

Iyunola Osagie. *African Modernity and the Philosophy of Culture in the Works of Femi Euba.*

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Femi Euba is a Nigerian playwright and novelist whose works has probably not received the critical attention it deserves. Perhaps more than any other writer of his generation, particularly those whose works have engaged with or challenged Wole Soyinka's ideology and interpretation of Yoruba cosmology and the idea of black consciousness, Femi Euba has situated his writing in Soyinka's "fourth area of existence", the chthonic realm where the mysteries of origin, life and tragedy are located. Until the publication of *African Modernity and the Philosophy of Culture in the Works of Femi Euba* however, little is known about Euba's writing, and there has been no critical appreciation of his work. *African Modernity* is therefore an important contribution, not only for the study of Euba's oeuvre and his position in African playwriting, but also to the deeper understanding of African dramaturgy and the pervading influence of Yoruba philosophy and culture in modern Nigerian drama and on drama from the black diaspora.

What makes Euba's drama further important is his approach to writing from a tri-continental perspective. To inform his writing, Euba draws upon his Yoruba heritage, his performative experience on the London stage where Euba was for several years an actor, and his decades of living in the United States of America, with its many multicultural influences. These are factors that elevates the contributions of Euba to African playwriting, as Iyunola Osagie expresses in this book.

The first of *African Modernity's* five chapters, "Archetypes of Modernity", introduces us to the Yoruba ideology that underpins Euba's writing. It also discusses the centrality of Esu to the generation of meaning and the creation of dramatic action in his writing. Euba, according to Osagie, "insists on a global Esu whose characters and actions implicate the entire world" (p. xxvi) and articulates his philosophy within this discourse of modernity with the use of ritual, myth and the performance elements in Yoruba culture. With this introduction into how his drama evolves, Osagie devotes the rest of the book to examining the values that Euba evokes in both traditional Yoruba culture and contemporary world – read 'black diaspora' – consciousness in his exploration of a philosophical approach to the intertextual engagement with Yoruba culture and, more particularly, to the writing of Wole Soyinka.

The analysis of *The Gulf* (1991), Euba's first play, which he wrote and produced for his doctoral degree in 1987 at the then University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), is quite instructive. Osagie points out how this play determined Euba's dramaturgy and how he used it to interrogate how the traditional Yoruba world negotiates an existence with the postcolonial effects of modern (Western) technology. *The Gulf* is a metaphor for the Middle Passage experience, not only as the chthonic realm of existence in Yoruba metaphysics, but also as the literal gulf that separates the Yoruba diaspora from, for instance, Yoruba culture.

Osagie further draws attention to Euba's other writings, especially his second play, *The Eye of Gabriel* (2002); and his adaptation of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, the epic satire on race *Dionysus of the Holocaust* (1998) that Kevin Wetmore in *The Athenian Sun in an African Sky* (2003) once described as "not only cross-cultural, but also cross-temporal". Osagie defines

Gabriel as a play that exemplifies the psychological interconnections between old gods and new worlds. She further provides a generous analysis of Euba's one act plays, with a concluding chapter on the only novel in his oeuvre, *Camwood at Crossroads*.

In *African Modernity*, Osagie's focus is on Femi Euba's deployment of Esu and Esu 'types' in his creative process to interrogate the idea of modernity, and to challenge concepts that are sometimes rigid and unbending in their acceptance (or non-acceptance) of tradition and culture, especially where cultures collide and interweave. *African Modernity* is a welcome addition to the growing body of critical work on African drama; it introduces a new 'voice' into the discourse and invites us to re-examine the politics of identity in modern drama.

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