

## Yoruba Metaphysics, Folkloric Dimensions, Orality and Meaning in Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*

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### Abstract

Within African literary architecture, new trends have continually rendered the demarcation among literary genres more opaque. Such opacity is evident in the thinning line between oral and written literary traditions. Many literary writers have adapted the elements of oral literature, such as songs, storytelling, folktales and proverbs in their works. Femi Osofisan, a second generation Nigerian playwright has made use of Yoruba metaphysics and orality extensively in several of his plays. In *Women of Owu*, an adaptation of *The Trojan Women*, A Greek tragedy by Euripides, Osofisan borrows greatly from Yoruba traditions to accentuate the meaning potentials and dialectics of his art. There is extensive use of historical resources, tales, proverbs, songs, praise poetry, myths, rituals, dirges, and para-language, which inform the reader and adds aesthetic quality to the play. The paper concludes that, the use of Yoruba metaphysical and folkloric elements lend meaning and help to propagate the cultural ideals and values of the Yoruba people.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Ideals, Folklore, Literary Pragmatics, Yoruba Metaphysics, Yoruba Oral Tradition.*

### INTRODUCTION

Most writers in Africa have been able to recreate and incorporate a portrait of traditional culture in their works as tool to showcase the literature of African societies. Such prominent writers include D.O. Fagunwa from the Yoruba of western Nigeria, as his materials are drawn from the tradition of hunters' tale which is a major sub-class of Yoruba oral narrative. Okpewho (1992:305) asserts that Fagunwa's works "... are fundamentally indebted to the oral tradition in both matter and manner of narration" His works include *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale* (1938) translated as *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* by Wole Soyinka, which contains fantasy and realistic images along with religious didacticism. *Igbo Olodumare* (1949) translation in English as "The Jungle of the Almighty", *Ireke-Onibudo* (1949), and *Irinkerindoninu Igbo Elegbeje* (1954) translated in English as "Irinkerindo the Hunter in the Town of Igbo Elegbeje", all are rich combinations of Yoruba metaphysics and Yoruba oral traditions. Fagunwa's final novel, *AdiituOlodumare* (1961), also translated in English as "God's Mystery-Knot" employs Yoruba folkloric traditions. Okot P' Bitek in *Songs of Ocol*(1970) and *Songs of Lawino* (1984) shows his heavy reliance on his native Acoli traditional poetry. According to Okpewho (1992:302), Okot P' Bitek had "remained a staunch believer in the vitality of the oral traditions". All his songs, explore the Oral tradition, which blends in, along with the various folkloric elements of his indigenous folklore.

Achebe's novels rely also on African folk tradition of the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria. In his most read novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) for instance, the reader comes across Igbo customs, myths, legends, folktales, and beliefs in magic, superstition, omen, and spells.

In the same novel, Achebe foregrounds some Igbo folktales such as “how the birds and the tortoise were hosted in heaven” and “the earth and the sky.” These folktales give the Igbo concepts of creation, communality, and diligence. Similarly, in Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God* (1964), there is an intertextual link between the novel and Igbo ritual drama of *Egwugwu* (masquerade), proverbs, and festival institutions like *NkwuNro*. With these fragments from Achebe’s cultural environment and tradition, he, like many other contemporary African writers, is able to enrich his creativity. Achebe exhibits the cultural wealth of Africa in his novels with a view to informing foreigners about the African folklore.

Wole Soyinka in *Death and the King Horseman* (1987) focuses on the ritual practices of the Yoruba people, and their belief in the positive result that comes from practising such traditions as to what the death of the king’s horseman will bring after committing the ritual suicide shortly after the demise of the king. It is believed that, failure to follow through this practice will bring problems to the community. The use of the praise singer, whose duty is to eulogise and sing his role through-out the play, is in accordance with Yoruba oral tradition. In addition, Soyinka’s *A Dance of The Forest* (1960), J.P Clark’s *Ozidi*(1966), and Ola Rotimi in *The Gods are not to Blame* (1968), set the plot of their works against the background of traditional myth. Amos Tituola in the *Palmwine Drinkard* (1952) also carries motifs in the Yoruba oral Tradition. Other writers and their works like Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*(1966), Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Anowa*(1970) and *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (1965), Zulu Sofola’s *Wedlock of the Gods*(1972), Ahmed Yerima in *Yemoja* (2002), and Ben Okri’s *Famished Road*(1991) incorporates their various indigenous oral traditions into their works to enrich and inform readers.

