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## REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN'S WAR EXPERIENCES IN FEMI OSOFISAN'S *MOROUNTODUN AND WOMEN OF OWU*

### Abstract

The history of wars in Yoruba nationalities reveals different experiences and challenges faced by women in times of war. In some social, historical, and literary texts, women have been presented as the primary cause of some of these wars. Yet, in a few of these texts, women have also been presented as the harbingers and brokers of peace during catastrophic Yoruba wars, or as their victims and heroines. This paper analyses the fate and status of women in Yoruba historical wars in Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* (1999) and *Women of Owu* (2011). It argues that the two plays present the collective and individual experiences of women, respectively. On the one hand, the characterisation of Titubi and Moremi in *Morountodun* valorises the heroic deeds of women during various wars and these heroic women's efforts to restore peace and order in their respective communities. On the other hand, in *Women of Owu*, women are presented as the vulnerable group in fratricidal and catastrophic wars caused by male egotism. Osofisan's plays, therefore, encompass a

range of diverse, oftentimes contradictory, positions, experiences, and roles embraced by women in war situations.

**Keywords:** Yoruba Civil War, Historical dramaturgy, Femi Osofisan, *Morountodun*, *Women of Owu*, Yoruba mythico-historical plays, Owu War

## Introduction

This paper discusses the post-war era in African countries, using Nigeria as a case study, with a specific reference to the eighteenth and nineteenth-century wars in the Yoruba nation. Most of these wars have been documented and chronicled in historical texts, such as Samuel Johnson's *The History of Yoruba*, Ajayi and Smith's *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*, and Justin Labinjoh's *Modernity and Tradition in the Politics of Ibadan: 1900-1975*. Even with the bitter lessons of these historical wars, the Yoruba nationality has not enjoyed unity and cooperation in the contemporary time, particularly on the political and ideological fronts. This paper, therefore, has specific interest in how Nigerian playwrights have interpreted/re-interrogated some of these wars with the combination of historical facts and literary imagination in order to raise historical consciousness and create appreciation for a sustainable humane society. In particular, it focuses on the roles and fates of women in some of these wars as interpreted in the dramatic texts of *Morountodun* (1999) and *Women of Owu* (2011).

Femi Osofisan is one of the Nigerian playwrights who have shown serious concern in the re-interrogation of some of the Yoruba eighteenth- and nineteenth-century wars. Even though other playwrights, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wale Ogunyemi, and Ahmed Yerima, have significantly contributed to the historical dramaturgy of these wars, this analysis focuses on Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* and *Women of Owu* because the two plays revolve around two historical and mythical experiences that have shaped the sociology and politics of the Yoruba nationality. In addition, these two plays reveal the roles and fates of women in war situations. The mythico-historical play, *Morountodun*, reveals the role and fate of the female-figure, Moremi of Ile-Ife, before, during, and after her stay in Igbo land in an attempt to save the Ife People. The play also presents a fictional

character, Titubi, who plays a significant role in bringing the Agbekoya uprising to an end. *Women of Owu* reveals the fate of Owu women during and after the war between Owu and the allied forces of Ife, Ijebu, and Oyo.

## 1. Nigerian Dramatic Literature and the Gender Question

In order to examine how male and female characters from Osofisan's plays respond to their biological sex and gender roles, one must first discuss the role of men and women as both creators and subjects of discourse in dramatic texts. Since the inauguration of the feminist movement in the nineteenth century, literary and social discourses in Africa and the world at large have increasingly engaged in gender issues, raising awareness of male hegemony and the tie between patriarchal ideology and women's subordination. In addition, women have started to value and exert their potential and personhood beyond the anatomical sex of femaleness.

The incidental or intentional treatment of women and feminine issues in the andro-dramatic texts<sup>1</sup> has prompted, promoted, and sustained the polemics of gender in the Nigerian dramatic texts in particular and the global dramatic discourses in general. The criticism of African drama and Nigerian drama in particular cannot overlook the gender prejudices that are overtly or covertly presented in these texts. Characterisation and the topicality of the sociological and socio-political experiences underscore the overt and/or covert gender dialogic in a dramatic text.

In the 1980s, there began the emergence of female voices in the genre of (Nigerian) drama, some of the most prominent ones being Tess Onwueme and Stella Oyedepo, whose literary virtuosity must be acknowledged. Among these female playwrights, Tess Onwueme has attracted much critical attention because of her radical resistance to female confinement in the patriarchal space.

