

Trickster in Nigerian Postcolonial Drama

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Abstract:

Trickster is a mythical character in folktales that shows a great deal of intelligence or secret knowledge and uses it to play tricks to outwit their masters or anyone with authority. They sometimes break social rules and defy traditional behaviour for special reasons. They might exist in the real world as real people who either intentionally or unconsciously inhabit or take on this role. This significant role of the trickster is embodied in the two Nigerian plays under study, *Esu and The Vagabond Minstrels* by Femi Osofison (1988) and *Dionysus of the Holocaust* by Femi Euba (2002). The bricoleur technique is adopted in the paper as a methodology as it is best defined by Denzin and Lincoln as one in which the inherent evaluations of a research project are made clear and persistently returned to throughout the period of a study. The paper concludes that all black people need to have Esu-related qualities such as escaping, creating secret codes, encouraging insurrections, deception, and dissembling to keep balance in a world full of fateful/fatal conflicts which is the hardest challenge that Esu, the God of fate introduces. The moral of the two plays is that good and bad coexist and complement each other. People learn to distinguish between them through experience and they overcome evil situations by the amount of trickery they master.

Introduction

Trickster in black culture, as illustrated by Femi Euba, the Nigerian playwright, “whether represented in animal form (as tortoise, spider, or monkey), or as a divinity such as Esu-Elegbara or Legba in West Africa, has often been used to convey an important moral or cultural message, implied in the action the trickster describes” (167). This significant role of the trickster is embodied in the two Nigerian plays under study. Nigeria is described as “the most populous country in Africa that became independent from Britain in 1960” (Banham et al. 67). There is a vast amount of work on Nigerian drama and theatre that reflect their diverse issues and the diversity of the country itself. Obviously, the country with the largest population in Africa, brags about speaking over three hundred languages including a wide variety of ethnic nationalities with different cultures as well as belief systems. This diversity, therefore, finds expression and manifestation in the written forms of drama and is well-reflected in the two plays under consideration.

The importance of this type of plays that focuses on the conflict between virtues and vices lies in the manner through which it improves the quality of life of people. It explores and reasserts the relevance of man to his fellow community, his society and before all to himself. In addition, the main objective of such literature is to enhance the virtual qualities of people and to employ them to help improve the entire society. Morality plays as identified by William Thrall “it was a dramatized ALLEGORY in which the abstract virtues and vices (like mercy, conscience, perseverance, and shame) appear in personified form, the good and the bad usually being engaged in a struggle for the soul of man” (293). It is from this perspective that the two selected Nigerian plays will be discussed. The contemporary playwrights of the plays are radicals, seek gradual reform in their societies, and well-noted for their critique of societal problems as well as the influence of the civil war and post-civil war periods and their consequences. Femi Osofisan is very famous for the fact that his plays explore the conflict between good and evil, in a way to advocate that “compassion, a sentiment now considered a sign of weakness or “effeminacy” in today’s macho world of tough American gangsters, super-Bonds and Supermen, and Kung-fu expert” (vi), writes *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* (1988) to highlight how modernity and civilization that are imposed by colonizers or

borrowed from western cultures have deviated us from our humanity and resulted in the loss of the established concepts of humanity and the looseness of the social strong bonds and the common values. On the other hand, Femi Euba whose plays embrace the Yoruba culture as their main topic, uses satire to pose a question in *The Dionysus of the Holocaust* (2002) wondering if it is possible for people to live peacefully together with different races, presents only facts, and leaves the audience to decide. Both playwrights invite the audience to agree with the finale of their plays, and accordingly they implicitly instill the moral values that they promote in the collective mind of the entire society.

Theoretical Framework

Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln prove that the bricoleur methodology is significant for: “stress[ing] the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (8). Moreover, they argue that bricolage as a methodology is better able to address the “value-laden nature of inquiry” and likewise “how social experience is created and given meaning” (8). So, a bricoleur methodology is best defined as one in which the inherent evaluations of a research project are made clear and persistently returned to throughout the period of a study. Furthermore, Troy Richardson refers to this mode or strategy as defined by the structural anthropologist Levi-Strauss, that it implies a kind of ingenuity and skill, of making good use of a range of tools (780). Then he cites the works of Denzin and Lincoln as they illustrate the main terms and characteristics of the bricoleur researcher. This strategy comes into perspective in the process of understanding topics like the relationship between text and reader, language and consciousness, culture and aesthetic, and subjectivity and narrative. Such ways of getting knowledge, as in indigenous contexts, will eventually raise questions that transcend the scope of reading and reflecting on the text.