Femi Osofisan a second generation Nigerian playwright borrows greatly from Yoruba traditions and accentuates his arts with elements of oral literature/ folklore. His use of myths, tales, songs, rituals, dirge, history, proverbs, reincarnation, concepts of spirits, human destiny, personal identity, portrays the Yoruba metaphysics and ideology, thereby portraying the cultural ideals and values of the Yoruba people.

A qualitative literary textual analysis of *Women of Owu* serves as a tool for text interpretation and a better understanding of the cultural ideals in the aspects of Yoruba Metaphysics and oral traditions. The tools for analysis involves the identification and interpretation of songs, dance, proverbs, folktales, chants, incantations, ritual performances, and other aesthetic qualities, in relation to Yoruba Metaphysics and oral traditions . This method specifically examines the contents of the text, through the dialogue within the text and extracts each tradition in terms of myths, tales, songs, rituals, dirge, history, proverbs, reincarnation, and concepts of spirits, human destiny, and personal identity, as used in the text.

The theory used is an approach from cultural studies which 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 folklore, 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 traditions 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 (McGraw-Hill: 2013). 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, in terms of myths, tales, songs, rituals, dirge, history, proverbs, reincarnation, and concepts of spirits, human destiny, and personal identity, as used in the *Women of Owu* by Femi Osofisan.

The concept discusses 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 the selected text. The aim of using this model is to examine features that reflect the text's literariness, in relation to orality. In other words, that which makes the work literary, by paying attention to the influences of customs and traditions, the concept of beliefs, myths, tales and elements of Yoruba folklore.

On the other hand, the model explores the culture of the Yoruba group in relation to their folkloric elements and provides meanings to peculiar codes, symbols, traditions that are unique to the Yoruba people. Thus, despite the diversities in culture, the Yoruba group has distinctive ideals that define each tradition and their significance to the Yoruba people.

### **Synopsis of the Play**

The play is an adaptation of the Greek tragedy based on Euripides' *Women of Troy*. It opens with the sad event of the war that left the Owu City in complete ruin. Two women sent to fetch water met with an old man who asked to know what city it is that lies in utter ruins, shouldering. The women in response gave the account of the devastating war and the brutality the allied forces from Ife, Ijebu and the mercenary soldiers from Ibadan unleashed on the city, they described how every male, both young and old, were killed, sparing only the beautiful women and those of the royal line, to keep as booty, especially for the generals. They feared for the old man and advised him to run for his dear life before the soldiers would sight him and waste him as they did to other men of the city. They were shocked when they discovered that the old man is Anlugbua, their ancestral god who also is one of the founders of the city.

The women at this revelation raised alarm and later expressed their disappointment at Anlugbua's late coming; for they believed if he had come, as they expected any god would; to defend his worshipers, the city would have been spared. But Anlugbua told them that the oath he took many years ago when he was departing prevented him from coming to their aid unless either the priests, chiefs or the diviners invoked his spirit as instructed.

The women, in describing the gory attack, gave detailed account of what was responsible for the people's plight. Okunade, the Maye: led the allied forces under the pretext of rescuing the oppressed Owu people from the despotic king, Oba Akinjobi; and for seven years his army camped around the city after failed attempts to penetrate and invade it. Okunade, the notable craftsman had abandoned his trade to train as a soldier and in the process rose in ranks to become the Maye, to avenge his wife, Iyunloye, who was taken captive alongside others, by the Owu soldier when they invaded the Apomu Market. Owu City was built round with very formidable walls and gate which kept the invaders off. Unfortunately for the people of the city, there arose a drought in the third year of the siege, which brought about untold hardship, hunger, disease and death among the people. In the face of these suffering, the people did not relent in sacrificing to the gods. Despite the severe famine caused by the siege, the city gate having been shut away from the invaders, they endured till the seventh years. One day the city woke up to see that their allied forces had left after seven years of futile attempts. They did not know that it was a tactics used to deceive them.

While the city was celebrating the end of the siege, the people were shocked to see their city set ablaze. This incident forced them to axe down the city gate to escape death. The soldiers who hid in the forest came out at once and unleashed terror on the people. Those who attempted to counter did not possess adequate weapons to fight back.

