

Yoruba Orality in Femi Osofisan's *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*

ADEBUA Babatunde Olanrewaju ¹, ONAJOBI Oluwafunmilola Olayinka ²,
BAMISAYE Oluwagbeminiyi Adewanle ³ & Ikuelogbon Kehinde ⁴

1,2,3,4. Department of Languages and Literary Studies, Babcock University, Ilisan Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.

¹Email: adebuab@babcock.edu.ng

Abstract

Existing studies of Femi Osofisan's plays have mainly examined them from the ambit of his philosophical, political, sociological and ideological viewpoint. Though from reading several of his plays, there is an evidence of Osofisan's penchant for using Yoruba oral forms and metaphors to enhance the aesthetic quality and meaning potentials of his work, however scant attention appears to have been paid to engaging in an in-depth analysis of Yoruba orality in Osofisan's plays. Thus, this paper is a critical analysis of the use of Yoruba oral forms in Osofisan's *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* (EVM). The paper adopts the Cultural Construction Theory as a conceptual model for text analysis. The text was subjected to critical analysis in the areas of meanings, signs, proverbs, chants, songs and ritual performances. The study shows that Osofisan portrayed Yoruba orality extensively in EVM with his use of Yoruba gods, songs, dance, praise poetry, incantatory chants, myths, symbols and history. In EVM, there is the dominance of songs and dance, supplicatory and incantatory chants rendered in both Yoruba and its Ijebu variant. The study also shows the import of Yoruba oral forms in showcasing the socio-cultural and therapeutic essence of Yoruba metaphysics. The study concludes that Osofisan has adequately showcased Yoruba orality in EVM. Furthermore, the play conformed largely to the genre of African plays that propagate the metaphysical ideals and values of the Yoruba people. The study therefore recommended that African writers should explore the use of traditional oral forms in literary works for their socio-cultural and therapeutic functions.

Keywords: *Yoruba orality, Cultural construction, Yoruba metaphysics, therapeutic essence*

INTRODUCTION

A study of orality in the plays of Femi Osofisan is a worthy exercise because many of his plays are imbued with Yoruba oral forms as a vehicle to the understanding of his world view. The paper draws greatly from oral literature and traditions that reflect the cultural and indigenous life of the Yoruba people as they are transposed into literary art forms. Orality in the context of this paper includes symbols, imageries and the verbal communicative mode of the transmission of cultural practices of the Yoruba people. The paper explores the various aesthetic forms of the Yoruba oral and folkloric traditions as it pertains to aspects of oral literature in terms of its functions, features, customs, dramatic elements, songs, kinesthetic elements and other aesthetic features.

It is believed that the Yoruba people as a group in Nigeria take their ancestry from Oduduwa, who is believed to be the progenitor of the Yoruba nation (Adeyemi: 2009). According to Adeyemi (2009:28), other motifs that bind the Yoruba include the acknowledgement of the pantheon of Yoruba gods and divinities, a belief in pre-destination and a reverence for the ancestors particularly through their earthly representatives; the *Ifapriest* (*babalawo*) and other ancient institutions. Traditional Yoruba religion is centered on a

pantheon of divinities collectively called *Orisa*. These Orisa direct the daily and other human affairs of the Yoruba person. On his part, Osofisan like Soyinka and Ola Rotimi before him, has demonstrated the latent artistic possibilities embedded in the indigenous oral forms as exhibited in his application of the genre to his written text. He has exhibited in his work the evidence of the sophistication of oral forms and their complicity in the articulation of societal norms and goals.

Various studies have examined the concept of orality and the Yoruba folkloric elements in written forms, such as those by Finnegan (1970), Osundare (1981), Akporobaro (2006) and Sotunsa (2009). However, it does not appear that much textual analysis has been done on the subject of orality using EVM. Also, it is not apparent that there has been much particularity placed on the study of the use of Yoruba orality in Osofisans' plays, to reinforce Yoruba cultural ethos. The present study attempts to fill the apparently existing gap by examining, in detail the use and import of Yoruba oral forms in EVM.

