



## The Altered Concept of Heroism in Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* and *No More the Wasted Breed*

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### ABSTRACT

This article adopts a mythic reading of Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* and *No More the Wasted Breed*, both written in 1982 and 2002 respectively, in order to interpret how the concept of the 'saviour hero' is altered and subverted in the plays. The subversion manifests in the plays such that heroism changes from its common mythological and philosophical concept as a salvaging/sacrificial task undertaken for all by an extraordinary individual to one which is collective, collaborative and mass oriented. The paper argues that, in the worlds of the selected Osofisan's plays, the latter concept is the one foregrounded as significant, functional, altruistic and more consistent with contemporary and pervasive sociopolitical and socioeconomic realities than the latter. The mythic critical approach adopted here attempts to align with Ernst Cassirer's notion of mythological resources in texts of literature as modes of human perception and expression serving both rhetorical and humanistic purposes. The paper affirms that the altered concept of heroism in Osofisan's two plays is motivated by a radical ideology which identifies anomalies such as inherent human failings, cultural prejudices, leadership failure, oppressive structures and other anti-progressive elements in Africa's historical and socio-political experiences as the bane of its economic and technological progress. It concludes that the playwright's suggestion as implied in the plays' sub-texts that Africa's problem can be overcome through humanistic evolution towards an egalitarian and compassionate society is only attainable through mass effort (collective sacrifice) to consciously change their defective value system.

**Keywords:** Altered concept of heroism, Mythology, Africa, Osofisan's drama, Collective sacrifice, Individual heroism.

### 1. Introduction

Femi Osofisan is more known globally as a playwright than as a professional in any of his other vocations, namely, a former university teacher, a poet, novelist, journalist, a translator and an essayist. His other jobs, nevertheless, have impacted on his creative impulse as a playwright. For instance, his plays are both didactic and stylistically innovative, which evince his pedagogical inclinations. The language of his plays reveals much of his lyrical flair and adeptness evident in his creative use of traditional, modern and foreign imageries and symbols. His rich repertoire of stories drawn from both Yoruba and European mythologies as well as modern myths, also evident in his plays, portrays the depth and versatility of his knowledge of world cultures. His proficiency in Yoruba (his indigenous language), English and French (in which he had his first, second and third degrees) confirms his forays into three rich literary traditions – Yoruba, English and French. M. P. Awodiya has also rightly observed that, "Osofisan's literary career has been largely – indeed overwhelmingly – devoted to the expression of African tradition through the medium of English Language" (The Drama 30).

Osofisan's personal philosophy is to "free the people's minds from the warped perceptions of themselves and the possibilities; free their consciousness from the foreign dependency syndrome; and free their capacity to innovate and create" (Femi Osofisan, "Of Alienation and Me" 6).

One of the recurring motifs in Osofisan's drama is the way the concept of heroism from both traditional mythology and western philosophical and literary thoughts is altered or subverted in his exposure and depiction of the rotten underbelly of the postcolonial Nigerian (or African) society in which members of all strata of the society are implicated. The perception of the concept of a hero in traditional and Western mythological, philosophical and literary thoughts as a saviour who alone undertakes a redeeming task that liberates society or a group from imminent destruction is often rejected in many Osofisan's plays as being too idealistic, unrealizable, mythical and inconsistent with the realities of the modern society with its complex socioeconomic and sociopolitical maneuverings. Osofisan's plays, *Morountodun* and *No More the Wasted Breed*, selected for discussion here, also ideologically and structurally reject redeeming single heroic exploits as contrived artistic panacea to the recurring ethical, sociopolitical and socioeconomic problems plaguing humanity. The plays assign such redeeming responsibilities to the collaboration of a group or the society itself.