A night to this attack, Oba Adejobi and some of his chiefs had escaped from the city through some of the secret exit routes. In the process, the sacred places were then desecrated by the allied armies who killed both men and women who ran there for refuge. Anlugbua and the other women departed, to nurse their pains: Anlugbua to mourn the loss of a dear city and worshippers; the women the loss of their beloved ones and the bitter experience of slavery. Meanwhile, the two parties (of gods and humans) point accusing fingers at one another. The gods maintain that the people of Owu had erred against a “higher” god, Sango (the Yoruba god of thunder), and hence they (the gods; Anlugbua and Lawumi) forewarn them of the war. The peoples’ arrogance and defiance brought about their fall. Throughout the play the women mourn and lament over their losses, including EreluAfin, the queen of Oba Adejobi, there is a recount of the killings of all the five princes who are sons of EreluAfin, slaughtered in the full glare of other helpless survivors, and the rape melted on the princesses who ‘were engaged already to be married to kings’. The women in their sorrow cursed the soldiers who wrought the terrible acts in their city while they attempted to go back to their homes. They made a pronouncement that they would be afflicted and would not get back to their motherlands. In the end Erulu has a task to summon of the god, Anlugbua, to accept the spirit of the dead, as a result of this invocation Erulu her dies. However, Anlugbua made a promise that Owu will raise again, someday, although not as a single city, but within other cities of Yoruba land.

### **Elements of Yoruba metaphysics and Oral Traditions in *Women of Owu***

The text, as stated earlier, is an adaptation of *The Trojan Women*, a Greek tragedy by Euripides. *Women of Owu* borrows greatly from the Yoruba oral traditions and elements of orality within the play are analysed. The elements found include history, folktales, proverbs, songs, dance, praise poetry, lamentations, myth, ritual, and curses. The start of the text takes the audience to history through the narrative by Anlugbua:

Listen, this city was very dear to me; I was there when your grandparents built up, the little old village of my father into a fortress, and called it Owu. I, Anlugbua, Great grandson of Oduduwa, progenitor of the Yoruba race. Together with my great uncles Obatala the god of creativity, Orunmila the god of wisdom, and Ogun the god of metallic ore, we came down from our house in heaven and lent our silent energies to the labour of the workmen. Unseen, of course then Esu bore our wishes up to Edumare, the Almighty father, and slowly the bricks and the stones and the clay grew into a city enclosed within two walls and a moat around it like a girdle: Owu, the safest place in the entire Yorubaland. But now I return to see-the unimaginable! A city reduced to rubble.

How did this happen? (5)

Here the origin of Owu is presented, and known as “the safest place in the entire Yorubaland”. Unfortunately, the city is reduced to rubble due to the display of arrogance, by the people of Owu towards the deities. In forgetting their history and origin, Owu falls. Lawunmi emphasizes on the cause of their fall:

Arrogance was their sin! An insufferable display of arrogance towards me, towards Ile Ife, where we all come from! Yes, it's true that your father founded Owu, but it was only with the help and blessings of Ife! It's because he, a priest, married a princess of Ife-me!- that my father agreed to give him a crown and make Owu one the seven kingdoms of Yorubaland... (18)

She reveals further that Owu forgot her history:

Owu forgot its history, forgot its origin! Your people became drunk with prosperity! And in their giddiness, they dared to send their army against Ife! They razed the town down and reduced it to dust! (19)

A people who forget history is without an identity, because the knowledge of a people's history makes them knowledgeable about their identity and responsibilities, for the city of Owu, the calamities they experience is a punishment from the gods.

### Elements and Use of Songs in the Text

Several song elements display the Yoruba oral traditions in the text, ranging from Dirges, bridal chants (*EkunIyawo*) and praise poems (*Oriki*) Each song becomes meaning through the mood created through the rhythm of the songs and metaphorical expressions embedded in them.