Method and Conceptual Orientation

For an effective and successful realization of the objectives of this paper, a qualitative literary textual analysis of EVM employing cultural construction approach was carried out. The theory, according to Templeton (1992) and During (1999), is an approach from cultural studies that relates to diverse influences of customs and traditions on social, cultural and political features that are developed by people. The model as a conceptual framework provides meanings to the traditions of the Yoruba people in terms of their oral forms, represented in the selected text as codes, signs, beliefs, and symbols specific to the Yoruba group. Also, the cultural construction theory is used as a conceptual model, to explore and understand the dynamics of the Yoruba Folklore in terms of its elements and forms. It also highlights, decontextualized mechanical and universal principles guiding the Yoruba cultural practices and folklores, in terms of their elements and forms. Although the model does not have a fixed method of application, instead they are dynamic and change over time. In essence it would be impossible to gain an understanding for this study without cultural construction, since its purpose is to illustrate the Yoruba folkloric elements which are embedded in EVM by Femi Osofisan.

The concept provides a template for the discussion of indigenous/universal facts, principles and cultural laws of the Yoruba group. For instance, the concept of beliefs, myths and tales created by the Yoruba people is used as a tool to organize their immediate environment. Hence, it is the indigenous cultural practices, and heritage of the Yoruba people that is being displayed in EVM that is germane to this paper. The aim of using this model is to examine features that reflect the text's literariness within the context of orality. In order words, that which makes the work literary, by paying attention to the influences of customs and traditions, the concept of beliefs, myths, tales and other elements of Yoruba orality on the outcomes of the play.

Previous Studies on Yoruba Orality in Osofisan's Works

Several studies have been carried out on the works of Femi Osofisan by various scholars, to examine ways by which his works portray orality and Yoruba folklore. Awodiya (2002:4) avers that:

Osofisan's favourite theoretical mode is the one that involves the popular traditional folklore and mechanics of festival theatre, produced in a kind of experimental drama, which allows for audience participation, spectacle, and magic, dance, music and songs as well as reflection and the questioning of values.

In several of his works, like *Fire Burn* and *Die Hard*, historical events of fire occurrences that happened in Nigeria, are been reconstructed to convey the radical outlook of the contemporary Nigerian society. The stories reflect the Nigerian society of government officials who deliberately set ablaze buildings where vital documents/evidences of misdeeds are kept to cover up their crimes and corrupt activities. Has used traditional Yoruba persona like the character *Iyaloja* to depict selfish and greedy leaders who resort to criminal activities and then cover up their crimes by inflaming and destroying files that contain facts about their heinous crimes, hence, Osofisan reveals and exposes the bad acts perpetuated by *Iyaloja*. *Iyaloja* is punished for are violations of societal norms; first, her goods were burnt, she forfeits her market stall for seven years, and she is required to dance naked around the market as a way of purification. Thus, the playwright indirectly suggests that the Nigerian society does not allow any corrupt leader escape the punishment for their wicked deeds.

Likewise, in *Another Raft*, Osofisan reconstructs and reinterprets the myth about the sea goddess and legend of the past, through the character of Yemosa, the character of the sea goddess is brought to the fore. In accordance to the Yoruba myth, the sea goddess is often described as imaginary creature with the head and upper body of a beautiful woman and tail of a fish. However, in the work, the playwright portrays Yemosa as a man without the tail of a fish. Thus, Osofisan debunks the sea goddess myth and caricatures the perception of present Nigeria.

A study done by Adeyemi (2009) examines the development of Femi Osofisan, and his contribution to world drama. He analysed Osofisan's plays by highlighting areas where the Yoruba heritage is projected and how new meanings are read to myths, and how history is reconstructed to speak on social issues. His analysed plays included *YungbaYungba* and *the Dance Contest* (1990), *Tegonni (an African Antigone)* (1994), *Nkrumah ni... Africa ni* (1994), *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*, *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels*, from African Studies point of view.

It was observed that large borrowings were made into the Yoruba myths and rather than writing a historical play, he foregrounds the Yoruba traditions and re writes history to comment on social issues. Adeyemi (2009:13) posits that Osofisan "employs folktales and idioms to caution the country about the hegemony of colonial legacy." This implies that aspects of the elements of Yoruba folklore where used by the playwright to create an aesthetic beauty in the structure of the work.