Considering the tempo and temper of women playwrights in Nigerian literary and theatrical scenes, three thematic paradigms can be identified –

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<sup>1</sup> a term that will be used in this paper to refer to dramatic texts written by male playwrights

sympathetic, apologetic, and radical.<sup>2</sup> With sympathetic themes, women playwrights reveal the inequity and injustice against women in a patriarchal society without any suggestion for a way out. The sympathetic theme presents female characters in plays as individuals who have resigned to fate. Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the gods* (1972) is one of the plays that present the sympathetic theme in the catalogue of plays by female writers. On the other hand, the apologetic theme presents women who manifest relative courage by seeking their space in a patriarchal setting. These women, in thoughts and actions, surreptitiously plead for a chance and identity on the recognition that the gender stereotype of their sex cannot be altered in a patriarchal society. The apologists, in the thematic construction of their plays, subtly accept the dominant status of men in the socio-cultural setting and thereby appeal for a space of identity and operation. Tess Onwueme's and Stella Oyedepo's plays, such as *Go Tell it to Women* (1997) and *Our Wife is not a Woman* (2005), respectively, fall within the apologetic classificatory paradigm. These plays reveal the earlier ideologies of the playwrights and their understanding of gender relations in a patriarchal society. The plays with apologetic thematic preoccupation emphasize the themes of motherhood, wifehood, sisterhood, and womanhood. In contrast, plays such as Stella Oyedepo's and Tess Onwueme's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy Chested* (2002) and *The Reign of Wazobia* (1993) represent the radical thematic paradigm, which reveals the contemporary situation of confrontation, as against negotiation, between male and female members in a society. In other words, this radical thematic paradigm suggests that women are no longer comfortable with the oppression and marginalisation they suffer in a patriarchal society.

However, despite the prolificacy of the female playwrights, only a few of their texts have focused on the roles and conditions of women in war situations. On the contrary, male playwrights have written plays that re-enact a series of pre-colonial and post-colonial wars in Nigeria. Most Nigerian male playwrights, such as Wale Ogunyemi, Ola Rotimi, Femi

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<sup>2</sup> I propose this thematic taxonomy, which is applicable to plays written by Nigerian female playwrights from the first generation to the present generation. The themes of these plays fall under any of the above identified paradigms.

Osofisan, Toyin Abiodun, Akinwumi Isola, and Ahmed Yerima, have tackled women's issues in their respective plays, particularly the ones that focus on Yoruba historical wars or political conflicts. These plays, in their respective capacities, present women as either victims or heroines (see Akoh 155).

In the recent time, female playwrights, such as Irene Isoken Salami-Agunloye, have attempted the writing of historical war plays which involve women as heroines. Salami-Agunloye's play, *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin* (2008), is representative of the plays in this category. This recent development might be prompted by the need of female playwrights to re-write their own stories for posterity. Emphasizing the literary and social significance of these female playwrights, Ewrierhoma has noted:

The focus on the female body affords the female writer an opportunity to analyze the great parts women have had in the production and reproduction of meaning as they tend to relate to her sex. This impact could be directly and indirectly immense, hence when seen from the dramatic angle, female playwrights radically write to justify the view by Koenig (1987) that "true art is genderless, true art transforms gender. . . ." (22)

## 2. Women as Heroines and Anti-Heroines in *Morountodun*

Considering the plot and subject matter, Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* is a mythico-historical play. The play is based on the heroism of the mythical character, Moremi, who is a wife of Oranmiyan, and the fictional character, Titubi, within the historical context of the Agbekoya uprising of the 1970s. It focuses on the heroic role played by Titubi, the daughter of Alhaja Kabirat, who infiltrates the camp of an Agbekoya militant group with the intention of bringing the burning militancy to an end. The play also revolves around the mythical heroism of Moremi of Ile-Ife, who attempts to put a stop to an incessant attack on the Ife kingdom by marauding Igbo people. At the end of the play, Titubi is able to hand over the leaders of Agbekoya to the government, which brings the conflict in the play to an end.