Literature review

Before introducing the tricksters and their roles in the post-colonial societies, it is important to set the definition and the general characteristics of the trickster figure as well as understanding their universality. The definition of the word trickster in many dictionaries, such as Cambridge, Macmillan, Collins, and Merriam-webster, is related to someone who cheats or deceives others, or someone who uses dishonest methods to get what he wants. Defining the trickster is far more complicated than this simple interpretation. To begin, it is very hard to find an accurate definition of tricksters as they cannot be included in one clear description or contained under one label or category. In his introduction to his book *The Trickster* (1972), Paul Radin defines the trickster as “creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and he who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil, yet he is responsible for both” (xxiii). He continues to show that the trickster figure has no social or moral values as he is always pushed by his desires and appetites. However, through his actions and behavior all values get fulfilled. It is not only the trickster figure who possess these qualities but also the other figures connected in the tales with him: the animals, any other supernatural beings, monsters, and even humankind as Radin elucidates. Roger Abrahams expressively describes the trickster as “the most paradoxical of all characters in Western narratives . . . for he combines the attributes of many other types that we tend to distinguish clearly. At various times he is clown, fool, jokester, initiate, culture hero, even ogre . . . He is the central character for what we consider many different types of folk narratives” (170-171). One major flaw in attempting to classify the trickster figure is the assumption of many modern scholars that each trickster is so diverse and complex that it is significantly hard to group two or more together under one definition. Studying the features of a trickster can help understand and spotlight some religious ceremonies or even rituals that are

considered sacred within a particular society. For example, studying Esu the trickster of the Yoruba culture discloses the suffering of the Nigerian society because of the diminishing of some significant virtues in that given community like compassion and tolerance.

Scholars and essayists who have studied the trickster figure fall into two main controversial groups. One group led by Radin sees the trickster as an individual character that belongs to its particular society and so “culture-specific” that no two tricksters convey the same message as described by Hynes and Doty (4). They argue against a “generalizing comparativist view” that gives a broad description that can be applied to all tricksters. Whereas the other group led by Carl Jung and Karl Kerényi sees the trickster as an archetypal figure that appears in many cultural and religious heritage and that tricksters should not be seen and discussed individually in relation to their own society, but they are connected by some universal characteristics regardless the culture or religion each one represents due to the adequate inherent similarities among them. The term archetype is introduced by Makaryk who asserts that Jung “employed the term archetype to designate primordial images inherited in the collective unconscious of the human race, from where they emerge into myths, religions, literature, the visual arts, dreams and private fantasies” (508). Jung admits that this line of common unconsciousness is not derived from a personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inherited in every individual and accordingly shared by the whole society as a segment of the deepest unconscious mind that is genetically inherited and is not shaped by personal experience. So, the collective unconsciousness is common to all human beings and is responsible for several deep-rooted beliefs and instincts, such as spirituality, sexual behaviour, and life and death instincts (196).

This short introduction sheds light on some reasons to deeply think and consider all related issues when dealing with tricksters. They, according to Hynes, provide “entertainments involving play or laughter. Yet they are instructive” (7). Jean Hardy provides a definition that encompasses many contradictory issues in defining the trickster including the Jungian interpretation and the confusion about his archetype. He describes the trickster as origin of the sudden change in communities that do not tolerate change as an embodiment of the uncertainty that surrounds our lives.

The archetype of the Trickster...is the existence of the unexpected as it appears in every human society, sometimes fully acknowledged, sometimes feared and hidden. He is the opposite of order – but then he is opposite of everything: he can turn into a she...He is the Green Man, the Jester, the clown, the witch or the wizard, Mercury, a shape shifter ... the Fool with the potential at times for becoming a Savior. He upsets normality and hierarchic order...He can change the expected world, and therefore be an agent of transformation. (1)

Searching for the true man with the help of the trickster:

The two plays share one main theme which is the search for the true man who is the foundation of that society and who should not be corrupted or inhuman. This pursuit of that man reaches the peak in both plays. For example, in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, it redefines the man who could challenge any temptations in a world full of pure materialism, transcends the cultural materialism, and restores the genuine ethics and moral values of the Nigerian society. In *Dionysus of the Holocaust*, the search is for a better version of mankind after they consumed all their opportunities to live in peace and coexistence in their first life. Both plays lend themselves to be morality plays that discuss the competing worldviews of good and evil with the compassionate and human win in the end, and they explore the collective consciousness in a way that is enlightening and thought-provoking. Osofisan is so much concerned with the corruption that has led his country over the years to an intolerable

state of decadence, a state that has pushed everyone in the society to discuss, especially artists who feel that something has to be done to stop and fight it. J. Akin-George laments the shameful condition of corruption in Nigeria in 1991 and his comments are still relevant “In recent times corruption and economic crimes have reached such an epidemic proportion that something urgent and drastic needs to be done before the entire fabric of the society collapses through their combined weight” (52).

In *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, Esu the god of crossroads in the Yoruba culture gives the minstrels, who are poverty-stricken, a superpower that can be used once to help people in need whom can reward the minstrels back after they change their miserable condition. So, all the minstrels search for wealthy people in trouble to offer their help disregarding the reason of their predicament whether it is a legal or not. What matters for them is the compensation everyone will get from the person in the experiment after improving his or her condition. That is the case for all the minstrels except Omele who does not look for a rich person in particular, but rather he wastes his superpower once to help an impoverished and abandoned woman who has been pregnant for nine years to get healed without any promise or hope for any reward later. He tries the magic power once more to help heal two leper couple who inform him that their only way to get healed is to hug someone and transfer the disease to him. He accepts to be that person sympathizing with them and giving an excuse that they deserve to live more than he does. An action that results in getting infected, bullied, beaten, and abandoned by his vagabond friends. As a morality play, the greedy minstrels are eventually punished and the compassionate Omele is rewarded and praised and the leprosy magically not only healed, but also transferred to the greedy group. The audience themselves are left confused and reconsidering the main theme of the play which is how a person can be too good to an extent of destroying himself for the betterment of others. They think of the other minstrels realistically as normal people who can not just forget about their ordeal for the sake of being too good like Omele. According to the minstrels, “he doesn’t deserve anything! He made his choice. He wanted to stand alone. He didn’t care for anyone of us. So, don’t give him anything. Let him eat his own reward! Goodness has its limits” (55). Omele is the man that Osofisan wants to stand out in the society as the base to change the others as he asserts:

Charity! That was the creed we were all raised on, and the whole village practiced it! Not even a stranger passed by without finding a roof, or a warm bed. They taught us to always give, freely, like Mother Nature. They said God owned everything, that every man was a creature of God. Created in his image!
(7)

The role of the trickster is played by the Old Man (Esu) who meets the minstrels at his favorite place, the crossroads, and gives them the superpower to help them survive their predicaments. After they fulfill their missions, Esu gets the audience involved in the debate if the minstrels should be punished for being materialistic and for trickily and inhumanly overcoming their problems or Omele for being altruistic. The play ends up with Omele being rewarded while his friends getting leprosy “writhing in agony as they are caught by the dreadful god, and gradually covered in spots” (68).

In the Yoruba world, Esu is known as the “errand boy” of Orunmila. He is a “trickster god of revolt and unpredictable forces,” an image of “the principle of justice whose operation often eludes man’s predictive abilities” (Awodiya 73). He is also seen as the cause of all forms of negative thoughts and deeds for humans. He is the reason behind corruption, lying, treachery, greed, and accordingly, the collapse of the entire society (Oluwole 2007). In contrast, Osofisan believes that God creates the two dichotomies of good and evil together not only in every society but basically in every man and it is the man’s sheer responsibility to make his own choice. According to Osofisan, Esu uses his divine power to observe the behavior and deeds of men and to bestow justice on earth. Old Man says: “The owner of the

world has created a balance between the forces of Good and those of Evil. He appointed Esu to watch over them” (17). Esu in the play does not search for the minstrels or follow them to guide on what to do, Osofisan makes them come to the crossroads to meet him with the hope of getting his assistance in their problems. He gives them the magical power and hinges their fate on how compassionate they are and on what will win; their humanity or materialism? Redio says: “Old Man, We’ve come to the end of the road. And it looks like you can help us, as the priest of the gods” (17-18).