<i>Atupagbeponlefelepo</i>	Lamp, yield your oil to the oil seller
- Refrain:	- Refrain:
<i>Irawo woo Orun o ran</i>	The stars are down, the sun retired,
<i>Osupa o tan mo o</i>	The moons refused to light the night
<i>Ale le le?</i>	It is night
<i>Alejo lo de loganjooru</i>	A stranger's come in the dead of night
- Refrain: <i>Irawo wo etc...</i>	The stars are down, etc...
<i>Alagangan lo k oja re de o</i>	Alagangan has come with his wares
- Refrain: <i>Irawo wo etc...</i>	The stars are down, etc...
<i>Ojaoro re lo mako de o</i>	Has brought his merchandise of pain
- Refrain: <i>Irawo wo etc...</i>	The stars are down, etc...
<i>Oro iku de nitAlagangan!</i>	Death of course is what he sells
- Refrain: <i>Irawo wo etc...</i>	The stars are down, etc...
<i>Ko ma seni to le yeebo o!</i>	And none of us can refuse to buy
- Refrain: <i>Irawo wo etc...</i>	The stars are down, etc...
<i>Atupagbeponlefelepo</i>	Lamps, yield your oil to the oil seller
- Refrain: <i>Irawo wo etc...</i>	The stars are down, etc...

The song is performed by the chorus of women, a state of mourning and helplessness, the song expresses loss over the destruction of Owu, the lamp, *Atupa*, here signifies Anlugbua, the god assigned to protect Owu in times of trouble. The oil, *Epo*, represents the people of Owu; the song is filled with metaphors, with inner meaning apart from the words written out.

The song is significant because, despite the appearance of Anlugbua in form of an old man (1), he was incapable of giving any assistance to the people of Owu, Anlugbua says: “well, it’s all over now... I’ve come too late” (8), with this statement, the hopelessness that came upon the women of Owu heightens.

Further, in sorrow the women mourn their lost city, with their quenched last hope, they sing:

<i>Lesi ma gbawa o</i>	Who will save us?
- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>	- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>
<i>Lesika re dimu?</i>	Who shall we hang on to?
- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>	- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>
<i>Afarajal’Owu!</i>	Owu’s bridge has collapsed!
- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>	- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>
<i>Ogun inatigbode!</i>	The war of fire has broken out!
- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>	- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>
<i>Yeepa, Oko mi!</i>	What calamity, my husband!
- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>	- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>
<i>Yeepa, aya mi!</i>	What a disaster, my wife!
- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>	- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>
<i>Mo? Yago, omo mi!</i>	Run away, my child!
- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>	- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>
<i>Ogun inatigbode!</i>	The war fire is everywhere!
- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i>	- Refrain: <i>Terejina!</i> (11)

The song above is an element of Yoruba oral tradition in form of a dirge. A dirge in the oral context involves laments expressed in a poetic form, in which the mourner cries out due to the loss of a departed loved one. In *Women of Owu*, there is an atmosphere of gloom, the mood is tragic and sympathetic as the women wail over the loss of their city and loved ones. The rhetorical questions are not directed to anyone in particular; perhaps they are directed to the gods of the land, who seem to be far away or asleep because the gods seem not to be affected by their cries. *Yeepa* is repeated twice, an exclamation to express bad occurrence and sorrowful feeling. It is repeated to emphasize and intensify their grief and to attract the audience to pay attention to the theme of the repeated sentences, also through repetition, the audience is made to pay attention to the depth of disaster, and its effect on the women, as they mourn their once flourishing city reduced to ruins. As the suffering heightens, the women of Owu raise their voices to curse the men responsible for their sorrows, and assaults. In unison, they start a ritual song of malediction:

<i>Orundedeede bi orinaro</i>	The hereafter, like a dirge
<i>Oyigiyigi, a tirubo</i>	Mighty Father, we have sacrificed
<i>A o yipada, a o darugbo</i>	Lets not die, till we reach old age

<i>Oyigiyigi, Oba omi</i>	Mighty Father, God of waters
<i>Titiitloriogbo</i>	Long, long lasts the head of grey
<i>Oyigiyigi, Oba omi</i>	Mighty Father, God of waters
<i>A tiruboie, Oluyeyentuye?</i>	We bid for long life, for grey hair
<i>A tiruboagba, Oluyeyentuye?</i>	We bid to grow old, Father of elders
<i>Akalamagbokiikulewe!</i>	Just as the vulture never dies young
<i>Kiikulewe! Eikulewe!</i>	Never dies young, never dies young
<i>- Akalamagbokiikulewe!</i>	- The vulture never dies young
<i>Titiitloriogbo</i>	Long, long lasts the head of grey
<i>- Akalamagbokiikulewe!</i>	- The vulture never dies young!
<i>Ani bapejolejoopa</i>	Who insults us will not grow old
<i>- Akalamagbokiikulewe!</i>	- The vulture never dies young!
<i>Ani bapejolejoopa</i>	Who summons snake will die by him
<i>- Akalamagbokiikulewe!</i>	- The vulture never dies young!
<i>Orunmila a se won nitan</i>	Diviner god will break their legs!
<i>Se won nitan</i>	Break their legs
<i>Se won nitan</i>	Break their legs
<i>Se won nitan</i>	Break their legs