Through the characterisation of Moremi and Tutubi, *Morountodun* stresses the fact that women have the potential for heroism in the time of war. Such a characterisation is consistent with Oscar G. Brockett's character typology, which offers four yardsticks for the traits of a heroic character in a play: the physical trait, the social trait, the psychological trait, and the moral trait (39). Both Titubi and the mythical heroine of the play and the Queen of Ile-Ife, Moremi, demonstrate all these traits. When all hopes are lost and when the Ife people have resigned to fate, Moremi attempts the unexpected by volunteering to infiltrate the Igbo camp to learn the secret of Igbo power. She is morally, psychologically, socially, and physically qualified to liberate her people from the bondage of fear of the marauding Igbo people. Furthermore, she challenges her people not to resign to fate and expect miracles from the gods, as can be seen in the following dialogue between Moremi and Niniola:

NINIOLA: The gods are with us –

MOREMI: With their backs turned to us –

NINIOLA: The gods will never turn their back! May the afternoon never suddenly take on the shroud of night in our life!

MOREMI: Futile prayers! How many times already we've watched our festivals change into periods of mourning when the Igbos set on us. Yet we have made sacrifices upon sacrifices till the earth is glutted with blood. Our priests have scraped their throats hoarse on incantations, and their latest ploy is to try and make us accept defeat as fate. Tell me, my friend, what more shall we do to learn that the gods will not help us? I have decided. Moremi shall be the clay which the race requires to remould itself.

NINIOLA: You frighten me, Moremi. You repudiate the gods. . . .

MOREMI: (*Amused*) Come, Nini. Embrace me. I am glad you came and talked to me. . . . Your doubt and your fear have strengthened me. I shall go, and I shall return. . . .

(*Morountodun* 33–34)

Moremi is not discouraged by the sympathetic reactions of her friend, Niniola. She is resolute to liberate her race from the external attack of the Igbo people. Therefore, she dares to tread the path on which all the menfolk in Ile-Ife, including Oranmiyan, the king, have failed to walk on. In the mythical story of Moremi of Ile-Ife, Moremi pledged her only son, Ela, also known as Oluorogbo, for Esinimirin River as a surety for her safe return from Igbo land. She eventually returned from her sojourn, with all the secrets of the power of the Igbos, and subsequently surrendered her only son. In this mythical story and its re-interpretation in the play, Moremi makes herself a scapegoat for the liberation of her people. This heroic deed of Moremi has been celebrated annually in Ile-Ife till today.

In the play, Titubi avers that she gets her inspiration of heroism from the lessons learnt from the heroic deed of Moremi. When her mother, Alhaja Kabirat, tries to dissuade her from embarking on her mission, Titubi resolutely replies:

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. (*Morountodun* 20)

Titubi's resolution and her courage resonates Acholonu's description of women's heroism in the pre-historic era:

We are told in the prehistoric times, women Amazons ruled the world and that the Golden Ages of the past were characterized by the reign of matriarchs, mother goddesses and Queen Mothers, whose empire led to the study of the beehive as an Ideal Republic. (29)

The history of warfare in prehistoric Africa reveals the outstanding bravery of Dahomean women in their fight for territorial protection, retention, and expansion. Apart from the collective heroism of Dahomean women, there are also accounts of individual heroism of women, such as Madam Tinubu, Queen Amina, Efunsetan Amiwura, and Moremi. With their actions and activities, these women, at different historical epochs, have brought to an end the era of terror, injustice, brutality, and gross violation of human dignity. Moreover, Titubi's action is just like fighting a real war because in order to restore peace in her community, she commits a class suicide. According to Awodiya,

Unlike other revolutionary women who belong to the lower classes and the struggling for improved social, economic and political conditions, Titubi already belongs to the rich, privileged class. She is bold, courageous and undaunted. In fact, she is the most daring and forceful of all the heroines in Osofisan's plays. This heroine of extraordinary qualities abandons her riches and opulent lifestyle to infiltrate the peasants' ranks as a spy in *Morountodun*. But at the peasants' camp, Titubi becomes re-educated and ideologically converted to the farmers' cause. In a revolutionary act, she commits class suicide by joining forces with the downtrodden to fight her rich class. (109–10)

Class suicide, which is difficult to undertake even in the contemporary time, is a courageous action taken by Titubi. She is aware of the possible consequences of her actions; yet, she embarks on her own capture by the peasants. It is at the camp of the peasants that she realises the pathetic situations and enduring penury which peasants pass through.