By the same token, Euba’s *The Dionysus of the Holocaust* centers around the end of the world, and the gods assemble to decide the fate of its inhabitants in the netherworld describing what happened to the world as “it looks like the holocausted earth to me” (7) as stated by Parakultus, the servant of Dionysus the god of democracy. Dionysus, Pluto, and Apollo lead a debate on whether the world should be restored to its former condition, and, in this case, which race should reign supreme. Dionysus always defends mankind and believes that they should be given another chance to return to the earth, therefore, the two oppositional parties, who are the Caucasians and the Afraks, asked him to intercede and allow them to get back and live together in a pure world that has no greed, corruption, exploitation, and senselessness. Dionysus opens the play dressing Parakultus, his servant, a multicolored dress “to represent the new spirit of multi culture that you’re trying to promote” (4). They both try to spread their idea throughout the play in many scenes like when they come with a heavy bag of cubes which Dionysus asks Parakultus to carry, but he fails because of its considerable weight. The cubes represent the different races on earth and the scene makes Dionysus speak aloud to include everybody who might be listening “That load will be always heavy for you to carry – until you’ve learnt the art of humility and love” (45). However, Hermelabas, who is the trickster in this play, believes that both races are biased and not willing to cooperate peacefully to live on a common land “These people are not ready to have a fresh start. Not in Zillion years!” (95). The Caucasians (representing the world of the White and given the name of White-confederacy) argue with the Afrak (representing the African tribes and slaves) about which race is better and deserves to rule the world. The Afraks constantly prove to be more compassionate, more welcoming, and kinder than the Caucasians, and the Caucasians continually try to win over the gods with tactics and flattery. Eventually, Hermelabas, the principle of fateful/fatal paradox and who is later chosen to be the advocate for the Caucasians, with his tricks and cunning manages to reveal how they are “psychopompos and fashioned with my devilish instincts” (126) and rewards the Afraks giving them a chance to rule the world for one time as the Caucasians were given this chance once before.

The most significant point in the two plays is the role of the trickster. Esu is the well-known Yoruba trickster god who introduces himself to humanity in very confusing ways. His diversity is presented in the popular folktale about the person who is wearing a hat with one blue side and one red side, and people just disagree about the colour of the hat. The aim of this Greek inspired story is to teach people that it is wrong to judge anything from only one side, and that you have to see the picture clearly in order to make any judgment. He resides in the crossroads and introduces them as the meeting point for the good and the bad qualities of humans. It symbolizes a wide variety of choices for people to choose their fate. In so doing, they may choose their success in life or their eternal misery. Adebola Ademeso shows that, “Esu allows man to use his will power, through determination at the crossroads, to determine his doom, failure, or success” (59). As Osofisan wants to refine the man of that stage to create a better one to improve his society, he put the minstrels, through Esu, to a test to seek this selfless man who can sacrifice himself to the society. Male Leper says: “Esu Laaroye, lord of crossroads, trickster, he set you a test, to see whether between compassion and greed, you would know the road to take; between material wealth, so ephemeral, and the unseen riches of tenderness...” (68).

Likewise, Euba in *Dionysus*, mixes Hermes, the Greek trickster, with Papa LaBas, the diaspora version of Esu to create the most controversial character in the play, Hermelabas. It is worth mentioning that the entire play is inspired by the Greek play; Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, not only the Greek trickster. Borrowing from the Greek theater is familiar to the Nigerian society particularly in the diaspora, as illustrated by Osagie (86), basically because of the great correspondence between the cultural, mythical, and ritual beliefs between the two cultures that made many of the Nigerian playwrights blend the two worlds together. Euba claims that the intrinsic link between Hermelabas and Esu is that the latter's association with cunning and deception is used as a means to an ultimate purpose which is punishing the mistaken and rewarding the virtuous. Similarly, Osagie assumes that Hermelabas is introduced with "a more complex and functional purpose than mere dissembling, one that has the potential to deflate human excesses and stupid drives, such as arrogance, megalomania, and pompousness, thereby forcing self-awareness and, ultimately, self-mastery" (86). Accordingly, the complicated character of Hermelabas represents Esu in the Yoruba world, and in one of the performances of the play in 2014, Osagie mentions that the character of Hermelabas was dressed in black and red, Esu's favorite colors. Additionally, the character was dressed half like a man with all male accouterments and the other half dressed all like a woman wearing feminine clothes and makeup. By doing so, Hermelabas embraces the paradoxical nature of Esu and he even uses an ironical language that is based mainly on confusion and contradiction. Needless to mention that both characters appear in the beginning of the plays at the crossroads as their favorite places. In *Esu*, the musicians declare that Esu lives on the crossroads and people who have problems like those who look for children, money, or long-life head to him to help them achieve their dreams.