Also, Owonibi (2014) examines Osofisan's writings from the Marxist perspective, analyzing politics as a tool of social organization, the combination of works includes the *Restless Run of Locust* (1975), *The Chattering and the Song* (1977), *Who is Afraid of Solarin* (1978), *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1982), *Morountodun and Other Plays* (1982) and *Midnight Hotel* (1986). On the other hand, Adedina, Adinku and Bolaji (2013), in their study titled "The women of Osofisan: beyond fiction" explored the contribution of various female characters used by Osofisan in his plays. According to the study, women are portrayed with great qualities of outstanding ability in the governance of their various societies. They argue that women are

not mere domestic servants who should be suppressed, subjected and thrown out, but rather they should also be respected as citizens who have a place and role to play in the society. The reference to the historical Moremi in the pre-colonial Ife kingdom, Funmilayo RansomeKuti and the Egba women during the colonial era reveals heroic demonstration of leadership control by females, contrary to the typical African cultural tradition. Characters like Tegonni, Alhaja, the female characters in *Women of Owu*, Titubi, and Wura in *Morountodun*, were heroes in the texts that demonstrated heroic acts that changed their respective societies.

Thus, it can be established that Osofisan manipulates the various heritages available to him as a post-colonial writer to speak to the challenges facing his society and to foreground the practice of art in Africa, for its socio-functionality. He also challenges the recuperative bias of the négritude ideology which classified everything African as noble, and proposes the presence of imperial or pseudo-imperial tyranny as the dictating current behind the popular African myths and traditional practices.

Synopsis of the Play

The play begins with an ambience of festivity, and a gathering of people ready to be entertained, after some deliberations, a song *Khaki* and *Agbada* is raised by someone, “which everybody picks” (10). Soon there is a call for the gathering of a group of amateur actors for a play rehearsal. This opening part which is the *orchestra* forms the prelude to the play. The *overture*, that forms the second aspect of the play, presents five vagabond minstrels: three men and two women (14). They were formerly musicians who played for those in government. However with the change in power, they are left poor, hungry and wandering for a means of livelihood. In their wanderings for days without food, Omele suggests to take them somewhere they will find food in abundance. In ignorance, they settle in *Sepeteri*, the crossroads, where *Esudwells*. When the other band members confronts Omele for bringing them to Esu’s abode, he informs them about the food people bring to the crossroads every day immediately, a man approaches and drops a pot perceived to be food, but in horror and disappointment, the minstrels find cow dung. Another worshipper approaches and drops a basket of waste. Hence, they blame Omele, and they all decide to leave the place, but unfortunately, they could not leave because their feet were glued to the ground. They realize the presence of Esu, and thus sing to appease Esu for their release. The supplication was well received, because an old man appeared and confronts them with several questions, in answer to these questions, they present their problems. In response, the old man introduces himself as Esu’s priest, he gives to them seeds to swallow in order to access special powers that will make human life better and make them rich.

In part three (*Opium*) of the text, the Minstrels use their mysterious power as instructed by the old man to help people solve their problems, hence they become anxious and selfish in their expectation of riches. EpoOyinbo helps an impotent man regain his virility in return for the promise of land and houses. Sinsin cures a wounded man, a victim of attempted assassination, who promises to repay her with property gained through human sacrifice. Redio helps three people to recover a dubious import licence in exchange for promises of wealth. Jigi saves a prince’s life and restores him to his position of power by using her power to kill a priest who wants to turn him into a carrier (68) for killing the royal python. However, Omele becomes a leper after violating the old man’s injunctions.

Part four (*Hangover*) starts the following morning when the minstrels are expecting their rewards. They have started living extravagant lifestyles, on credit, in the expectation of the promised riches, and have chased away Omele because of his leprosy despite his insistence on being present to defend himself before the Old Man. The other Minstrels mock Omele, displaying their greed and breaking vows of solidarity. When the Old Man reappears, the Minstrels continue to exhibit their selfishness and failure to follow the instructions of the old man to help reduce suffering in the world: “EpoOyinbo: The important thing is – because I hate beating about the bush – the important thing is that we have reduced suffering for ourselves!” (86). The play ends with an assessment of the quality of choice made by each of the minstrels. Omele is cured of his leprosy and his comrades, “who have put their selfish greed first before everything, including their humanity” (99) receive their punishment of leprosy from *Obaluaye*, god of small pox.