In the plays, Osofisan initially presents the image or idea of the traditional sense of the individual hero for societal redemption and later flaws such task and either makes the group or collective heroic efforts triumphant as an alternative. While *Morountodun* displaces the myth of a single heroic saviour as serving the interests of the privileged class to entrench themselves oppressively in power, *No More the Wasted Breed*, on the other hand, aborts traditional and institutional designation of a specific individual usually for ritual self-sacrifice for societal redemption as unproductive and archaic. This phenomenon in Osofisan's drama realized artistically and ideologically is what this study has identified as the altered concept of heroism. Osofisan's radical ideology is obviously the motivating principle behind the changing perspective of the 'saviour hero' in his drama, which is also seen to influence his deployment and manipulation of traditional and foreign myths rendering his dramaturgy subversive in style and message.

In *Morountodun* and *No More the Wasted Breed*, the mythic consciousness is unmistakably visible. It foregrounds the ethical, sociopolitical and socioeconomic underpinnings in the plays. In the relationship between mythology and literature, Ernst Cassirer has observed that myth is "a mode of human perception and expression" which does not isolate image from entity, the ideal from real, but provides for the literary critic "more than a rhetorical ground for literature's link to metaphor" and becomes useful for contemplating humanity (*The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* 811). This observation has inspired in this discourse the choice of a mythic critical approach which Craig White describes as a literary investigation which demonstrates how "literary works draw upon a common reservoir of archetypes or recurrent images" (par 11). Similarly, E. W. Ward asserts that: "modern authors have been fascinated by the possibilities of myth in literature, and it is, therefore, necessary for the literary critic to examine the ways in which those possibilities are exploited and developed" (70). The mythic reading in this discourse, to borrow Ward's words, exemplifies the use of mythology "as a means of literary allusions, intended to attract the attention of the reader and to add significance to a theme or situation by means of illustration or parallel" (71).

In *Morountodun* and *No More the Wasted Breed*, mythological resources are both pronounced and subtle. The former uses history and the myth of Moremi as materials for its plot. The latter is an inter-textual response to Wole Soyinka's earlier play, *The Strong Breed*, published in 1973; and it extends the subject of the traditional carrier ritual of self-sacrifice for the atonement of communal sins, on which Soyinka's aforementioned play also dwells.

## 2. The Plays' Synopses

*Morountodun* (*Mor*) re-enacts a historical incident centring on the Yoruba peasant farmers' uprising known as the Agbekoya - "Farmers reject exploitation" (Awodiya *The Drama* 58) - in 1969 against the oppression and excessive taxation by the government of Western region (Awodiya *The Drama* 58). At the beginning of the play, Titubi, the young beautiful lady and rich and pampered only daughter of the highly influential aristocrat, Alhaja Kabirat, obstructs a stage performance with a violent mob and a coterie of rich friends. The reason for her action is her perceived motive for the actors' stage performance which she interprets as a dramatization of the ongoing peasant farmers' struggle in the world of the play intended to condemn the affluent and vilify those in authority. She sums up her reasons for obstructing the players: "They come here night after night and throw bricks at us" (*Mor* 11-12). A team of riot policemen, acting on tip-off, led by Salami, a Deputy Superintendent of Police, steps into the scene of fracas spearheaded by Titubi. Initially she is mistaken to be the victim by the superintendent who later learns that she is in fact the intruder and offender. Titubi is arrested by the Superintendent for causing civil disturbance and chastised for using mob action against the struggling ambulant players who make the affluent the subject of their satirical butts. She is further criticized by the superintendent for not using the same energy to confront the peasant farmers who have taken to the trenches to wage war against government and its rich allies.

The verbal lashing from the superintendent instigates Titubi to infiltrate the camp of the rebelling peasants in order to report back the strength and weakness of the rebels and help to bring their leaders to justice. She is

determined to re-enact the bravery and single heroic exploits of the legendary Queen Moremi in Yoruba mythology, who volunteered to be captured by the Igbo invaders of her Ife kingdom and later came back to the king, her husband, with the secrets of the enemies' vulnerability, which aided her kingdom's eventual victory over the Igbo enemies. The ironic twist in the plot is that while at the camp she is transformed by populist values and visions, and joins the rebelling group to fight for a change in their status quo ante. Her joining the peasants' struggle against the oppressive and exploitative laws of government, whose agents she earlier agreed to work for, helps to bring both parties to the negotiating table, but not before each side records huge losses in human and material terms in the war.