Titubi's heroism constitutes the main plot of the play, whereas Moremi's action and heroism is only a sub-plot on which the whole plot of Titubi's action anchors. Moreover, Titubi's heroism could also be seen as a sort of Bildungsroman as she passes through different developmental stages of heroism, ranging from negative to positive heroism. Before her class suicide, Titubi demonstrates negative heroism because she attempts to disrupt a play that she believes is an attack against her bourgeoisie class. One event leads



to another, and Titubi agrees to assist in the capture of the militant leaders. This is also a sort of negative heroism because Titubi's mission is to assist the state in the arrest of the peasant farmers. There is, therefore, an arrangement between Superintendent Salami and Titubi to feign being captured in order to infiltrate the camp of the peasant farmers:

SUPERINTENDENT: [*Applauding*] You'll live, woman. Very, very good. Even I was impressed. If you can remember all that, you'll make it.

TITUBI: [*Unmoved*] Thank you.

SUPERINTENDENT: Well, all that remains is for me to wish you good luck. [*He offers his hand. She does not take it.*]

TITUBI: Goodbye. [*He looks at her for some time, in silence, and then goes out. TITUBI walks slowly round the cell.*] They are already outside, he said. They'll soon be here! I . . . I am afraid, suddenly . . . [*Pause*] No! Moremi was not afraid! [*Snaps her fingers backwards over her head.*] Fears go away! . . .

(*Morountodun* 30)

Titubi's goal, like that of Moremi, is the mandate to save her class from the peasant farmers' threat. In her assignment, Titubi sees Moremi as her hero-head whose history can motivate her to achieve her goal, confirming that her characterization "is informed by mythical, legendary and psycho-historical elements as well as the burning urge for heroism and adventurism" (Sesan 70).

At the same time, Titubi undergoes a transformation at the camp of the peasant farmers. It is here that she understands the actual plights of the peasants. Consequently, she commits class suicide, which makes her suspend the illusions of luxury enjoyed by her bourgeoisie class. At this stage, she experiences a transformation from negative heroism to positive heroism. The social and class transformation of Titubi begins with her

consciousness of the socio-economic chasm between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat classes and culminates when she denounces her class:

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. . . . (*Morountodun* 70)

The change in Titubi's perception of Moremi's heroism prepares her for the task of confronting her own class. With her new consciousness of the class war between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, Titubi is no longer comfortable with the mythical role of Moremi because she sees the latter's role as protective of her class. Thereupon, through Titubi's new consciousness, Osofisan questions the mythical role of Moremi of Ile-Ife. Unlike Titubi, in the plot of the play Moremi does not experience any class suicide either before or in the course of her sojourn in Igbo land. On the contrary, Titubi's class suicide makes her psychologically and physically ready to join forces with the peasants for a change in the status quo.

At the camp of the peasants, Titubi is the one taking care of the sick and the injured. She is immersed in all the activities that take place at the camp. Her heroism is also confirmed by the fact that she does not forget the need to ensure peace and a truce between the state and the peasants. Accordingly, the deeds of Titubi, seen from any viewpoint, are heroic, and her characterization is fully in line with Dasylyva's definition of heroism:

The *heroic* is neither necessarily determined by "goodness" nor by some "rare virtues" as we have in the western literature, but by the uniqueness of action (good or bad), and the capability of its prime mover to determine the syntax of action and situations in the fictive world. In this lies the "greatness" of such a character. (34)

Titubi's heroism brings the war to an end. The government and the peasants engage in dialogue – the situation which eventually brings the truce. As a heroine, Titubi thus combines the role of a mediator and an arbitrator with her understanding of the tensions and aspirations of the two parties involved in the war. What was supposed to be the initial solution to the

peasants' agitation came last with the intervention of Titubi, as is eventually revealed by the Director:

Oh, you're still there? I suppose you'd like to know how the story ended? [*He walks back a bit. The actors go on about their business, unconcerned.*] Well, the old man was right. Marshal and his men did not come back. It was, you'll admit, a suicidal mission? . . . In the end, peace came, but from the negotiating table, after each side had burned itself out. . . . (*Morountodun* 78–79)

Accordingly, both the state and the peasants benefit from Titubi's heroism. Like a true heroine, she renders altruistic service to humanity by sacrificing her social integrity and dignity for the survival and sustenance of her people and the state. While recounting her experience in the camp of the peasant farmers, Titubi avers: "I went, and I returned, triumphant. But I am not the same as I went away. A lot has happened" (*Morountodun* 60).