Yoruba Oral Forms in EVM

Elements of Yoruba oral tradition are largely employed in the text, with specific elements such as song and dance, proverb, chants and praise poetry. From the beginning of the play characters are seen on the stage, holding their drinks as “*each holds a calabash cup while younger men and women, bearing large gourds go around serving*” (9). The style of arrangement creates a festive scene in accordance with an aspect of Yoruba folklore, where the audience gather round the raconteur to listen to folktales and legends and also participate in the event. The communal activity is performed in celebration, incorporating diverse forms like singing, chanting, acting, drumming, masking, miming or puppetry, to dramatize a story by acting. *The calabash* each participant holds, alongside the young men and women who bear large *gourds* serving, the noise of conversation, chants, quarrels, and all imageries signify the motif festival. An instance of the performance and participation is seen where a member from the audience starts the *song of khaki and Agbada* which every other individual picks up.

The song as a satire is addressed towards the greedy leaders who keep exploiting their subjects, just like their predecessors. More so, the involvement of Esu in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* (EVM) represents his character traits according to the Yoruba belief in him as the god of mischief, propitiated by his followers. Just like the Yoruba people have the god of Sango, Ogun, Obatala, Orunmila, Oya and so on, so also Esu is believed to be an intermediary between men and their wishes, between their destiny and their fulfilment as Omele puts it that: ... “So Esu, the lord of *Sepeteri*, is regarded as a kind of intermediary between men and their wishes, between destiny and fulfilment”... (21) Contrary to the knowledge of Esu as a trickster, and a messenger of confusions, Osofisan portrays Esu as one capable of showing compassion and getting solutions to one’s immediate problems. Soon, after this statement by Omele, believers of Esu started coming with their sacrifices. Also, the above quote shows that the people believe in the god of Esu as a god who helps those who seek refuge in him.

Also in the play, reference to Esu as a god is seen in the conversation between Jigi, Sinsin, Omele and his colleagues when they are in need of food, they go to the crossroad where Esu lives. “EpoOyinbo: You don’t understand! You don’t understand at all, OgaRedio! 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!” (19) In fear, EpoOyinbo warns his colleagues about what Esu is capable of doing to them:

EpoOyinbo: I swear it to you! Tales are told of...of people going mad here! Suddenly losing their senses and beginning to bark! Like dogs dying of rabies! Of men suddenly transfixed and having to be carried stiff to the home experience! Or of women turning into screaming monsters! Of- ... (20)

Use of Songs and Dance in EVM

Songs and dance feature greatly in the play, as it has been observed that Africans, particularly the Yoruba group find songs for every occasion. Even when situations are bad, they still sing and dance. This is made known as EpoOyinbo laments: “just look at you! Look at you! Singing, at a time like this! (24) In the Yoruba society, singing and dancing is an element of the Yoruba oral tradition that draws the audience to join in the singing even without direct invitation from the performer. The element of song and dance has a power to lift away sad emotional state and improve situations. For instance, when the spirit in the seed connects with performance of dance and song, the power ignites to make any form of suffering disappear. The old man states: ... “As you sing and dance, whatever his pain, whatever his suffering, it will end...” (32).

Speaking on the power of songs, when Omele and his friend’s feet gum to the ground, they realize that they are in trouble; hence they sing a song to Esu to appease him, a song of supplication:

<i>Esu o, Esu o!</i>	Esu O, Esu O!
<i>Esu O, Laaroye</i>	Esu O, Laaroye
<i>Se oungbo 'gbe, baba?</i>	Father, please hear our prayers,
<i>Araiye de'riwamokonga</i>	We're pushed down the well of despair
<i>A o ti se kayo o?</i>	We long to surface again;
<i>Awa ti de gboingboin</i>	We have our backs pinned to the wall;
<i>Dede'enikongun, baba o!</i>	Completely lost and undone!
<i>Eranko o inuiboji</i>	The mighty beasts who rule the jungle,
<i>Won ra ma kos'omi lo o?</i>	How can they drown at sea?
<i>Akere e-emaik'osa</i>	Will the crab leave his home in rivers
<i>Kopounk'orib'oko?</i>	And then take to bush?
<i>Gbawa o, we de sim'edo,</i>	We call you, and crave your pity
<i>Kogbot'eni o!</i>	Please do not shun our prayers! (29)