*No More the Wasted Breed (NMWB)* on the other hand portrays a community's territorial violation of divine injunctions and the abandonment of a carrier ritual for renewal, atonement and appeasement, the subsequent devastating vengeance wrecked by the community's totemic/tutelary deities and the hard-earned victory of the human community to chat the course of its destiny without the interference of gods. The wreckage in the fictional riverine community of Egure is surveyed and described by the visiting two characters who appear first in the play's prologue and who incidentally are Olokun - the god of the sea - and Elusu (Olokun's wife), the goddess of the "shallow waters of the creeks on whose bank" the community is situated (NMWB 98). Elusu is the bringer of the flood of water which has spread "everywhere [in the community] like a terrible carpet" so much so that wherever the people "put their feet, even within the doors, they swim" in water; their farmlands have "turned to swamp", roots of their crops "rotted away", fishes in the waters have run away and the natives cannot paddle through the inclement flood in order to escape from the community because such an escapee may not survive it (NMWB 88). Judging by her remark to Olokun, "I am a terrible goddess of vengeance" (NMWB 88), it is clear Elusu has brought this wreckage upon the riverine community as a punitive measure because the people broke her pristine injunction not to pollute and fish in her shallow waters that run through the creeks.

Biokun, the protagonist of the play, soon realizes that he is from a lineage of carriers who are normally saddled with the seasonal responsibility of a long, laborious, risky and fatal ritual journey to appease the gods and atone for the community's sins with sacrifices, which may result in the carrier's death. His re-enactment of that ritual is required by the guardian gods to re-establish the ties between the community and themselves, which the people's transgressions and misguided activities have eroded, so that normalcy will return. Biokun, a former non-believer in the traditional religion, is willing to undertake the task especially as the health of his afflicted infant son is at stake. He is discouraged by his best friend, Saluga, who confronts the gods and Togun (the chief priest) for perpetually picking scapegoats among the poor for the consequences of the indiscretion of the gods and the excesses of the powerful and privileged class. In fact, Saluga sees the ritual practice carrying away societal ills by a designated individual as "an apparatus for meting out violence on the poor" (Chinyere Okafor 121) when those from the privileged or ruling class are never assigned such a single heroic task. The murdering of Saluga by the deities for confronting them emboldens Biokun to retract his earlier promise to continue the moribund carrier ritual. Biokun thereafter reproves the gods of wickedness, greed, insensitivity and partiality to the conditions and cause of mankind. In the argument between humankind and gods, Olokun who arbitrates as god of justice orders the goddess Elusu to resurrect Saluga. The god affirms the petitions of Biokun and Saluga who argue for mankind, and acquits humanity of any wrongdoing in the territorial disaster that has befallen the community. Olokun finds the gods culpable for their oppressive and overbearing relations with mankind and acknowledges that,

... men have changed. They have eaten the salt of freedom and moved beyond our [the gods'] simple caprices. We must fulfil our appetite by other means, for they [humans] do not demand protection any more, but food; but justice. (NMWB 109)

After resurrecting Saluga, goddess Elusu "sings a dying song and begins to withdraw" (NMWB 110). The territorial wreckage on the land thereafter disappears, Biokun's afflicted son recovers. Normalcy returns to the land signalling the victory and liberation of humankind from perpetual enslavement by the gods and their institutional forces of control zealously encouraged and enforced by the privileged class. The play ends with the arrival of a new dawn for men and women to collectively champion the course of society.