(The lines are repeated over and over again, hysterically, as the women become possessed)

As the Yoruba tradition employs *awure* translated as blessings in Yoruba oral tradition, so also is *epeused*. *Epeis* the Yoruba word for curse that requires an invocation of spirits of misfortune to directly attack its target with supernatural evil occurrences that makes life miserable. In the song above, curses are pronounced on the soldiers of Ife and Ijebu by the women of owu for the tragedy they brought on them. *Epenow* serves as a major weapon the women use in fighting back. As the words *se won nitan* (break their legs) is repeated over again, they become possessed, soon after this action, the soldiers from Ife became provoked thereby invading the scene to beat and assault the women sexually. This immediate occurrence keeps the women calm but in pain as they continue their dirge:

<i>Wele-welelerinse o</i>	Softly, softly falls the dew
<i>Wele-weleleri o</i>	Softly, softly the dew
<i>Seweleseweledojo allele o</i>	Gently, gently rain in the evening
<i>Seweleseweledojo</i>	Gently, falls the evening rain
<i>Iku o nigbowo</i>	Death will not accept money
<i>Iku o nigbebe?</i>	Death will not listen to any plea
<i>A kigbe-kigbeoroiku</i>	Repeatedly we curse death's sting

*Iku o loogun o!*

For there's no medicine for death! (39)

The tragic situation that surrounds them with the loss of their husbands, sons, families and properties to war and death makes them liken death to the morning dew, the dew which falls softly in the night represents the way death suddenly snatches people away. Hence, they curse death. The bridal song found in the text is done by Orisaye, daughter to Erelu who is the bride of a god (24) she had been wedded since birth to Obatala, the god of purity and creativity. Now as a result of this war, she is to be married to Balogun of Ife, for this reason, she sings:

*E sure fun mi*

Shower me with blessings

*Mo nreleoko*

I am going to my husband's house

*E sib a mi yo*

And rejoice with me

*Mo nreleoko*

As I head for my matrimonial book

*Okunkun parade*

Darkness, melt away

*Imole tele mi lo*

And light, accompany me

*E ba mi yosese*

Come, celebrate with me

*Sese la nyomoko*

A groom is met with rejoicing (27)

The last two lines are ironical, requesting others to rejoice with her, despite the agony she feels. A groom is met with rejoicing but unfortunately in this case, she plans to murder him. She seeks the prayers of her loved ones as she moves to her matrimonial home. Though the atmosphere during this song is sorrowful, she sings this bridal song as a satire to mock the gods indirectly, she says "I am going to be married to a king, don't you know? This torch is for our bridal night...Ah; all the gods are awake with us! Their watchful eyes follow us with blessings, as I go to the bed of my king! (27). She continues her satire, by singing:

*Olobe lo loko o*

Husbands are for those who can cook

*- Emi tirokofe o-e!*

- See, I've won my own husband!

*Oko ma won lode o*

Husbands are hard to find:

*- Emi tiritemi o e!*

- But I've got my own husband!

*Okunrin won lode o:*

Good men are rare to find

*- Emi tiritemi o e!*

- But I caught my own!

*Ogun tigbe won tan o*

Wars have made them rare to find:

*- Emi tiritemi o e!*

- But I've found my own!

*Baba o digbana*

Father, goodbye to you:

*- Emi nlo le oko o e!*

- As I leave for my husband's home!

*Iya e ma sunkun o*

Mother, wipe your tears:

*- Emi nloleoko o e!*

- I'm going to my husband's house! (28)

This song portrays that the woman that is good at cooking good meals owns her husband. In this context, the song is a satire because Orisaye is not happy to be married, but for the situation she finds herself is pitiful. Despite that the song itself is a Yoruba traditional song, among the Yoruba women. The journey into marriage for every woman in the Yoruba culture



is supported with good wishes and prayers, the lyrics of the song requests for blessings as she heads to her matrimonial home. The context is that of irony, satire and repressed agony.