As they sing, supernatural things begin to take place. First, the hooded figures around the signboard come alive; also, the static figure of the signboard begins to shake, till a man gradually emerges from it in a cloud of smoke and fire (29). The effect of their song wakes Esu up to their call and attends to their wishes. Singing and dancing as an element of Yoruba orality is also expressed when a rich man who lost his manhood appears, sorrowful and has come to offer sacrifice to Esu for help. As EpoOyinbo and the other minstrels sing and dance.

Immediately the song ends, the man exclaims: “Soponna o! By God, it is working I’m coming alive!” (41). To the minstrels and the man, they get convinced about the power of song and dance, subsequently, throughout the play, each of the minstrels get the opportunity to help someone in need, by singing and dancing with the affected individual. However, each song is peculiar to the situation of the person bearing the problem. When the woman who has been pregnant for nine years arrives at the scene, none of the other minstrels were willing to help her. They conclude that the woman is poor and will not be able to show gratitude by giving them material gifts. However Omele shows compassion and helps the suffering woman. He begins to sing while his friends accompany him:

<i>Ba mi se o, Yeye Osun</i>	Oh please hear my cry, Yeye Osun
<i>Jowogbotemi, Yeye Osun</i>	Don’t abandon me, Yeye Osun
- <i>Jowoba mi se o, Yeye Osun</i>	Will you hear my cry, Yeye Osun
<i>Dakungbotemi, Yeye Osun.</i>	Don’t abandon me, Yeye Osun.
<i>Ebe la be b o, Yeye Osun</i>	Fill me with your love, Yeye Osun
<i>Dakungbotemo, Yeye Osun.</i>	Fold me in your arms, Yeye Osun
- <i>Jowoba mi se o, Yeye Osun</i>	Will you hear my cry, Yeye Osun
<i>Dakungbotemo, Yeye Osun.</i>	Don’t abandon me Yeye Osun.
<i>Iwo lo l’oyun, to tunl’omo</i>	You determine the fate of the pregnancy and the Unborn
<i>Iwo lo l’ekunabiyamo</i>	You owe the tears of the mother
<i>Iwo lo l’erinyeyeomo</i>	You owe the laughter of the mother
<i>Iwo lo niwa, ki la le se?</i>	You owe completely, can we survive without you?
<i>Yeye ma ni’tatare</i>	Fill me with your love Yeyeosun
<i>Pupopupool’omiokun</i>	Much more does the tear flow
<i>Dakunba mi se o, Yeye Osun</i>	I beg you, do it for me o, Yeyeosun (45-46)

This song is a supplication to *Yeye Osun*, begging for help, in the Yoruba oral tradition, *Yeye Osun* is considered as mother of children, believed to help women deliver safely. The first five lines are repetitive stating that *Yeye Osun* actually listens to them. The repetition is made for emphasis and a desperate plea that she harkens to them. The next stanza pleads and begs for help, while stanzas five and six ascribes *Yeye Osun* as the owner of the pregnancy, the foetus, and the one responsible for the cry or the laughter of the pregnant mother. Hence, by the end of the exercise, the woman runs into labour: “Woman: The baby! I can feel it, it’s moving...I must go now...I think I have to find a midwife quickly...I shall return, you’ll see, with the baby!” (46).