Epo: "This place ... Sepeteri! This is the home of Esu himself! Esu the dreaded god of mischief, this is his homing ground! We are standing on his head!"

Omele: I'll explain. This place ... this crossroads, people used to bring a lot of food and leave them on this crossroads as offerings to Esu... You see, Sepeteri is the last point between the town behind us, and the sacred grove of Orunmila, over there. So Esu, the lord of Sepeteri, is regarded as a kind of intermediary, between men and their wishes, between destiny and fulfillment. (9-10)

In *Dionysus*, the first appearance for Hermelabas is at the crossroads where he plays his tricks on Parakultus who was looking for his master Dionysus. Hermelabas confuses Parakultus and keeps pointing to different directions at different times and every time Parakultus goes to the direction, does not find his master, looks back to Hermelabas who points to another direction saying "here" or "there" and so on until Dionysus enters, addresses Hermelabas as "the advocate for death" (23) and introduces him to Parakultus as his nephew. Dionysus shows discomfort because of Hermelabas' tricks and elicits that he is here to attend the trial and help the gods choose who will get back to the earth, but he announces that the gods can decide without his help. It is then when Hermelabas gets outraged and says that nothing can happen without him and no decisions can be made without his interference because of his superpowers; a situation that makes Hermelabas instigate the Caucase to beg him to be their advocate and finally they lose because of his deceiving involvement.

I'm the final conquest, the fateful-fatal one that brings life to the dead, that turns life into dead beats, that cripple the overexcited, that bring war to peace, peace to war. I, Hermelabas, the multipowered one, also called the beast! I am not the frivolous child you once knew; even I have learnt this art of love that you've brought to mankind. But that can there be any love without hate, any hate without love? What remains to be seen is whether mankind is capable of this love you wish to offer. Everything must happen according to the rules, without any favors. (24-25)

On a different note, both Esu and Hermelabas play a critical role to tangle the life of people in order to make them reconsider their inputs and surroundings, and then reassess their decisions and choices. Osagie spotlights this relation between both tricksters “Like Esu, who indirectly guides humans to their destinies by disordering their lives and therefore forcing them to reevaluate their choices, habits, and behaviors” (86). In *Esu*, it is well noted that the Old man gives quite misleading instructions to the minstrels when he says: “Esu does not look into the hearts of men, only their actions. Are you ready to help those among you, who are in distress? To bring redress to the wronged? And justice to the exploited?” (18). He encourages them to help any suffering person disregarding the reason behind their struggle to change their lives. They offer help to different corrupt examples in the society and do not look at the poor or the sick people who really need miracles to change their miserable destinies. Eventually, after they complete the mission, Esu punishes them for their choices that are instigated by him. Moreover, he rewards the only character who apparently does not follow his instruction and helps the impoverished woman and the leprous couple. On the day of reward, the musicians blame the compassionate Omele in the presence of The Old Man for helping the needy. “First, he wasted your power on a pauper. A woman with no money or means. And then, he tried again, a second time. But he didn’t pick up prosperity, like us! He picked up leprosy!” (60). Omele refuses even to defend himself and shows his extreme gratitude to his fellows as they originally taught him how to sing, dance, lie, and fight and that if he defends himself by any means, it will be turned against them. At the end, Esu, after calling the audience to help him make the right decision which he has previously made, he announces the final judgment:

Yes. Let’s end the play then, old spoilsport. Let the disease go to those who have won it, those who seek to be rich without labour. Who have put their selfish greed before everything, including their humanity! I mean you, my dear fellows! Take your reward! (*The minstrels cringe in terror*) (68).

