

## **Metatheatre in Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun*(\*)**

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### ***Abstract***

This paper aims at examining the metatheatrical devices used by Osofisan in his play *Morountodun*. It also reveals his purpose from using these devices; that is, his attempt to incite the audience / readers to reform their socio-economic conditions and challenge the existing social hierarchy that is unjust. To do that, Osofisan uses multiple metatheatrical techniques such as addressing the audience, self-reference of the play to itself as a play, role playing-within-a role, the play-within-a play, music, songs ... etc. He successfully creates a distance between the audience and the theatrical situation, by using such techniques, to allow them to reflect on what they see and relate it to the real life in which they are supposed to be active participants.

### ***Keywords***

Metatheatricality, Nigerian Drama, Femi Osofisan, the play, within, the play, role, playing, Moremi myth, theatrical metaphors

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## المخلص:

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى دراسة مسرحية موراونتودن للكاتب المسرحي فيمي أوسيفيسان في ضوء استخدامه لأدوات ما وراء المسرح، كما تبرز الدراسة هدف أوسيفيسان من وراء ذلك وهو محاولته تحفيز الجمهور والقراء على اتخاذ خطوات جديدة لتعديل الأحوال الاجتماعية والاقتصادية عن طريق مواجهة الهرم الاجتماعي غير العادل الموجود حاليًا. ومن أجل ذلك استخدم أوسيفيسان العديد من تقنيات ما وراء المسرح مثل توجيه الحديث للجمهور وإشارة المسرحية لنفسها كمسرحية ولعب الأدوار المختلفة والمسرحية داخل المسرحية والموسيقى والأغاني... إلخ. وقد نجح في خلق مسافة بين الجمهور والحالة المسرحية عن طريق استخدامه لهذه التقنيات؛ مما يتيح لهم أن يتدبروا أمورهم الحياتية التي عليهم لعب دور بارز في تغييرها.

## الكلمات الدالة:

ماوراء المسرح - فيمي أوسيفيسان - الدراما النيجيرية - المسرحية بداخل المسرحية - تعدد الأدوار - خرافة موريمي - الاستعارات المسرحية.

## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine Femi Osofisan's play, *Morountodun* (1983) in terms of metatheatricality. It also aims at showing how far Osofisan uses metatheatrical devices in the aim of achieving his goals, which are raising the awareness of the audience and effecting social change. It is true that the play, *Morountodun* was the object of study of some researchers such as Adeighon Uwadinma-Idemudia and Samuel Chukwu-Okoronkwo; however, these studies focus either on the political elements of the play or the representation of the female figure, or on myth. There is no study that focuses entirely on the metatheatricality of the play, which is the focus of this paper.

The term "metatheatre" was first coined by Lionel Abel in 1963. He first used it in his book *Metatheatre: A New view of Dramatic Form* to refer to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and other plays such as those of Beckett and Brecht. For Abel, metaplays are truthful as "they show the reality of the dramatic

imagination instanced by the playwright's and also by that of his characters" (59). The characters for Abel "are aware of their own theatricality" (60). Abel's work is extremely important for it raises the readers' awareness of the fictional nature of drama and how drama can reflect on itself. Since then, the term "metatheatre" has been used to refer to a play as a fictional performance; that is, it refers to its illusory nature. It is "the capacity of stage text and performance to refer to and comment on its own nature as an artistic medium... (Crow 132). It breaks the illusion that a play presents a slice of life. As confirmed by Bhargav Rani, metatheatre is a theatrical device that presents "theatre as the subterfuge it is, with all its insincerities, pretensions and intrinsic 'theatricality.' It disrupts any illusion of reality that the dramatic action on stage might perpetrate and reinforces the artifice and fiction of the play" (496). In brief, "theatre attempts to become more pretentious by hosting its own critique" (Okoye 119). That is to say, in metatheatre, the dramatic performance examines the nature of drama.

Another aim of metatheatre is to create enough distance between the actors and the audience / readers and the text so as to allow them to reconsider matters, think deeply, and reach conclusions. It can even incite them to take action or effect some change, whether that change is social, economic, political, or cultural. As revealed by Manoranjan Behura, a metatheatrical play "may present actions that are alien, stylized or absurd to distance audience from the theatrical illusion on the stage" (229). Brecht too states, "if the actor presents social issues rather than psychological concerns in a stylized and distant fashion then the viewer will be able to think through the issues, see the injustices, and be provoked toward action in the world" (86).