### 3. Ethical and Sociopolitical Issues in the Plays

*Morountodun* is another enactment of how unpopular and oppressive policies, mass deprivation and poverty can trigger the perennial conflict between society's underlings and the reactionary forces in control of the establishment or State power, which has characterized much of postcolonial literature. The ethical issues in the play are sacrifice, honesty, transparency, choice, persistence and commitment. The play teaches that the combination of these elements deployed by the underlings strengthens them in their struggle to dislodge any oppressive devices adopted by the team of the rich and the rulers/agents of the State in their designs to gag the poor or underlings of the society. Ethically, the play also teaches that State power corrupts and wielders are always insensitive until confronted, sometimes violently, before any change in status quo ante can occur in favour of the oppressed class. The sociopolitical message derivable from this struggle, therefore, is that the rich and those who control State

power and their agents are always on the same side against the poor/underlings of the society; whether the wielders of such State power came by it through the barrel of a gun, election or nomination, they are always insincere, corrupt, greedy and ruthless; they use the same deceptive and oppressive strategies to subdue the underprivileged class. This is a historical process which has remained unchanged in postcolonial Africa, which is alluded to by the Director who doubles as a narrator in the play while addressing the audience as soon as his team of actors commences action:

– But history – or what some of you call Chance or Fortune – has taken over the stage. And it will play itself out, whether we like it or not. All we can do is either quicken it or slow down its progress. And let this be a lesson to you, my friends. In the affairs of men, History is often like ... like a .... (Mor 16)

The dots are ellipses which though indicate interruptions from fellow actors on stage thereby preventing him to complete his description of history, but his view point is not lost on the audience and the reader.

According to Udentia O. Udentia, the reality of class differences is rooted in the greed, insensitivity, domineering attitude and lack of moral rectitude of the ruling privileged class and the perseverance and docility of the lower one (35). It is the inevitable reason for the perpetual conflict between the two classes anytime the consciousness of the latter awakens. The peak of that consciousness is what confronts both the reader and the audience in the plot of *Morountodun* as one of the Director's lines intimates: "illiterate farmers whom we had all along thought to be docile, peace loving if not stupid, suddenly took to arms ... against the government" (Mor 6).

In *No More the Wasted Breed*, the rejection of ritual imperatives does not imply that Osofisan rejects African tradition; but that the creative impulse in the text simply re-directs thinking towards a re-evaluation of the role of traditional values, belief system, religion and ritual practices in postcolonial Africa. The result of such critique evidently implies that traditional institutions in Africa have colluded with reactionary forces in entrenching mass disillusionment, leadership insensitivity, oppression of the poor, pervasive poverty and environmental degradation. It is, therefore, important for peoples of postcolonial African society, at both the individual and collective planes, to tap from the innate human resources in finding lasting solutions to the socioeconomic and environmental problems that plague them. This is the perspective that appears to elude Brian Crow when he states that:

Either [Osofisan's] plays do not in any very significant way touch on the issue of tradition at all or, when they do, his position is detached, skeptical and somewhat ambivalent, prepared to give the traditional order its due only within very limited parameters. (45)

Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*, whose textual content reads like an implicit inter-textual exchange with Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, debunks the tradition of the ritual of self-sacrifice as moribund, a defective heroic and salvaging humanistic endeavour which is quite inadequate in answering to modern society's socioeconomic and political needs. Soyinka's play on the other hand links the essence of human's existence to the divine precepts of the community's gods and ancestors which must be preserved through periodic communication between the world of the living and that of the dead through self-denial and sacrifice willingly borne by a designated individual for communal benefits as Ogun did to create passages of communication for the gods and mankind.

#### 4. The Altered Concept of Heroism in the Plays

It is from the perspective of sacrifice that the reader or audience can discern the projection and subversion of the motif of the saviour hero which lies underneath the two plays' mythic dimension. In *Morountodun*, for instance, it is the principle which foregrounds the significance of Titubi's initial obsession with, and the desire to replicate, Moremi's heroic exploits to save the ancient people of Ife in Yoruba mythology, which her psychological and intellectual development in the play shatters or demystifies later. The Moremi myth is not only central as a key motivation of the creative impulse behind the play, it is a deliberate narrative strategy to examine and subvert the concept of heroism. The myth of a saviour of a people, community or humanity from looming destruction, evil or monster is a narrative of burden, suffering and sacrifice, which is present in the "psychic residue" (Abrams 10) of all races, and which plucks "the chords of memory" (G. Steiner 326). But its adoption in the play and the rejection of the Moremi type of individual heroism by Titubi, which only serves to entrench despotism, challenge such archetypal image of heroism.