Likewise, in the *Dionysus*, the Caucase choose Hermelabas to be their advocate with the aim of getting another chance to restore the earth and rule the world for one time in their mind, but they end up not only conciliating with the Afraks but admitting that they belong somehow to the black race with variant degrees. When the gods realize that all the mess happening to the trial attributes to Hermelabas, he replies frankly that “No, I’ll answer to no such charge. I just offer choices, and it’s up to each individual to take it or leave it” (94). Through the trickster nature of Hermelabas, the Caucase aim at an end, but end up embracing a different conviction that makes them promote for their multicultural identities in order to be given the chance to rehabilitate the land with the Afraks:

Caucase 6

Lord Apollo, this is the truth, the honest truth and nothing but the truth! If you but look into our genealogical history, you’ll find plenty of evidence to believe that we all one way or another have black blood, a substantial black blood enough to lay claims to a family of blackness. Consider me for instance. My great grandfather, an absentee planter in the Caribees, impregnated many of his slaves.

Caucase 2

What about me! I come from a line of colonials in black Africa.

Caucase 3

Me too. My great father actually married my black great mother on his death bed – an occurrence I’ve denied all my life. (130)

One more significant key point is the hidden hands of the tricksters that cause the actions to happen in favor of their plans. They both appear in the scenes approaching the end to reveal their secret agendas and their true intentions. To begin with Osofisan’s play, Esu

appears in the reward day with his followers, hooded, to assess how the wandering musicians have helped reduce the suffering in the world. Immediately after they are welcomed by the musicians who show real excitement to reap their gains, they start one by one to realize Esu's followers who turn to be the same people who they helped they day before. The four minstrels recognize the followers in spite the neater appearance, however surprisingly, the followers totally deny that they have met or even seen any of the musicians before. This first step discloses the fact that all the actions are planned and carried out by Esu himself. Those people who come in agony seeking help are not more than tools in the hands of Esu who sends them to play their roles in his tale to reach his aim. On another note, Esu gets baffled to see the poor woman and the lepers whom Omele has helped, because he realizes that they do not belong to his entourage and he keeps asking who they are until the Male Leper reveals his real identity. He turns to be Orunmila, the God of wisdom and knowledge, when he talks to the Female Leper, Orunmila's fellow, Yeye Osun, Mother of fertility, it is made clear that they participate in this plot to "retrieve my children" and save Omele.

Male Leper: (Smiles, to the Female Leper) My dear, how terrible you can be, even to a god! See, you've wrapped his mind iso completely in your cobweb!

Female Leper: (Smiling) Well, you know that when you play with the master trickster himself, you have to be ruthless... Yes, it's me, Esu. You forgot, didn't you, that even the cleverest fox can be fooled. (67)

Thus, Esu in this scene with his fellow gods, take part in complicating the plot. Esu confuses the minstrels to show the greed in them, while the other gods save the naturally altruistic man. They all share trickery and deception. "Old Man: Come, Orunmila, and you, Mother of Fertility, you know I am not unkind. We've all played the game. And now, it is time to reward the only man we have found truly worthy to be called a human being! Salute!" (68).

Correspondingly, in the second round between the Caucasians and the Afraks, the latter gives a speech about their vision of how life would look like if they were given the chance to rule the world. They propose the idea of having a Commonwealth that will accommodate all the cultures with respect, knowledge, and understanding with the help of Lord Pluto and Lord Dionysus. It will contain and control all the old and new cultures and differences; one that will valorize their bountiful resources, build their strength on their creative power, and achieve justice through its retributive judgment, announcing that anyone who is not willing to participate in the democracy of the Commonwealth must be left behind. While demonstrating their proposal, a woman abruptly interrupts, disguised as a black woman, and disagrees with their claims that "your Commonwealth won't work".

The cultures I represent, for one, will be taken by no foreign Dionysian cult. We have our Dionyses, thank God – Lord Harikrichna, or Lord Hindu, or Lord Bhudda take your pick. We don't need another reprobate to lord anything over us. You too, what about your Obatala, your Ogun, or your Sange, or any of those violently tempered gods of your tribes, you think they wish to be rules by foreign gods? Their vibrant history in the old New World should attest to that. But then, consider also the Christians who, don't forget, will be part of your so called Commonwealth, you think they will be willing to subject their Christ to your Dionysiac unruly passion? (94)

