack a city or to Breach a woman's chastity: Euripides' *Trojan Women* and Osofisan's *Women of Owu*." *African Performance Review*, 6(1), 111-121.

Osofisan, F. (2006). *Women of Owu*. Ibadan: University Press.

Osofisan, F. (1999). Theatre and the rites of 'Post-Negritude' remembering." *Research in African Literatures*, 30(1), 1-11.

Owolabi, K. A. (2000). An insight into Husserl's Phenomenology. In G.O.Ozumba (Ed.), *The Great Philosophers*. Awka: R&K Enterprises, 2000.

Robert, F. M. (2001). *Let the reader understand: Reader – Response criticism and the Gospel of Mark.* Harrisburg: Trinity Press.

Taiwo, E. F. (1997). An Interface of the Old and the New: Creating the Conscious Nigerian via an Interrogation of Sophocles' *Antigone* in Osofisan's *Tegoni*. *Nebula*, 6(3), 121-133.

Tompkins, J. P. (Ed.). (1980). *Reader-Response criticism: From formalism to post-structuralism*. Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Weyenberg, A. Van. (2013). *The politics of adaptation: Contemporary African drama and Greek tragedy*. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi,.