Although metatheatre started in the West, it reached the Nigerian stage in the 1970s, and it became a theatrical technique widely used by playwrights. It is even maintained that remnants of that technique are found in early Nigerian drama. Although the Nigerian plays use some of Brecht's

distancing devices, yet they are distinguished by other devices such as storytelling and folktales that arose due to the difference in culture, religion, social norms and historical background. In fact, one of the main features of African drama is “the persistence with which its writers foreground the act of performance itself and seem concerned to investigate its status” (Crow 133). When the Africans first made use of their metatheatricality, it was not just to reflect on the nature of drama as drama, but also as a tool of changing their society and preserving their identity.

One of the most famous Nigerian dramatists who is known for his use of metatheatre as a dramatic or theatrical technique is Femi Osofisan. Femi Osofisan, originally called Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan, is a renowned Nigerian poet, dramatist, novelist and university professor. He was born in a small village in Western Nigeria in 1946. In fact, Osofisan is classified as a second generation writer, a generation widely known for its radical and revolutionary stance, unlike the first generation writers who believed in subservience and accepting the present as unchangeable. Whereas many people were concerned with the negative effect of colonization on Africa, Osofisan was mainly concerned with what he considers a more serious threat, the threat of alienation; that is, the Africans were starting to follow the American model as a way of life, neglecting by that their African roots and identity. They started to be submissive and passive with no will to improve themselves or their societies. Osofisan voices his fears of this threat in: “no nation can grow, after all, which abandons its roots. Thus the threat of alienation is obviously an important issue to be confronted and resolved like others” (“Theater and the Rites of ‘Post-Negritude’” 4). He adds that the identity issue has two factors, “first the dilemma of creating a national identity out of our disparate ethnic communities; and secondly, that of creating committed, responsible, patriotic, and compassionate individuals out of our civil population” (“Theater and the Rites of ‘Post-Negritude’” 6). The second factor is the main objective of most of Osofisan’s plays.

Thus, despite his being influenced by Marxist and Brechtian ideologies, Osofisan is able to distinguish himself from them through using his dramaturgy as a means of social reform. As declared by E.F.Taiwo, Osofisan's works "have also betrayed sympathy for an advocacy of social change. The fabric of his plays and other writings is usually critical of the disequilibrium in the social structure..." (149). Therefore, Osofisan uses metatheatrical devices in his plays to criticize the ways people live, to criticize the economic system and the existing social norms in the aim of dispersing harmony among people.

### **Metatheatricality in *Morountodun***

*Morountodun* (1983), one of the most famous plays by Osofisan, is a clear manifestation of his use of metatheatrical devices in the aim of changing the society. Osofisan asserts that it "demonstrates a process of class suicide, in which a member of the middle class is mobilized into an alliance with the peasantry, in order to perform the catalytic role necessary, in our undeveloped economies, for the drama of social transformation" ("Theater and the Rights" 10). The events of the play take place in 1969 during the civil war in Nigeria. It deals with the farmers' revolt known as the Agbekoya Uprising. During that revolt, the Nigerians in the West challenged the government that supported the rich at the expense of the poor. Therefore, in this play, Osofisan tries to persuade the poor citizens "to rise up en masse and fight against mass poverty, against exploitation of the impoverished, and against all forces of reaction aimed at perpetuating the sterile status quo" (Iji 399). One of the tools used by Osofisan to do this is metatheatricality.

One of the metatheatrical devices used by Osofisan in *Morountodun* is removing the barrier between the actors and the audience. As Anwar asserts, "metatheatrical moments arise as soon as the wall between the stage and audience is dissolved and the latter can see through the fallacy of theatrical constructs" (45). The play starts in a dressing area where the audience can

see the actors while dressing and making up. They are even seen rehearsing parts of the play as revealed in the stage directions; there is “a flurry of activity: actors making up, trying costumes, reading script, rehearsing gestures ...” (129). Thus, from the very beginning of the play, the audience is alarmed that what they see is part of a fictional world not a real one. Later on, the Director is seen giving instructions to the actors to “put on your costumes and make-up. Disguise yourselves well” (139) and, at the end of the play, the actors begin to reemerge to change their costumes. We are back in the changing room” (192). Not only does the audience see the actors’ dressing room, but they also see the sets on the stage while being arranged. In episode ten, “the actors rearrange the set” (171). By removing the wall between the audience and the actors, Osofisan successfully breaks the illusion of reality.