Taking a closer look at some songs used in *EVM*, one could say that the songs have elements of incantations (*ofo*) in them, in that although *ofois* poetic in form, it is cultic in nature and mystical in its expectations to bring about desired results, such aspect is seen in all the songs. *Ofo* is that verbal aspect of the magical act which could also be referred to as spell or incantation, through magical means the natural and the supernatural elements are controlled and subject to the will of the user. *Ofo* in Yoruba folklore is seen as a source of mystical power

and the possession of it is the attainment of metaphysical maturity. Other aspects that work with *ofò* include rites which deal with the set of actions that accompany the incantations of which in this situation; the action is song and dance. Furthermore, the one who performs the incantations is often warned and aware of some taboos to avoid and some actions to be taken, so that the utterance may be effective, actions such as chewing of alligator pepper which acts as a catalytic effect, or tasting of some preparations stuffed into a deer's horn (*Afòse*). In the case of EVM, a seed is given to the minstrels to swallow:

Old man: I am going to give you a power that can raise you from dust... Take these seeds, one for each of you, eat it... done? Now let each one find a suffering man, someone unhappy, and sing to him. Sing him your favourite song, and make him dance with you. That's all.

(32)

The swallowing of the 'seed' signifies the first step of action into the procession of *ofò* usage, the second step of action is to sing and dance:

As you sing and dance, whatever his pain, whatever his sufferings, it will end! If he is thirsty, he will be satisfied. If crippled, he will walk. Whatever his agony, you will relieve it. Your dance will bear it all away... (32)

Hence, the taboo is seen as the old man gives a stern warning: "if you misuse it, you'll be punished" (32). The misuse of power results when the bearer chooses the wrong target to help, which means helping someone who cannot give the true gratitude, and failure to choose right is the meaning of taboo here, and the old man warns further that:

So, now it depends on you, choose your targets carefully, according to your personal wishes, choose those truly capable of gratitude, and you will be well repaid! As for me, I'll be back here tomorrow... but if you have gained nothing, if you have misused the power, chosen the wrong targets, I promise you will be severely punished, so I leave now, you have all eaten the seed of wishes. Good luck to you. (33)

In Yoruba oral tradition, when taboo is violated, there is a consequence, Osofisan presents this in *EVM*, when the old man foretells their impending punishment, should they fail to choose the right target, thus as portrayed towards the end of the text, the minstrels fail in choosing right except Omele, while others: EpoOyinbo, Jigi, Sinsin, Redio are punished, Omele is rewarded and blessed with a happy life.

Use of Yoruba Praise Poetry (Oriki) In *EVM*

Praise poetry is another element found in the text. Yoruba oral poetry is a living and dynamic verbal art which is usually sung, chanted, or intoned in performances before an audience. Its performance includes musical or dramatic opera. Types of oral praise poetry peculiar to Yoruba tradition include *Ijala*, which is performed by hunters and *Ogun* (Yoruba god of iron and war) worshippers, *Ese Ifa* (Ifa divinatory poems), chanted while individuals have come to consult the *Ifa* diviner for either guidance or treatment of an illness, *oro* poetry performed by men only, for only male audience too, *Esa* (Egungun masquerade chant) performed and participated by everyone. Each form of *oriki* is performed with special tone of

voice, and while some are spoken others are chanted or sung, depending on the situation of the performance or the occasion.

Furthermore, *oriki* contains the name of a person, or set of names including nicknames, trade names, and also verbal slogans ascribed to the individual. The *oriki* is also performed with descriptions and profiles of the person or thing that forms the subject of such *oriki*, such descriptions can include citations or narratives of ‘heroic’ actions associated with the subject. The *oriki* of a person includes those of his parents, forebears, and also those associated with his lineage. It is worthy to note that every Yoruba thing, idea, or person that has a name has an *oriki* or set of *oriki*. Therefore, every individual, city, community, place, object, god, concept, animal and plant has its own unique *oriki*, hence *oriki* defines its subject, maximizing every good quality of the subject in his *oriki*. In *EVM*, ‘the woman’ recites a portion of the *oriki* of Esu, ‘OnileOrita’! Esu god of the crossroads, (41). Below is the full *oriki* of Esu