### Use of Curses (Epe)

Series of curses are pronounced on the people and soldiers of Ife and Ijebu by the women of Owu. A curse (*Epe*) in Yoruba folklore is a serious issue to the cursed individual. A cursed person experiences problems and calamities. This is what the women bestow on the (Ife troops), placing curses on them such that will make their lives unbearable, and feel a bit of what they experience from them:

Woman: Tuah! I spit and the wind dries it! May each of you be sucked and withered by the wind of affliction on your journey back!

Chorus Leader: ... may you all without exception suffer the indignity of unremembered graves... (12)

They pronounce the curses by first stating their offence, followed by the curses as a reward they get for their evil acts.

### Ritual Performances

Rituals in Yoruba traditional setting vary from rituals that have to do with worship, to ritual performances during annual festivals, and finally, funeral rituals. Ritual worship involves special acts of worshipping Olodumare or other gods (Orisa), hence this ritual performance have religious undertones. The next type involves sacrificing during festivals and finally, the rituals are connected to death and funeral rites. In some Yoruba traditional practices, when a person dies, rituals are performed. This type of ritual performance is seen here towards the end of the play, Erelu requests to perform her duty to the community, and to the dead. The ritual performance will prevent the spirits of the dead from roaming about, the chorus leader remarks "Thank u Erelu, now our dead will not be left to wander forever like abandoned mongrels in the wastelands of the after-life..." (63). Afterwards, the ritual is done to conjure the spirits of the dead (64). First Anlugbua is summoned to receive the spirits of the dead (65) the ritual performance is a combination of dance, song, chants, and proverbs:

Chorus Leader 1: our people must go home, father. No swimmer, however good, can swim beyond the rim of the world. This world's journey has ended in catastrophe for us. Without your help, we can no longer find our way back in the void. (65)

In the end, the ritual is not accepted, the gods refused to forgive them for their offence, Anlugbua states that he will not help them, despite their ritual performance, they must face the wrought of the gods, their punishment . Anlugbua speaking through Erelu says:

I cannot help you, no one can. You are going now into years of wandering and slavery. As the penalty for your wasted lives. Perhaps afterwards you would have learnt the wisdom of sticking together, and loving one another... (66).

So that after their suffering, the future generation to come will be told about the fall of Owu, and the reason for the fall, and learn from the mistakes of their fore fathers.

### Elements of Oriki (praise poetry)

A total description of a person is embedded in his or her *oriki*. In the Yoruba folklore, *oriki* defines the subject praised and positive attributes are maximized. Moreso, the name of an

individual affects his oriki, for instance, parents who belong to a royal or titled families are given names with words like, Ade (crown) as in Adeyemi ( meaning crown befits me), Ola (honour) as in Olaitan (meaning honour never ends), Oye (chieftancy or royalty) as in Oyedoyin (meaning chieftancy has become honey). In the case of Adeoti who is a child of Erelu and following the news of Adeoti's murder, Erelu bids her farewell, wishing her safe journey to heaven (orun re o) (41). As she chants her oriki, Erelu laments over her loss, disappointment, her sorrow, helplessness, and agony.

<i>Omoo mi Adeoti</i>	My child Adeoti
<i>OmoAnlugbua</i>	Descendant of Anlugbua
<i>Anlugbua</i>	Anlugbua
<i>Ogun foriolu sere</i>	Ogun that played with a crown
<i>OmoAsunkungbade</i>	And won a crown with tears
<i>OmoAgbaoye</i>	Son of Agbaoye
<i>OmoAremaboAgbadesire</i>	Offspring of AremaboAgbadesire
<i>Omo</i>	Daughter who
<i>Lai gbeiyunsorun</i>	Even without royal neck beads
<i>Didannindanbii ide</i>	She gleams and gleams like brass!
<i>Ah omo mi openleng</i>	Ah, my slim and pretty daughter,
<i>Orun re o</i>	Rest in peace
<i>Boo badorun</i>	O there in heaven, don't eat worms
<i>Ma jekolo</i>	Don't eat millipedes
<i>Oun won ban je ni o ba won je...</i>	Eat only what they eat there... (41)

The use of *omo* (offspring) links the subject to her relations. The oriki rendered in tears and anguish makes reference to all her names mentioned, like "my child Adeoti", likewise, her ancestral lineage is embedded in the praise poetry (oriki). 'Son of Agbaoye', 'Offspring of AremaboAgbadesire', also, her physical appearance is described here: 'Even without royal neck beads, she gleams and gleams like brass', 'Ah, my slim and pretty daughter'.