One of the Afraks who has doubted the identity of the woman, approaches and lifts her wig revealing a Caucasian hair. Immediately fight ensues between the two races until Hermelabas enters, smiling, so the other gods infer that he is behind all that aggravation. It is him who has sent one of the Caucase to disguise and spoil the Afraks false claims of the peaceful, healthy, and creative coexistence. He does that apparently to ruin the Afraks' assertion, but actually to fail the Caucase in the round and let the Afraks win. His justification is that he strongly questions the readiness of the two races in general and of the Caucase in particular to coexist

and that he has to prove that. Dionysus tells him “How wrong can you get, Herme, as stubborn and as inflexible as you are to change”, but Hermelabas replies “And these, if you call my individuality stubborn, what do you call these earthlings? Are they not molded with my mettle? Where can they go without me? What can they do without me?” (95). Hermelabas defends the idea that in the Old World, the Afraks were suppressed, humiliated, and persecuted by the Caucase and it is fair enough that they get the chance of ruling the world at least for once. Being a trickster character makes him interfere not only to ruin plans of the Caucase, but also to deceive them and get them to trust him and choose him as their advocate yet he changes their inner vision of themselves. When introducing himself, he brags about his mixed identity in a way that confuses the Caucase and drags their attention to his Creole mix. He appears “(Carrying a caduceus – a golden rod embossed with twined snakes at the top) By the power of my syncretic, multicultural appellation and being Hermes – of the Aryans and Papa LaBas of African ascendance” (98). Then, in his defense of the Caucase, he promotes their right of racial discrimination and the sensible idea that there should be two worlds; one for them and the people they can control, and the other for the Afrak Diaspora; “one for the Aryans, and the other for anybody of Bantu origins” (99). Then, he turns deliberately to the Caucase to check their comprehension of what is beyond his words, they cheer and praise what he says. Moreover, he uses suspicious and double-meaning words to describe their weaknesses not to mention their faults and meanness. For example, he uses words such as “explorative, exploitative agency of all private rights, was-hungry perverts, inventive psychopaths, pale color-conscious paranoias, die-hard racist-separatists” (100-101) and they keep praising and cheering for that as their reaction to agree with him. His method makes Athene, the Afraks advocate, take advantage of it and announce that “the case has proven itself beyond all reasonable doubt. Cousin Herme has mercantiled his trickery again to greatest advantage.” Then he replies that “Honesty is the best policy, Auntie” (101). Athene proves through her talk that the Caucase throughout history have forced one-sided acculturation via empowerment and slavery, because no colonizer thinks of the culture of the colonized as good to be adopted. She gives the example of stealing their cultural arts to grace Aryan museums; this is what one of the Afraks called: “they used us and dumped us” (87), but at the same time, they profane the Afraks’ special possessions and consider them as only “paganistic”. Their talk creates a sense of uneasiness among the Caucases as they feel there is something is plotted against them, and that makes them request the court to change the strategy and decide the case by a Qualitative Intelligence Test (IQ) given to both parties to find out who is more intelligent, presuming since they have more advanced technology, they will certainly win the competition, and the court agrees.

In the light of the incidents of the two plays, it can be inferred that both trickster characters, Esu and Hermelabas, are the main instigators behind the actions through their dispositions and tricks in the two plays who cause failure to those who appeal for their help whether the minstrels in *Esu* or the Caucases in *Dionysus*. There is a question that is worth asking in this context. Are they negative forces? In other words; are they representing the Devil among the other Deities? Ademeso believes that “Most Christians in Africa believe strongly that Esu is the same person referred to in the Bible as the Devil or Satan, whereas the appropriate parallel or the equivalent of the Christian’s Devil does not exist in the Yoruba pantheon” (58). What Osofisan has shown through this work is that Esu is not phenomenal in a sense that the divine status is given to him by people; when they seek his miracles to overcome their suffering and it can be disrobed also by people and sometimes by other gods. So, he can make mistakes and be tricked like men. That happens when he is deceived by the leprosy couple who turned to be Orunmila and Yeye Osun, and when he calls the audience to subscribe to the debate about who should take the disease from Omele. This last vote raises an issue that Esu needs to generalize his decision and make it like a unanimous vote to instill the

significance of altruism in the collective psyche of the society. In this play, Esu shows all his standard traditional qualities describes by Hynes— he is at once a trickster, a shape-shifter, an illusionist, an unbiased judge, a satirist, a tester, an enforcer, an interrogator, a spinner of obstacles and options, a lover of the theatrical and lord of the crossroads.