<i>Esu,</i>	<i>Divine Messenger</i>
<i>EsuOdara,</i>	<i>Divine Messenger of Transformation,</i>
<i>Esulaaluogirioko,</i>	<i>Divine Messenger speaks with power.</i>
<i>Okunrineriita,</i>	<i>Man of the crossroads</i>
<i>A jo langalalu,</i>	<i>Dance to the drum.</i>
<i>A rinlanjalanjalalu.</i>	<i>Tickle the toe of the drum.</i>
<i>Ode ibiija de mole,</i>	<i>Move beyond strife.</i>
<i>Ijaniotarubad'eleife,</i>	<i>Strife is contrary to the spirit of the invisible realm.</i>
<i>To fi de omo won,</i>	<i>Unite the unsteady feet of weaning children.</i>
<i>Oro Esu to totoakoni,</i>	<i>The word of the Divine Messenger is always respected.</i>
<i>Ao fi ida re lale,</i>	<i>We shall use your sword to touch the Earth.</i>
<i>Esu ma se mi o,</i>	<i>Divine Messenger do not confuse me.</i>
<i>Esu ma se mi o,</i>	<i>Divine Messenger do not confuse me.</i>
<i>Esu ma se mi o,</i>	<i>Divine Messenger do not confuse me.</i>
<i>Omoelomiranniko lo se,</i>	<i>Let someone else be confused.</i>
<i>Pa ado asubi da,</i>	<i>Turn my suffering around.</i>
<i>No ado asuresiwa,</i>	<i>Give me the blessing of the calabash.</i>
<i>Ase,</i>	<i>May it be so.</i>

The *oriki* consists of highly metaphorical and proverbial devices, such as:

<i>A jolangalangalalu,</i>	<i>Dance to the drum.</i>
<i>A rinlanjalanjalalu.</i>	<i>Tickle the toe of the drum.</i>
<i>Oro Esu to totoakoni,</i>	<i>The word of the Divine Messenger is always respected.</i>

The impact of praising Esu is to get fast solution to her request.

Use of Symbols in *EVM*

After Jigi saves ‘the prince’ by killing the old priest, who attempts to make the prince a carrier (68) of the community, the prince is sought by the village representatives to crown him as king, with some royal items, that serves as symbols with meanings, some of these items are listed below:

...Second Spokesman: We are sent with these sandals, so your feet will always go forward henceforth on step of ease.

Another: And this wrapper for your waist, as only splendour can robe you!

Another: This shawl, for your shoulders! Grace becomes them.

Another: Finally, this sparkling cap, for your royal head. Only crown can henceforth displace it!

All: Ka-a-a-a-bi-ye-siiiiiii!!! (72)

The sandals, the wrapper, the shawl, and the sparkling cap are all symbols of royalty in Yoruba oral tradition. In totality, *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrelsis* written in form of a narrative, with several oral elements, with moral lessons to be learnt. Esu is described as the trickster, who is known for creating confusion among people, here in the text he comes to deceive the minstrels, however, Orunmila and Yeye Osun steps into the scene in order to rescue Omele and to point out the evil in being greedy.

In the end, the four minstrels get punished for their greed and lack of kindness: “Old man: ...well as you like it! Let the diseases go to those who have won it...” (98), on the other hand, Omele’s selfless action towards his show of kindness and compassion saves him from the diseases as he gets restored to riches and honour: “Omele is led in, again, now decorated with cowrie beads. The former pregnant woman holds him by the hand.” (99). Oral elements that feature in the play reflect the traditional value of the Yoruba people, thus the play ends with a charge in form of song that advocates for true compassion towards fellow men.

CONCLUSION

Attempt has been made in this paper to elucidate on the use of Yoruba orality by Femi Osofisan in his works, using *EVM* as the case study. The paper conclude that Osofisan’s art is replete with Yoruba oral forms in *EVM*. The paper shows that Osofisan portrayed Yoruba orality extensively in *EVM* with his use of Yoruba gods, songs, dance, praise poetry, incantatory chants, myths, symbols and history. In *EVM*, there is the dominance of songs and dance, supplicatory and incantatory chants rendered in both Yoruba and its Ijebu variant. The study also shows the import of Yoruba oral forms in showcasing the socio-cultural and therapeutic essence of Yoruba metaphysics. The study concludes that Osofisan has adequately showcased Yoruba orality in *EVM*. Furthermore, the play conformed largely to the genre of African plays that propagate the metaphysical ideals and values of the Yoruba people as showcased in the healing of characters through metaphysical calibrations. The study therefore recommended that African writers should explore the use of traditional oral forms in literary works for their socio-cultural and therapeutic functions.

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