The moment Titubi steps on the stage, at the beginning of the play, with her team of like-minded supporters to disrupt the play Director's performance, the prominence of the 'Moremi necklace' worn by her and her little group of female friends "superbly dressed with lots of jewellery" (Mor 6-7) is the first symbol in the play to suggest the obsession with the Moremi heroic tale. It is to this class of the 'well-fed' and rich urban dwellers that the myth of Moremi seems to have more meaning. Titubi's obsession is further given prominence while in prison as she tells her visiting mother that she taught her the story of Moremi: "when I was still too young to understand ... 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" (Mor 20). Later, while awaiting the rebels' rescue from the prison as it has been planned by Superintendent Salami, "she puts on the necklace and seems to go into a reverie" (Mor 31). The next two scenes (31-39) are the first flashbacks, which take the reader and audience into the Moremi myth in the play. The scenes are understood as a journey through Titubi's mind to the ancient Ife, the locale of the



flashback, where the travails, the fears, self-doubt, sacrifice of Queen Moremi and the discouragements from friends, co-wives, relatives and her royal husband, are seen to be akin to Titubi's mental experiences in preparation for the planned espionage to the camp of the peasant farmers.

There are many versions of the Moremi tale. They are all similar but different in a matter of details but the story common to all the versions is that a queen of the royal house of Ife volunteered to be captured by strange Igbo warriors looking like quasi-human creatures with regalia made from grasses and raffia palms and strange hoods covering their heads and who they initially thought were sent by the gods to punish the land. As they continually raided the land of Ife, Moremi made them capture her. She was taken to the land of the Igbo where she studied their secrets and escaped back to Ife to divulge them to her people who used the secrets to defeat the enemies. After her return she is made to redeem her pledge to sacrifice her only son, "Olu-Orogbo" to the god of "the sacred brook called Esinminrin" (Harold Courlander 50). However, the reconstructed version of the myth in the play stops when in order to discourage her husband in his pressure to dissuade her from the seeming suicide mission, she lies to him that she has been unfaithful to him. Her husband, King Oranmiyan, eventually permits her to go.

A close study of the artistic consciousness behind the playwright's construction of the play's plot reveals that, Titubi, as the protagonist of the play, helps to draw similarity and contrast between the Agbekoya farmers' uprising, which was a fact of history, and the popular Moremi heroic exploits in Yoruba mythology. This explains the need for a different and more relevant kind of heroism in the modern African postcolonial setting. It is no surprise, therefore, that having initially been obsessed with the Moremi legendary image so much so that she volunteers to save the upper class by helping government forces seek out the secrets of the rebels so that the latter will be defeated, Titubi changes and takes the side of the poor: "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" (*Mor* 70). She further informs the mother while she holds Superintendent Salami at gun point: "He [Salami] knows the truth ....

He won't be in such a hurry to order the massacre of children ... for there is no way you can win a war against a people whose cause is just. As long ... as the law remains ... the privilege of a handful of powerful men ..." (*Mor* 70).