Another oriki sung by Erelu is about Aderogun:

<i>Omo mi Aderogun,</i>	My son, Aderogun!
<i>O wa di babaa mi loni</i>	You become my father today!
<i>To ba dele koba mi kiwon:</i>	When you gt home, give them my greetings
<i>Aderogun, okikiolu</i>	Aderogun, brave one
<i>O digbere, o darinnako!</i>	Farewell, till we meet again!
<i>OmoJagunmolu</i>	Son of the warrior Jagunmolu
<i>OmoAraOwuojogedengbe!</i>	Offspring of Owu's ancestors
<i>Omojagunmajole,</i>	Son of a fighter don't steal

<i>Mira-mile ma mile ebi</i>	Shake men, shake the earth, but not your in-laws
<i>Ebieniningbeniga!</i>	For in-laws dignify us!
<i>Omo won gbe mi sonleApomu</i>	Son of, I was felled (fightin) in Apomu
<i>Iyen ii somoo mi</i>	Cannot be my child
<i>O kori-koriomotuntun</i>	Collector of beads except the new-borns
<i>Waa sun, waaji,</i>	Sleep on but you will rise again
<i>Oonijokun, oonijekolo</i>	You'll not eat millipedes or worms
<i>To ba dele koba mi kiwon</i>	When you get home there, say my greetings:
<i>Koo pemombolona o ...</i>	And tell them I am on my way! (59)

In the same vein, description of Aderogun is, sung: 'My son, Aderogun', reference to his attributes, is embedded in his praise poem: 'Aderogun, brave one', 'son of the warrior (ancestral link), Jagunmolu', 'and offspring of Owu's ancestors'. Hence, the praise poem describes and praises

### Use of proverbs in *Women of Owu*

Proverbs are employed within the songs performed, for instance in a flash back, the women remembered their failure to realize that the last moment of happiness and joyful atmosphere they enjoyed before the attack was a mask to trick them of their coming doom, in this regard, the chorus leader says: "...the sky is at its calmest in the moments before a mighty thunderstorm". (37). similarly, the women of owu conclude that the world is a journey that will end for everyone someday somehow: "no swimmer, however good can swim beyond the rim of the world" (65). Though they agree that the end has come for them, they still needed the help of the supernatural being to help the spirits of their dead ones cross over to the afterlife safely.

In *Women of Owu*, Osofisan projects the image of the Yoruba culture in the text, with elements of songs, praise poetry, proverbs, curses, and invocation, all is seen to show the beauty/aesthetic structure of Yoruba folklore, and its significance to educate readers, and inform them about the tradition of the Yoruba people. *Women of Owu* revise history and the involvement of the supernatural gods as well. The writer uses indigenous Yoruba expressions, localized languages, including pidgin and the Ijebu dialect to convey the oral traditions effectively and the folklore of the Yoruba people, making imaginative and innovative essence of oral literature.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Oral Yoruba tradition is an essentially communal participatory experience that impacts people for the purpose of interaction, to generate oral performance that reflects the society's social and moral life. The paper has examined the Yoruba traditions in *Women of Owu* by Femi Osofisan. Hence this technique has enhanced the overall quality and aesthetics of the work. The presentation and the usage of Yoruba folklores have impacted the entire aesthetic quality of the selected text, which was able to showcase the rich traditions of the Yoruba people and their folklore.

It is clear that various aspects of the oral tradition of the Yoruba society are important for enriching the social and moral life of the people, ensuring the continuity of their culture. The adoption of orality and folklores in written texts serves as an effective means of expressing the ideals and values of the communities teaching the young generations the history of their ancestors and thus helping them improve their self-awareness by giving them the information they need for the understanding of their identity. In essence, a young child is introduced to the *oriki* (praise name) of his/her family right from birth, through constant repetition by the female members of the household, who also tease him/her about the significance of his/her birth and the distinguished history of his/her ancestors. At the same time, he/she is encouraged to uphold this tradition and contribute to its development and continuity.

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