In *Morountodun*, Femi Osofisan also presents women as anti-heroines, as can be seen from the characterisation of Alhaja Kabirat, the mother of Titubi. Alhaja Kabirat's role is antithetical to her daughter's heroism because she arrogantly believes that her daughter's resolution to infiltrate the peasants' camp is a disgrace of the bourgeoisie class she belongs to. Alhaja tries her best to dissuade her daughter from going to the peasant camp. Realising that she cannot dissuade Titubi because they are of the same class, Alhaja transfers her aggression to Deputy Superintendent Salami, who belongs to the proletariat class: "You are going to pay for this, Salami. You're going to pay so much that you'll regret the day you joined the Force" (*Morountodun* 22). Alhaja Kabirat fears not only for the safety of her daughter but also for further protection of her class. She does not want the bourgeoisie class to see her daughter's action as anti-class. As Awodiya explains,

In *Morountodun*, Alhaja Kabirat is portrayed as a boastful and insensitive woman. In the prison cell scene, Alhaja Kabirat accuses the Deputy Superintendent of Police of spurring the heroic impulse in her daughter, Titubi, to offer herself to crush the peasant's revolt. She threatens the Superintendent, Salami, in her boastfulness which

is characteristic of the rich and the powerful class and their belief in the intimidating power of their wealth. (161)

### **3. Women as Victims and Villains in *Women of Owu***

Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu* focuses on the fate and conditions of women during and after the war which ravages the Owu Kingdom. The play opens with two women, who have accidentally come across Anlugbua, the ancestral father of the Owu people. These women lament their loss and express their fear for the continued existence of the Owu kingdom because all the males have been killed and all the women and young girls are to be taken as captives of the war. The actual cause of the war is the vengeance of Maye Okunade, an Ife man, whose wife, Iyunloye, is snatched from him by an Owu Prince. When Okunade later becomes a warrior, he prepares to take his wife and to ruthlessly deal with the Owu kingdom for his past humiliation. He wages war, with the support of allied forces of the Ijebu and Oyo, to annihilate the Owu Kingdom with the pretence that the kingdom is oppressing other Yoruba towns and communities. The war is tragic for the Owu Kingdom with the killing of all the men and the destruction of the community.

The plot of the play presents women as victims of the war. This historical play interprets one of the major wars in the history of the eighteenth-century Yoruba nationality. It reveals an aggregate of experience of women in time of war. Owu women in the play suffer a tragic fate worse than their male counterparts who are already dead. For instance, they are forced to live with men who have killed their husbands and sons. These women of Owu, particularly the ones of marriage age, are expected to be faithful as wives and mistresses to the people who have killed their husbands and sons. Unwritten social codes resulting from socio-cultural conventions perceive and present women as objects to be possessed by men for sexual gratification and dutiful implementation of domestic assignments. For instance, Adumaadan in *Women of Owu* laments not only the loss of her husband and sons but also the loss of control over her body:

Hope? What hope has a dog tethered to the belt of Ogun? I was happy once, glad to devote myself totally to the care of my husband

and to raising his children. I won a reputation for that, and see, it's what has ruined me now. . . . I confess. For I am only a woman with a woman's familiar weaknesses. Our flesh too often, and in spite of itself, quickens to a man's touch, and a night of loving is all it takes, they say, to tame the most unwilling among us. I am scared therefore that this animal in my body will betray me, that against my wishes, against my memories, I will begin to respond eagerly to the new man even as it once did to my husband! How can I think of that and call it hope? (*Women of Owu* 42)

Adumaadan's lamentation is an indication that she has no choice but to love and care for her "new husband," who murdered her first husband and children in her presence. Adumaadan's and other women's war experiences are common in the history of Yoruba warfare. In the tradition of Yoruba war, women were taken as captives of war to be shared as part of war booties among the warriors, the king, and the chiefs of the land. The very beautiful among them were taken as wives/mistresses, while the less fortunate among them were made farm or home slaves. Adumaadan does not see herself as fortunate because she is forced to love and care for a man who has killed her husband and children. Besides, her position reflects the gendered perception of women in the traditional African society. The misconceived primary gender roles of women in the ancient and contemporary African societies are those of wives and mothers. Thus, any training and education to be given to a female child should aim towards a fulfilling and sustainable wifehood and motherhood. In the context of *Women of Owu*, Adumaadan has not failed in the traditional gender roles ascribed to her – she remains a faithful and dutiful wife and mother.