The play, therefore, poses the following questions to reader and audience: of what relevance are traditional myths, which serve to entrench and bolster the mental and physical well-being of the ruling class and the rich? How have such myths redeemed the plight of the underprivileged in the light of modern day pervasive mass disillusionment, starvation and poverty occasioned by official corruption and irresponsibility of the ruling class? Which of the two disparate classes clearly distinguishable in the postcolonial and post-independence Africa, has more need of redemption and heroism: the class of the defenceless, deprived and oppressed or that of the oppressors and the affluent? With Titubi's rejection of Moremi - the saviour of the ancient Ife - the play answers the foregoing questions in favour of the downtrodden signified by the protesting peasant farmers. For their struggle in the play to force government forces to a negotiation table is a victory which, sub-textually, affirms that collective heroism is a better, more practicable and achievable ideal, to individual heroism; and that, gains of collective sacrifice are a more memorable victory to savour than any that individual heroism may bring. Furthermore, it is the mass of the economically deprived people who need to rise up collectively as heroes to save themselves instead of waiting for an individual to do it for them. This is the major significance of the play's subversion of the Moremi myth achieved through an entrenchment of group action against official oppression and deprivation, which Titubi subsequently and unequivocally takes side with in words and in deeds. The collective action in this dimension of struggle for liberation by the poor and disadvantaged of the society requires the involvement of men and women, the old and the young, the strong and the weak.

Notwithstanding the defeat and death of Marshal (the farmers' field commander) and his team in the final conflict at the end of the play, the farmers' collective struggle bears the fruit of forcing government to a negotiating table. This defeat of Marshal in his last mission cannot be interpreted as the failing of a collective affirmation and action or collective heroism. In the play, the concept of the 'saviour hero' shifts from the individual to the collective; and Marshal dies in the play because he loses this meaning as he is overwhelmed by ego, self-conceit and hubris symptomatically revealed in his speech and action thus: "... . I am dreaming, and so much still to do! Bogunde! Kokondi! Kick me awake! Let me hear a song of fire to rouse my spirit. [KOKONDI starts a war song which they all pickup.] That's better! Now I am a man again ..." (*Mor* 78). Marshal ends up tragically with his team of warriors because his last mission does not receive the blessing of the majority of the peasants including Baba their camp leader after the government and the peasants have agreed to negotiate peace terms. In the disorientation of Baba, he prophetically affirms that "[t]hey will not come back" (*Mor* 78).

Much as the concept of the traditional saviour hero is reinforced by Moremi myth, Titubi's rejection of it is the play's displacement of the traditional concept. Heroism as a concept can only be significant in the light of contemporary realities if it is championed by the mass of the poor and the downtrodden, though they are also flawed as a group in the play. It is when the struggle is collective or collaborative that its fruits are more valuable

and will make greater impact. The universal truth communicated in the play, therefore, is one of unending class conflict and redemption after group sacrifice and affirmative action of the collective. Some traditional myths in Africa such as the Moremi's and the ritual practices in them have become means of entrenching superstition and defective value system that need to be dislodged for modern African society to grow progressively.

*No more the Wasted Breed* also interrogates known myths surrounding the dying god whose death supposedly brings renewal, the infallibility of the gods and the saviour ritual of sacrifice - which points partly to a dimension of the biblical stories of the fall of man and that of Jesus the Saviour who is the ultimate sacrifice for the expected individual and communal salvation from eternal damnation. It is obvious that the significance of the death of goddess Elesu to the community in the play is not like those of Tammuz, Adonis, Osiris and Dionysus in which the specific forms of their worship "were ultimately identical" and commonly viewed as "a personification of the ebb and flow of nature's life in the cycle of the seasons" (Henri Frankfort 141 and 143). Elesu's death is not for the purpose of human transcendence and cleansing for redemption like in the biblical story of Jesus Christ. Elesu's death rather signifies the community's victory over, and liberation from, cosmic powers. It elevates humanity's potential up to the level arrogated to the supernatural forces. Biokun and Saluga's victory proves that humankind is capable of attaining the heights of the supernatural through self enlightenment, courage, resourcefulness, and industry and by dislodging the strangleholds of superstitions; and that, the most credible saviour of the human community is mankind. By resisting the pressure and caprices of the gods and their human agents in the play, the victory of the humans further intimates that the demands of any forces outside the human community to redeem it are costlier than the pains which make humans seek the redemption.

