Divine Che Neba, Gerald Neba Ambe, "Entry on: Women of Owu by Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/785. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan

Women of Owu

Nigeria (2006)

TAGS: African Traditions Ancient Warfare



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Women of Owu
Country of the First Edition	Nigeria
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2006
First Edition Details	Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan, *Women of Owu*. Ibadan: University Press PLC, 2006.
ISBN	978978069267
Genre	Drama
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com Gerald Neba Ambe, University of Yaoundé 1, nebaambegerald@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@orehampton.ac.uk

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan , b. 1946
(Author)

Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan, born on the on June 6, 1946, is a school teacher, lay reader and church organist. He attended primary and secondary school, both in Ile-Ife and Ibadan and thereafter continued his studies in the University of Ibadan. From there, he did his post-graduate studies from 1972-1973 at the Sorbonne, Paris and later returned to Ibadan where he obtained his PhD after researching on the origins of drama in West Africa. In most of his works, he lampoons on the tyrannical rulers and autocratic governments. In 2016, Osofisan became the first African to win the coveted Thalia Prize awarded by the International Association of Theatre Critics. He has produced three prose works, *Ma'ami*, *Abigail* and *Cordelia*. His plays include *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980), *Morountodun and Other Plays* (1983), *Ajor Plays 2* (2003), and *Women of Owu* (2006). Presently, he teaches Theatre Arts at Kwara State University in Nigeria.

Source:

Awodiya, Muyiwa P., *The Drama of Femi Osofisan: A Critical Perspective*, Kraft Books, 1995.

Bio prepared by Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com and Gerald Neba Ambe, University of Yaoundé 1, nebaambegerald@yahoo.com

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Additional information

Summary

Anlugbua, the progenitor of the Yoruba race, and some two women are lamenting the fall of the great city of Owu Ipole after their city has been ransacked, and their husbands killed, and when the rest of family members are about to be taken away as slaves. The previous night King Oba Akinjobi escaped from the land, along his notables, but without his family. As a result, the allied forces from Ijebu killed all the rest of the men and children back at home and enslaved their wives.

Queen Erelus of Owu-Orisaye's mother - is dethroned. As she languishes in the hands of Allied Forces in their make-shift tent, she curses Iyunloye for initiating the war. The messenger from Allied Forces, Gesinde, tells Erelus what is going to happen to her and her family: Erelus herself is to become Balogun Derin's slave; her daughter, Orisaye, who is still a virgin and bride to the god, will become Balogun Kusa's wife. With this information, Orisaye is driven almost insane. Besides, she knows that when she arrives Balogun Kusa's home, she will kill him while in bed, so as to avenge the death of her brothers and sister, caring less if she dies in the act.

Adumaadan, Erelus' daughter-in-law, arrives with her baby son, Aderogun, to share the sad news that Erelus' youngest daughter Adeoti has been killed at the entrance to the shrine of Lawunmi (a goddess and mother of Anlugbua). Erelus feels that she should oblige her new master, Otunba, to permit her raise her son to become the future saviour of Owu, but the Allied Forces are not sympathetic to her plea, since their intention is to bash the baby's head against a tree and crush his skull. Adumaadan is taken away after her son is ripped from her and killed.

Maye, also referred to as General Okunade, comes in partially satisfied because his purpose in Owu is to take revenge on Adejumo who had escaped with his beautiful wife. However, Adejumo was killed by a common soldier in the battle field. Now, his anger is tilted towards Iyunloye who deserves to suffer before death, either in the land of Owu or back at home, where the woman are waiting to lynch her. Iyunloye is brought before him, and she is still a charming beauty even after all that has transpired in the conflict. She pleads with General Okunade to spare her life, telling him that her real motives were to advertise his artistic skills and clothes design, and that she

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

had fully intended to return to him but the Owu soldiers stopped her several times. Erelus, who had earlier warned Okunade to resist her charms and sweet eyes, scoffs at this story and warns Okunade that she will betray him again. He remains resolute, and makes sure that she goes back home on a different ship from him and face the wrath of the women, whom in the course of the war had lost their husbands and children.

Moments later, Gesinde returns with the body of the new-born Aderogun, wrapped with Lisabi's warlike-dress. It has been Adumaadan's wish that she buries her child herself, in accordance with Owu burying rites, but her ship has already sailed and so it is Erelus' task to prepare the child for burial. This is too much for Erelus to bury her only grandson and lineage she had left especially after being informed that the king of Owu and his closed chiefs who had earlier escaped on the eve of the attack on Owu city were caught and put to death. After the rites, fire is set on the palace and Gesinde calls on all to board their ships. He equally informs the woman that Iyunloye has succeeded to regain Maye's heart, and has joined his caravan. As flames rise from the ruins of Owu so that all can leave, Erelus and the other women beg Gesinde a chance to ritually send the spirits of their dead ones to the world of the ancestors and he accepts though reluctantly. As the rite is performed through chanting, dancing and incantation, the god Anlugbua is invoked and he possesses the body of Erelus who speaks against war, bloodshed, and violence practised by humans. However, he assures those taken into slavery that they shall start new and powerful kingdoms in those places.

Analysis

Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu* parallels the situation described in Euripides' *Trojan Women* (415 BC). At the centre of Euripides' play is the fate of the women of Troy, when their husbands are killed and the city destroyed. Osofisan's projections in *Women of Owu* bear semblances with the tragic catastrophes in *Trojan Women*. Owu, like Troy, does not easily capitulate, up to seven years before the city is sacked. Her capturing, just like Troy's, leads to the death of men. This fact determines the fate of the people. Like Euripides' *Trojan Women*, Osofisan's *Women of Owu*, stages the dilemma of women in times of war.

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Traditions Ancient Warfare
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Conflict Death Gender, female Identity Loss Resilience Violence
Further Reading	Budelmann, Felix, "Greek tragedies in West African adaptations", *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 50 (2004): 1–28. Budelmann, Felix, "Trojan Women in Yorubaland: Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*" in Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie, eds., *Classics in Post-Colonial Worlds*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 15–39. Whitehouse, Suki-Jo, *Modern adaptation of Euripides' Medea and Trojan Women*, Diss. University of Birmingham, 2015.
Addenda	First performed in Lagos in 2003 before its publication in 2006 by the publishing house Ibadan University Press and publisher University Press PLC.

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.