Femi Osofisan: Theatre and Performance in a Fragmented World

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The world, in its global meaning, constitutes the various diverse nations, countries, ethnicities, communities, families and individuals. These diverse and uneven cartographic units also embody all kinds of differences: economic, gender, national, social, biological, religious, cognitive, cultural, technological, age, etc. This fundamental construct renders the globe as a huge corpus comprising a plethora of smaller definitive entities. It is in respect of this understanding that the world is construed as constitutive of fragments. Paradoxically, the notion of a fragmentary globe already implicates a global belongingness/sameness. Thus, what we have is a patently holistic world constituted by disparate identities; a world of difference. Conceived as global fragments, these identities possess and are burdened with what we could construe as the Du Boisian ‘double consciousness’ – being a unit as well as a part of a whole, sometimes operating in a state of contradictions and conflicts.

Much of the conflicts and frictions in the world emerge from this paradoxical consciousness, with shifting loyalty between the whole and its constituent fragments. In view of the reality that differences continue to emerge, even from erstwhile composite entities, we could observe not only that the world is positively fragmented but is continuously fragmenting.

The notion of the world as fragmented or fragmenting is often construed negatively, hence the loud call for a healing or suturing of some sort. Gayatri Spivak suggests that “perhaps our problem is that we are not fragmenting, or fragmented, enough.” She explains that what she has in mind “is a different vision of the whole, where, instead of claiming a holistic space for ourselves, we think of ourselves as a fragment fitting into a patterned whole.” Thus, talking about fragments is actually talking about difference within sameness. However, sameness in this sense, translatable to globalism, is often hegemonic especially where it tends to gloss over...
difference resulting in marginalization and oppression, where differences are often suppressed in the name of universal sameness. However, claims to universality or global citizenship are often underlined/informed by self-interest and tend to undermine difference. Such claims are largely hegemonic and oppressive because they are ordinarily invoked by dominant identities in order to elide or suppress difference, resulting in discriminatory and oppressive practices. In this respect/manner the world has witnessed diverse conflicts, such as racist, religious and ethnic fundamentalisms. For instance, “All lives matter”, as a riposte to “Black lives matter”, is such a claim to universal sameness which elides/glosses over racism and inequities.

Thus these smaller constituents are fragments of the larger globe; collectively, they populate the globe; fragments are proofs and existence of individual beings and perspectives. In Africa, for instance, apart from the violations of rights of individuals, ethnicities and nationals within the continent, there is the imposing ghosts of colonists that give rise to narratives and legends of the oppression of indigenous peoples and particular nations. Like most committed writer-activists of the Third World, Femi Osofisan exemplifies this double bind. This mode of perception epitomises our thematic interest here: a fragmented world.

To reflect the interdisciplinary contributions of Femi Osofisan to the academy, and his use of African performance culture to expose societal ills through his writing, the conference is inviting papers by scholars exploring his work, and drama, music, dance, poetry and literature from a range of perspectives, including but not limited to the work of his contemporaries.

Contributions are therefore sought on any or a combination of these thematic areas:

- Osofisan, theatre and the African worldview
- Fragmented worlds, performance and the authorial imagination
- Wars, insurgencies and poverty in postcolonial societies
- Osofisan, gendered identities, race and African matters
- Alienation, forms and stylistic inventions
- Fiction and the African writer
- Gender and Femininity in the work of Nigerian writers
- Comedy and Satire and African performance space
- African diasporan cultural encounters in the works of Femi Osofisan
- Osofisan, Poetry and Power Semantics
- Adaptations, Re-readings, translations and unworking text in African
Femi Osofisan studied in Ibadan, Dakar and Paris, and taught theatre and comparative literature at the University of Ibadan for thirty-four years. He is currently Professor Emeritus at the University as well as Distinguished Professor of Theatre Arts at the Kwara State University, Nigeria.

An award-winning poet, writer, actor, company director, producer, journalist, scholar and a playwright with over fifty plays, Osofisan commands a long-standing interest in reinterpreting European works in the context of African – specifically Yoruba – traditions and customs, as well as plays that interrogate Yoruba culture and traditions. He emphasises representation of gender and identity within cultural institutions, including the society, where his interventions authorise positions of equality and justice. His dramaturgy is authentically African and innovative, in terms of form and technique, concerns he has employed in interrogating several canonical texts by authors such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, JP Clark-Bekederemo, DO Fagunwa, William Shakespeare, Anton Chekhov, Nikolai Gogol, Bertolt Brecht, Georges Feydeau, Max Frisch, Euripides and Sophocles. His work questions globalized neo-colonialism and terrorism on the one hand, and Nollywood and the culture of Nigerian society on the other.

As a total theatre artist, Osofisan has made indelible marks in the writing of stage drama, satirical essays, dance, music(al), comedy, standup comedy, and their other
various combinations. He has been acknowledged as a major African poet (with Okinba Launko as pen name); and he has been described as a compelling media person, being a newspaper columnist and public intellectual, combined with his works on TV, radio, print media, digital media, social media, photography, and film.

Contact Info:

Prof Olakunbi Olasope, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Dr Sola Adeyemi, Goldsmiths University of London, UK

Dr Tunji Azeez, Lagos State University, Nigeria

Contact Email:
femiosofisan2021@gmail.com