The *gods* in the play exhibit human traits and foibles reminiscent of the portrayal of gods by the Greek classical tragedian, Euripides, as petty, self-conceited, tyrannical, insensitive, unreasonable and capricious. These shortcomings evident in the character of goddess Elusu confront the reader/audience at the beginning of the play when she admires and gloats over the destruction she has brought upon the human community for polluting her waters and for the people's failing to continue the ritual of communal cleansing always done to appease her (NMWB 88). She lays all the blame on the people of the riverine community when in actual fact they were helplessly overpowered by the vicissitudes of the industrial age and its attendant modern capitalist forces. Actually, as informed in the play, the resultant social changes and aquatic violations decried by the deities began with the advent of the colonial powers who navigated through the waters, purportedly owned and controlled by the gods and goddesses of the sea and inland waters, to exploit both the human and natural resources of the indigenous people. These are the very incidents which overturned local customs and ushered in a new way of life. Meanwhile, the former colonial powers, the emergent rich black ruling class replacing the colonial masters, and their powerful capitalist friends have continued to traverse the waters in big ships in peace and comfort and ignored by the gods of the land while the poor and underprivileged are made to suffer and atone for the social, cultural and territorial violations.

The misplaced vendetta of goddess Elusu on the fictive African community of Egure is indeed a case of injustice. It shows that the gods are no longer our saviours neither are they capable of appointing anyone to undertake a heroic task to redeem society. It further indicates that the local people have become wiser and more knowledgeable than their gods. As such the deities are no more relevant to humanity in respect of the contemporary scheme of things. The rejection of the ritual imperatives is the abortion of the supposedly redeeming saviour ritual of self-sacrifice. It is a rebellious stance against the atonement seeking goddess, Elusu. The human community wins the battle and in many ways achieves a greater result than may have been possible if they had acceded to the deadlier and riskier carrier ritual sacrifice. A major achievement of the human community is that the battle is collectively fought and won. Such task aimed at social transformation is no longer going to be the tragic responsibility of an individual or his family because they are designated to be the community's carrier but a collective responsibility to work for the good of all. Also, the carrier ritual and the traditional institution that fosters it are rendered obsolete and made irrelevant. Lastly, the human community wins an eternal autonomy from a circle of perpetual servitude to the gods signified by the metaphor of the dying god in the lamentation of Elusu when told by Olokun to resurrect Saluga: "Stand! Take life again, go on, suck my breasts, my life! Live and watch a goddess die!" (NMWB 110). It's a new dawn as Saluga also puts it: "It's a new world! The poor shall raise their heads! Men shall be free!" (NMWB 110).

## 5. Conclusion

The concept of heroism and societal redemption has been one of the dominant motifs in Osofisan's drama, which recurs in his myth based plays. Its depiction is both a re-evaluation and a subversion of the traditional and cultural perspective which is inconsistent with the clamour/desire for economic and social progress in the postcolonial African society. This has served as a platform from which Osofisan launches his satirical attack on the foundation of society and retrogressive social beliefs and customs. The subversive temperament of Osofisan's drama seen, for instance, in his iconoclastic and populist portrayal of heroism, redemption and sacrifice as observed in the two plays selected in this article is not the artistic and ideological representation of Marxist ideal in which the

downtrodden wake up from docility and innocence to change the history and reality of exploitations and bourgeois culture, neither is it the idyllic portrayal of African indigenous cultural heritage. Rather, it is a subversiveness which interrogates the historical, cultural, sociopolitical and socioeconomic realities that have become part of African heritage. It is one which identifies oppressive structures and anti-progressive elements in all systems in which members of all strata are implicated in Africa's historical and contemporary realities and which will only be overcome through a mass conscious evolution of an egalitarian and compassionate society. This, from the plays' sub-texts, can be attained through mass effort to consciously change their defective value system. Osofisan has indeed said in one of his interviews with Awodiya that, he reinterprets history and myth for man's self-rediscovery (*Excursions* 47). The Yoruba Moremi myth subjected to scrutiny in *Morountodun*, and the deities treated likewise in *No More the Wasted Breed* are depicted not only for aesthetic purposes but also to make profound comments on society.

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