The play also indicts a woman, Iyunloye, as the cause of the war. This interpretation, however, is questionable. While assessing Iyunloye's role in the war which has destroyed their land, the women of Owu place the whole blame on her. These women, however, are not objective in their view about Iyunloye's role in the war, and fail to consider the role of the Owu Prince, who uses his wealth and status to coerce Iyunloye into marriage. It is only Maye Okunade, perhaps because of the undying love he still has for

Iyunloye, who offers an objective evaluation of Iyunloye's "love affair" with the Owu Prince (Prince Adejumo):

It's here  
At last, the day I've 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!  
Who would believe it? They say  
It was because of her that I abandoned my first vocation,  
Left my work as an artist, and took to arms.  
Perhaps.  
But in truth, it was more because of Prince Adejumo,  
The dog who stole her from me. Now  
He is gone, felled by one of our ordinary soldiers.  
  
( *Women of Owu* 46)

In order to redeem his lost integrity and to assert his will, Maye Okunade subjects Owu women to the perpetual state of widowhood and fatherlessness. Selfishness and egotism are the primary motivating factors for Maye Okunade to engage in the war, which has grave consequences on the whole Owu kingdom, resulting in dismemberment, miscegenation, and territorial dispersion. This confirms that in any war there is usually a personal interest underlining the public concern. In *Women of Owu*, Maye Okunade hides his personal interest of vengeance under the public interest of upturning tyrannical rule in the Owu kingdom. With victimisation and dehumanisation, the women of Owu are quick to understand that their lives have only retrogressed from bad to worse:

WOMAN:  
Bless the kindness which has rescued us  
From tyranny in order to plunge us into  
slavery!

WOMAN:

Sing, my friends! Let us celebrate  
Our new-won freedom of chains!

(*Women of Owu* 13)

The dialogue above is a metaphorical expression of the status and fate of women in a patriarchal society. It suggests that women cannot be free at any point in time in a patriarchal socio-cultural configuration. Owu women realise this situation when it is almost too late. They are aware that there is no freedom in any guise for them in the lands they are going to after the collapse of their kingdom.

In the context of *Women of Owu*, it is necessary to discuss the historical reasons for the Owu War. It has been said in Yoruba historical discourses that the ancient Apomu Market was remarkable for its economic prosperity, and this market was under the control of Owu. Other communities and towns in the Yoruba nationality had eyed this prosperous market. These communities and towns were of the view that their intention could only materialise with the collapse of the Owu Kingdom. In *Women of Owu* the remote economic variable of the war is expressed by Erelu:

Savages! You claim to be more civilized than us but did you have to carry out all this killing and carnage to show you are stronger than us? Did you have to plunge all these women here into mourning just to seize control over our famous Apomu market known all over for its uncommon merchandize? (*Women of Owu* 12)

The seizure of Apomu Market, as suggested by the play and available historical evidences, is one of the strategies adopted by men to sustain hegemonic control over women. Owu women are rendered powerless, and thus they will always depend on their captors for economic survival. Erelu calls the allied forces under the control of Maye Okunade savages because they do not show any regard for the safeguard of the rights of women in the war. In all war situations, women, children, and the physically challenged individuals are always the vulnerable group, and for this reason, there is always a need to protect them physically, emotionally, and psychologically.

However, in the play, women's rights are grossly violated, and they are rendered to the state of nothingness.

Among other damaging effects, the ugliness of any war situation is also marked by dehumanisation and violation of women's bodies. In addition, women lose their natural and personal rights to the control of their womanhood as during wars the majority of them become victims of rape. *Women of Owu* depicts such a violation of women's bodies through rape. Erelu laments how the "innocence" of her daughters, already betrothed to kings, is "abused" by the rapist warriors:

ERELU:

And my daughters, dear women! These same eyes saw my daughters seized by their hair, their clothes ripped off their bodies by brutal men, and their innocence shredded forever in an orgy of senseless rapine.

WOMEN:

Erelu, we still hear their scream tearing through the air, tearing our hearts.