For the same target of detaching the audience, Osofisan uses the metatheatrical technique of the exposure of the lighting system, a technique that was previously used by Bertolt Brecht. Osofisan makes use of this technique, like other metatheatrical techniques, “to distance his audience from identification, inviting them rather to think, evaluate the characters and the events in terms of their relevance and bearing on their own lives and choices” (Hutchison 42). In act three, lights highlight a scene opposite Titubi’s prison (139). In act four, “light changes occur, slowly, dimming gradually on the cell and brightening simultaneously on a small market square” (151). In act five, “the light grows into the brilliance of sunlight” (151). In act eight, “the director appears in a spot light and speaks above the song” (159). The exposure of light and reference to how it sometimes spots light on certain characters or things, almost takes place in every act of the play. Thus, the audience gets to realize the artificiality of light. It creates a dream-like effect, thus hypnotising the audience and making them go beyond what they see. That is to say, the unrealness of light underscores the artificiality of the play that is performed, an act that allows the audience to

think and re-think on the events that occur on stage.

Another metatheatrical technique used by Osofisan in *Morountodun* is addressing the audience, whether in a prologue, an epilogue, or throughout the action of the play. In the prologue, the Director addresses the audience saying, “good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We will soon be starting. But while the actors prepare, I’ll try and give you a summary of our play tonight” (130). He gives the audience all the necessary background information and even mentions the aim of the play: “we decided to go and rouse people up by doing a play on the subject” (p. 130). As revealed by Hutchison, Osofisan does that to incite “the audience to choose positions for themselves personally, and potentially for the nation too” (41). In many other instances, the Director and other characters as well, are seen addressing the audience. Titubi addresses the audience to defend her people saying, “look at me. Go on, feast your eyes. Am I not good to look at? Ehn? So what is wrong with being rich?” (131). The Director also refers to the audience as witnesses that he is the one who sent for the police: “Ask them! They’ll tell you” (134).

Furthermore, the Director addresses the audience in the epilogue:

But still, you must not imagine that what we presented here tonight was the truth. This is a theatre, don't forget, a house of dream and phantom struggles. The real struggle, the real truth, is out there, among you, on the street, in your homes; in your daily living and dying .... (192)

The Director here refers to the artificiality of the play and advises the audience to be more realistic, take action, and change the ills of the society. Hence, the performed play is just a way to shed light on the real challenge the audience has to face, which is their resisting stance against the socio-economic injustice. In brief, by addressing the audience, Osofisan aims at removing the wall between the action of the play and the audience. It is a means to both detach them from the illusion of reality and, at the same time,

get them involved, with their minds, in that illusion so as to become aware and rebel to change their reality and their nation for the better.

Another means of distancing the audience and creating a metatheatrical situation in *Morountodun* is the use of an episodic structure instead of a linear one. That is, the play does not have one main line of action that develops until the end is reached. It comprises a number of episodes that take us from the past to the present and vice versa, or from one scene to a totally different one. For example, act three takes place in the market place where the Marshal is seen talking to Bogunde about his plan to attack a prison while act four reveals another scene in which Titubi reveals to her mother, Alhaja, a plan she is going to take part in to arrest the leader of the rebels. As for act five, it takes the audience back to the past where they see Moremi, the legendary figure, and they are acquainted with her story. Thus, the play is “continuously juxtaposing scenes from myth and history; from the present and the past; and from the play’s present, and the real present...” (Osofisan, “Theater and the Rites of ‘Post-Negritude’” 9) to blur the line between illusion and reality. These episodes, as declared by Awodiya, are intended “to engage the interest and belief of the audience and then to break the spell on them by urging them to evaluate the meaning and implications of what they see in the episodes” (qtd.in Anwar 165). That is to say, by having multiple episodes in the play, the audience is not allowed to follow the action of the main play as if it is real. They fail to be taken by the reality of the situation, and they get to know that what they see is just an illusion. This technique enables the audience to use their minds, instead of getting emotionally involved, and to reflect on what they see. They detach themselves from the action of the play, and thus, they gain insight into matters.