By the same token, Osagie states that “The complexity of Hermelabas, both in character and in action, is an attempt to capture the essence of Esu in Yoruba cosmology. Indeed the “double gesture of adaptation” Hermelabas is subject to can rightly be assessed as a fair representation of Esu” (86). Both tricksters engage in paradoxical actions. They admit their loves to their conflicting nature. The Old Man says: “Esu loves to help men, but only when they show that they can live happily among other human beings. For human beings are greedy” (18) and then he sends the wrong people to the minstrels to help. Hermelabas admits that he is there when people make bad decisions, for example, he taught them how to use explosives, but he is also there to trick them into making the right choices. All this happen while humans are not aware that they are guided or directed into a specific path. So, why are they doing that? The actions of the tricksters lead to one end that they both initiate critical thinking and moral evaluation in humans. At the end of Osofisan’s play, the leprosy couple come back to take the disease from Omele, but Esu insists that it should go back to the greedy minstrels who deserve to be punished. Likewise, the Caucas whose main objective is to repopulate the earth alone taking all the races who can “better relate to one another” (83) and calling it “ New World Aryan Confederacy” (86) wind up adopting a different strategy “if you can’t beat them, join them”, again inspired by Hermelabas. He even states it that although the Caucas are too racists, they love his black half even if they do not notice that. “Isn’t it strange that you do not recognize in me what you hate, but rather what conditions you hate? Even that, I’ll have you know, is my genius in irony” (91). Hermelabas’ techniques in dealing with the Caucas can be seen as very wise and makes him strike a keynote addressing human social and psychological needs. While Dionysus and the other gods and judges try to have the Caucas and Afraks talk together to reach a meeting point, Hermelabas differs by making the Caucas see the ‘blackness’ within themselves and breeze with that fact.

Euba in *Archetypes* presents a claim that Esu is no longer outside us or outside our identity. “For Esu is no other than our fate – by synecdoche ourselves” (93). This concept coincides with how Esu and Hermelabas approach the issues in the two plays under study as they both adopt this concept that humans should not blame others whether gods or people for making any decisions or taking any choices as they eventually turn out to be their own faults. Therefore, the playwrights use this tendency to blame others as a cornerstone to urge self-awareness and assessment. Humans can tolerate their mistakes and problems by accepting their responsibility for them instead of blaming others for making them; which is a religious belief in the Yoruba cosmology as Osagie shows “that this psychic structure of evil is part and parcel of the human condition” (87). So, the noticeable blame game throughout the plays between the minstrels and Omele from one side and between the Caucas and the Afraks from the other is suppressed by the tricksters. Esu could have thought of punishing Omele to take revenge of the two gods who deceived him, but he disdains this detail in the sake of valorizing the virtue of empathy and compassion. Similarly, Hermelabas, as Esu, acts from the same perspective and redirects the uncooperative Caucas to look inward for a solution to their racial fiasco. Such actions of the two tricksters bring balance to the world of humans and give some hope that humans will be empathetic to each other and accept their differences if they decide to.

Conclusion

To conclude, the two plays introduce a very good example of the central role of trickster figures in tangling the lives of people in order to make them reconsider, reassess, and reevaluate their decisions and choices. They also demonstrate the manner by which the hidden

hands of tricksters derive actions to the directions that help and serve their plans. Euba demonstrates in his book *Archetypes, imprecators, and victims of fate* that “everyone possesses his or her own fate or Esu, metaphysically and physically realizes as the embodiment of one’s fateful/fatal construct of character, personality, and will, all of which shape one’s destiny” (169). Since Esu is a cultural character, he is implanted in the psyche of the black people and his intervening influence is very hard to remove. Such impact can be seen in the reaction of the black people towards colonization and colonizers as it is mirrored in various actions, such as escaping, creating secret codes, encouraging insurrections, and most Esu-related quality, the art of deception and dissembling. All black people need to have such traits to keep balance in a world full of fateful/fatal conflicts which is the hardest challenge that Esu, the God of fate introduces. Besides, to maintain such balance entails skills and potentials of a trickster and this is the evolution that depends on the individual personality and which are both influenced by Esu. The moral of the two plays is that good and bad coexist and complement each other. People learn to distinguish between them through experience and they overcome evil situations by the amount of trickery they master. In other words, the clear substance cannot be seen as such if not tested by some impurities. The plays are meant to boost the human tendency to take compassion, empathy, and altruism as the natural choice, and this is what the Nigerian society needs to improve from the viewpoint of the playwrights.

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