(*Women of Owu* 10–11)

Apart from rape, the play also depicts the women suffering from other forms of mental torture, as can be seen from Orisaye's experiences. Orisaye is a devotee to God, and this makes her "super-human" with the ability to forecast the future. Yet, despite this power, she is unable to prevent the calamity that befalls her and the entire Owu Kingdom. Orisaye is a victim of the war from two major perspectives – her god has disappointed her and the human world dominated by men has also violated her sanity. One of Erelu's major fears is that the activities of the allied forces in Owu land will further endanger her daughter's reasoning and mental health. However, what Erelu fails to understand is that isolation and seclusion will further affect Orisaye's sanity:

At least, let my poor Orisaye continue to remain inside, out of sight for now. These events, as you know, have made her even more



delirious than she was, and her state of incoherence would only worsen to see her mother like this. (*Women of Owu* 16)

In the above excerpt, Osofisan reveals Orisaye's state of mind, pointing at her delirium and incoherence as possible post-traumatic effects of war. These effects are closely related with war situations in general, which have different psychological impact on their participants. According to Lare,

On the basis of this testimony, Femi Osofisan gives Orisaye a careful etiological description of the progress of the disease – fear, depression, insomnia, delirium, debility, delusion and finally raving madness. He shows that the resort to violence to settle such conflicts has always been chaotic and disastrous. Femi Osofisan is one of the drama scholars who believes [*sic*] that art can be used to raise awareness among the populations on the nefarious consequences of unsettled human conflicts. His grudge is against the resort to violence instead of peace talks to address quarrels of the same nature. (104)

On the other hand, some female characters in *Women of Owu* take the role of a villain. Such is the case of Lawumi, the grandmother of Anlugbua, the ancestral father of Owu people. Lawumi's villainy against Owu people is seen in her claim that the people of Owu land have grown arrogant of their power and prosperity, and that they "bully" other Yoruba towns and communities. As a punitive measure, the goddess, Lawumi "weakens the resilience of Owu to withstand the long siege by the allied forces by causing a mysterious inferno which forces Owu to open its gate to the invaders and, in the process, open itself to its very annihilation" (Adedeji 288). Lawumi's resolution to support the enemies against her own offspring is undoubtedly an act of villainy. It is, in fact, an action which negates the principles of motherhood in Yoruba cultural configuration. Contrary to the Yoruba proverb: *Abiyamọki í gbọ́ ẹkún ọmọ rẹ̀ kí ó mọ́ tati were* (A mother quickly hearkens to the call of her child), Lawumi does not hearken to the cry of the Owu people in time of distress, and for this reason, she is a villain who does not have any mercy for her offspring.

## Conclusion

Femi Osofisan's plays, *Morountodun* and *Women of Owu*, expose the historical and sociological experiences of women in war situations. Representing women as heroines, victims, or villains of war, both plays juxtapose their characters' fate to the fate and status of women in mythico-historical texts on Yoruba historical wars. Whereas *Women of Owu* explores the detrimental effects of war on women's bodies and minds as well as the lack of trust and solidarity among women, emphasizing the dehumanization, powerlessness, and economic subordination faced by women in a patriarchal society, *Morountodun* upholds resilient and strong women characters who, sacrificing themselves for the greater good, become active participants in history, intrepid warriors, and cultural heroes.

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# PRIKAZ ŽENSKOGA RATNOG ISKUSTVA U DJELIMA *MOROUNTODUN* I *WOMEN OF OWU* FEMIJA OSOFISANA

## Sažetak

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Povijest ratova naroda Joruba otkriva različita iskustva i izazove s kojima se žene suočavaju u vrijeme rata. U određenim društvenim, povijesnim i književnim tekstovima žene su predstavljene i kao glavni uzrok ratova. Ipak, u određenim tekstovima žene predstavljaju vjesnice i mirotvorke tijekom stravičnih ratova naroda Joruba ili su pak prikazane kao žrtve i junakinje. Rad analizira sudbinu i položaj žena u povijesnim ratovima naroda Joruba u djelima *Morountodun* (1999) i *Women of Owu* (2011) Femija Osofisana, tvrdeći da drame predstavljaju kolektivno, odnosno individualno žensko iskustvo. S jedne strane, likovi Titubi i Moremi u *Morountodunu* veličaju ženska junačka djela tijekom različitih ratova te nastojanja tih heroína da vrate mir i uspostave red u svojim zajednicama. S druge strane, u djelu *Women of Owu* žene su prikazane kao ranjiva skupina u bratoubilačkim i stravičnim ratovima uzrokovanim muškim egoizmom. Možemo stoga zaključiti da Osofisaneve drame obuhvaćaju različite, često proturječne stavove, iskustva i uloge žena u ratnim okolnostima.

**Ključne riječi:** građanski rat Joruba, povijesna dramaturgija, Femi Osofisana, *Morountodun*, *Women of Owu*, jorupske mitsko-povijesne drame, Rat u Kraljevini Owu