Related to the episodic structure is the use of songs and music as metatheatrical tools. These tools are used by Nigerian playwrights to “break and fluctuate reception levels of dramatic illusion of their audiences”



(Anwar 24). First of all, the songs, as used by Osofisan in *Morountodun*, do not aim at effecting an emotional response from the audience. They are used more to detach the audience through creating a dream-like world. Music too is intended by Nigerian playwrights “both to create and break an illusion” (Anwar 77). Thus, Osofisan uses both music and songs, whether individual songs or by a chorus, to take the audience far away from the real world into the world of fantasy, to make them realize that what they are watching is a world of make-believe, an illusory fictional world. At the same time, and ironically, songs and music “break an illusion” through arousing the audience’s awareness to the fact that they themselves are living in the real world and that they must be active participants in it.

Through examining Osofisan’s *Morountodun*, it is obvious that most of the episodes end in a song. Act one ends with the song of the prisoners as clear in: “They salute the officer with the mock song of prisoners and go out” (138). Act three ends with the Marshal singing with the traders. At the end of act nine, the ladies “sing the song ‘Iyawo nfo’ so.” (181). Those end-of-episode songs aim at distracting the audience from the events that take place in the episode, the world of illusion, and making them reflect on what they watch. Other songs in the play are significant too such as the song that the intruders, who break up into the stage, sing in act one. They sing as a chorus:

Stand! Stand!  
Fight to be rich  
for happiness.  
Oh fight for your right  
to rise in life! (131)

This song is sung by the rich people, and by breaking through the stage, they break the illusion of reality from the very start of the play. Furthermore, at the end of act four, a link between Titubi, the main character

of the play, and Moremi, the mythical figure, is drawn through a song: “The Moremi praise-song wells up and then sinks into a faint background. Titubi, still in her reverie, joins in the singing” (151). Later on, in act eight, the Moremi praise-chant is sung:

Hail Moremi!  
The huge sacrifice that  
wards off death  
The big offering that  
prevents diseases  
like the Ikoyi, you fearlessly  
faced battle. (159)

This song is intended to make the audience find similarities between Titubi and Moremi. Abubakar asserts, “the song demands of the audience to link the legendary story of Moremi to the current struggle by the peasants against oppression” (183). Hence, the audience might be instigated to act, fight back, or rebel against the social injustices like Titubi and Moremi do.

Moreover, the repetition of a refrain of a song is also a metatheatrical device. Molade, one of the Agbekoy women, sings, “be always like this day / beside me. Wear hope like a jewel: It never fades” (186). This refrain is repeated once more at the end of the play in the aim of persuading the citizens that there is still hope to change their current conditions to the better if only they have a strong will. They need to be brave enough as to voice their complaints about the current social and economic hierarchies. Moreover, repetition underscores the artificial nature of the play, as it is not normal, in real life, to have things repeated.

Self-reference or the reference of the play to itself as a play is another metatheatrical device used by Osofisan in *Morountodun*. As Anwar declares, “in the context of theatre, self-consciousness implies those

dislocating moments whereby audiences are made to comprehend the artifice of theatrical reality created on the stage” (37). That is to say, the audience get to know that the actors that are on stage are not flesh and blood; they are just actors playing roles that can change within the performance of a play or in different performances of the same play. This is so obvious in *Morountodun* as the characters carry the names of Director, An Actor, Another Actor... etc. Naming the actors according to their roles in the play is a way of emphasizing the artificiality of the dramatic situation. Thus, the audience find it difficult to identify with the actors and do not act emotionally.

Moreover, Osofisan uses theatrical metaphors when referring to the play. The Director, in act one, tells the actors: “Hurry up. Hurry up. Play opens in five minutes” (129). When Titubi breaks into the stage, she insists, “I am stopping this play tonight” (131). The Superintendent begs Titubi, “I think this is enough. Madam, I appeal to you, please leave the stage now” (135). Bogunde too asks the Director to get into the stage: “May we come in now? It’s our cue” (139). Hence, these references to the play as a play distance the audience emotionally but also trigger their minds to think about and reflect upon the action that takes place on stage. Thus, this fictitious action acts as a catalyst for real actions that should be taken by the audience. Thus, by using self-reference, Osofisan intends to manipulate his audience. This aim is clear in the Superintendent’s words to Titubi: “This mere wooden platform is your battlefield ... go on. Titu-Titu, the magnificent Moremi of the sixties! Make your show, let them clap for you! Destroy the theatre! Burn it down” (137). Hence, the world for Osofisan is like a stage but more real. If Moremi acts her role on stage successfully, she will achieve her aim. Similarly, if the audience reflect on what they see on stage and respond with taking action in reality, they will change the world they live in to the better. As affirmed by Quayson, the theatre represents “an intermediary space by which audiences are drawn into an active process of meaning-making” (43).

Verbal gaming, riddles and ceremonies are also metatheatrical tools used by Osofisan in *Morountodun*. In act one, Titubi and the Superintendent exchange verbal riddles:

Superintendent: I congratulate you. Gestures are large, when  
the wind alone is the obstacle

Titubi: Don't think you're clever. Every cobra is poisonous,  
whatever it's gloss

Superintendent: The hunter brings home a grass-cutter and  
beats his chest. What will happen to the elephant-killer

Titubi: The shoulder is not smaller is it, simply because it has  
chosen to wear a low-

necked blouse? (136)

Indeed, this verbal gaming shows the defiance on the part of each of the characters who tries to show that he is more powerful than the other. However, on a deeper level, this verbal gaming distracts the audience from the main action of the play. Moreover, in act thirteen, the Agbekoy ladies use riddles to reveal to Titubi the Marshal's love to her. Mosun says,

Oruku bi gba omo!

A thousand kernels

Nestle in a thousand nuts

We await your riddle – O!

Mama Kayode replies,

Oruku tindi tindi

I launch a riddle – O! (182)

Again such riddles break the theatrical illusion and distance the audience.

Furthermore, in act fifteen, the ladies are seen celebrating both the harvest as well as the union between the Marshal and Titubi. By celebrating the harvest, Osofisan gives hope to his audience that the future can be better

only through their work. Indeed, they will reap what they sow. In this celebration, the Agbekoy ladies form a circle around Titubi and dance and sing. The whole scene is described in detail in the stage directions:

Ovation! the women begin to sing the praise-song: “Morountodun eja oson!” They beat

out the rhythm on their hands and feet. Marshal drinks from the gourd and hands it to

Titubi who also drinks. She rises and embraces him. Kokondi sings a love song. The

dance and merriment are at a peak when Baba enters (189).

Therefore, it is clear that Osofisan uses ceremonies and riddles to achieve his target, which is “to awaken the audience to the truth about theatre’s imaginary world and to prompt the audience into cultivating the right attitude to it” (Abubakar 181). That is to say, by using riddles, Osofisan both breaks the illusion of reality and, at the same time, entices the audience to use their minds. Moreover, by using ceremonies, the audience becomes aware that despite the unrealness of what they see, they are invited to think of other means to bring joy and happiness to their lives. They are encouraged to act to change whatever they dislike in the society.

Role-playing within a role is another metatheatrical device used by Osofisan in *Morountodun*. As Anwar declares, “the identity of the actors and characters in Osofisan’s plays has been manipulated and challenged by making them reverse, transform, assume and abandon different roles” (197). For example, the Director of the play is both a director and an actor. He plays a role in the action of the play, yet he confirms twice, “I am the director of this play” (132). Even the actors assume different roles as maintained by the Director in: “In the scene, remember, you’ll be playing, not you are real roles ...” (139). Titubi too assures her mother, Alhaja, “after that night in the theatre, I agreed to it. I stay here. I pretend to be a prisoner”

(141). She refers here to her role in the plan to arrest the leader of the peasants' revolt. Even one of the Agbekoy women, namely Mama Kayode, is seen mimicking the governor who came to listen to their demands: "Ladies and gentlemen, I know you have some grievances. But I have come to speak to you as the father of all the people" (180). Through her mimicking, she shows how dishonest and pretentious the governor is. By making the characters play various roles, Osofisan emphasizes the artificiality of the dramatic / theatrical situation. The characters / actors have no fixed identities. They are just part of a make-believe world. By emphasizing that, the audience do not get emotionally involved. They tend to use their minds to reflect on what the actors do. However, the audience is supposed to realize that since identities are not constant; thus, they can form new social or political identities for themselves. They have the opportunity to change themselves and be what they want to be, not only for their sake but also for the sake of their nation.

Furthermore, framing through the use of the play-within-the play technique is one of the most important metatheatrical techniques. *Morountodun*, Osofisan's play, is replete with plays-within-the play. By making use of these plays, Osofisan aims at both distancing the audience and also allowing them to reflect on the main plot. As confirmed by Rani, the play-within-the play "buttresses the notion of spectatorship to a fictive event by emphasizing the fabricated and illusory nature of theatre. The characters on stage, through their rehearsed and enacted responses to the play-within-the play attempt to serve as models that the audience is expected to emulate" (499). One of these plays-within-the play is when the Superintendent and Titubi rehearse for the scene in which the rebels will find Titubi in prison.

Superintendent: We'll go through that interrogation scene we've rehearsed again. Then

maybe I'll know. Get before me. I am the peasants' leader, you have

been brought before me. Are we set? Here we go” (148)

In that scene, Titubi compares herself to Medea, a classical Greek figure:

Superintendent: Did you kill someone?

Titubi: yes

Superintendent: Who?

Titubi: I killed my own children (149)

Medea killed her children to avenge herself on her husband. This allegorical reference, which is another metatheatrical technique, relates Titubi to Medea in terms of courage. Although Titubi kills no one, she acts bravely as Medea. This allusion is intended to encourage and incite Titubi to go on with her mission to put an end to the Agbekoy revolt.

Other plays-within-the play take place when Titubi remembers the events that occurred when she was with the peasants using the flashback technique. This technique, also a metatheatrical device, creates a dream-like world that underscores the illusory nature of the play. It also strengthens Titubi’s resolution to go on with her mission, at that time, defending the rights of the poor peasants. A good example of the play-within-the play within the flashback frame is the umbrella episode that is acted by Mama Kayode and Molade. According to the stage directions, “She [Mama Kayode] turns to Molade and they begin to play act” (177). In that episode, the umbrella of the poor lady is confiscated by the governor as a public property, and the owner of the umbrella spends two weeks in prison. This act shows the atrocities of those in charge when treating the poor. As confirmed by Mosun, “all our properties were public property...” (179). Thus, although the function of this play-within-the play is to detach the audience from the action of the main plot, it also sheds light on it. The audience is supposed to relate between the suffering of the poor in this make-believe plot and the social injustices they face in real life, and hence, take action or revolt.

Another play-within-the play is when the Agbekoy women are seen

expressing their hope for a better future:

Wura: Water fertilizers the earth, blood the spirit of the race.

Molade: We're older than pain and betrayal.

Wura: Older than your politicians and your rulers

Mama Kayode: We own the earth; we are the earth itself (182)

On the superficial level, this play-within-the play aims at encouraging Titubi to go on with her new mission of defending the right of the poor peasants. However, these words also reflect Osofisan's message that there is still hope for the people, through abandoning their subservient nature to reform their society. As Iji maintains, Osofisan's intent is "to establish a convincing class-conscious base for indigenous mass revolution against our multifaceted socio-political injustices" (407).

Another play-within-the play, as well as an intertextual allusion to an allegorical figure, is the Moremi plot. The Moremi myth is about a woman who undergoes a battle in defence of her rich class. By contrast, in *Morountodun*, Osofisan subverts this myth through the portrayal of the character of Titubi as a lady who defends the rights of the poor farmers and who aims at bringing about social justice. In fact, Osofisan, as belonging to the revolutionary generation, believes that history and myth do not have fixed meanings; they are to be interpreted and re-interpreted according to their use for the people in different ages. For him, the playwright's role is "dismantling, rearranging, and reconstructing them to propel society to new horizons" (Onwueme 59). Onwueme adds that Osofisan believes "that history can be interpreted, reinterpreted, altered, and manipulated to accommodate a new social organization" (61). In *Morountodun*, Titubi is seen wearing the Moremi necklace at the very beginning of the play, which makes the audience relate Titubi to Moremi. Even the Superintendent refers to Titubi as "the magnificent Moremi of the sixties" (137). At first, Titubi shows her desire to become a Moremi in her words to her mum:



You taught me her story, mama. When I was still too young to understand. But I've never forgotten: Moremi, the brave woman of Ile-Ife, who saved the race. Now, when

I wear this necklace, I feel a passion deeper than any passing vogue. It is as if I have become history itself (142)

Later, in Titubi's speech with the Superintendent, Titubi voices Osofisan's intention behind including the Moremi myth:

Superintendent: A myth. We're dealing with reality here. And reality is a far more cruel thing.

Titubi: Yet it is the same reality that softens with time, isn't it, that turns into myth?(147)

Osofisan believes that myth is not something that is past and fictional. It is rather part of reality, and it can be rejuvenated or reinterpreted for certain purposes. Its meaning varies according to the context in which it is found. That is why, in *Morountodun*, Osofisan uses the Moremi myth but subverts it. Whereas Titubi wanted to become a Moremi and defend the rich class to which she belongs at first, she totally changes at the end when she realizes the suffering of the poor peasants. She changes sides as clear in:

And that was it. I knew at last that I had won. I knew I had to kill the ghost of Moremi

in my belly. I am not Moremi! Moremi served the state, *was* the state, was the spirit of

the ruling class. But it is not true that the state is always right .... (185)

Thus, the play-within-the play of Moremi has more than one function. First, it detaches the audience from the events of the main plot, so that they are incited to evaluate their real situation. Moreover, it is also an invitation to the audience to be like Titubi and rebel against the current social norms and values, to be active individuals in their society for their sake as well as for the sake of their nation.

The stage directions are also used by Osofisan as an embedded

metatheatrical technique so as to blur the line between illusion and reality. They reveal the theatrical situation in a way that underscores its artificiality. In fact, they show characters such as the Director and Titubi addressing the audience. The Director “watches them for a while, then ‘steps out’ of place and approaches the audience” (129-30), and Titubi is seen “addressing the audience” (131). Stage directions also expose the changes of light on stage as in episode one: “full lights return, flooding the entire theatre” (131), and in episode three: “He [Marshal] sings. Lights fade on hands reaching out toward his bundle ...” (141). Moreover, they highlight the role-playing within-a role as the Superintendent “takes a different voice” (148) when assuming the role of the peasants’ leader. Not only that, but they also show both the onstage and the off-stage worlds as clear: “A sudden upwelling of noise, offstage. Onstage, the men and women go into swift movements of self-defense ...” (165). By pinpointing such metatheatrical elements through the stage directions, Osofisan aims at raising the audience’s awareness as to the illusory nature of the performed play. He also detaches them so as to motivate them to use their minds all the way through.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, Femi Osofisan employs numerous metatheatrical devices in his play *Morountodun* such as role-playing-within-a role, the play-within-the play and self-reference. Through these metatheatrical devices, he successfully breaks the illusion of reality. That is, the audience realizes the artificiality of the dramatic / theatrical situation, which prevents them from getting emotionally involved in the action of the play. They realize that the characters are not flesh and blood; they just assume certain roles for a certain purpose. Moreover, the world as presented on stage is not a real one; it is just make-believe. By doing that, Osofisan detaches the audience and creates a distance between them and the action of the play, a distance long enough to allow them to get mentally, not emotionally, involved in what they see. They are invited by Osofisan, through using these metatheatrical

techniques, to reflect on the real world and to become active participants in their society. As Osofisan believes, it is not God who will improve their living conditions; the citizens are the ones who are supposed to do that. Thus, Osofisan successfully uses metatheatrical tools to serve his purpose of instigating the citizens to take action and effect socio-economic change. In brief, as Osofisan declares, “the dialectic between the real and imaginary, between the forces of tradition and the modernist consciousness, is the contribution that the theatre can make to the process of social transformation” (“Ritual and Revolutionary Ethos” 78).

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