

Interview

Interviewee:

Temilade Kosoko

Interviewer:

Olalekan Balogun

Transcriber:

Jayne Batzofin

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Balogun: Okay, good afternoon.

Kosoko: Good afternoon sir.

Balogun: Can you introduce yourself?

Kosoko: Okay, my name is Temilade Kosoko and I'm a thespian and professional actress.

Balogun: Okay, yeah umm, I have seen you in a couple of productions. One of the things I've noticed is that, in most plays that you are doing you've always played some very significant roles. Sometimes the lead roles which suggest that you are obviously a very strong and talented actress. Now can you share some of the experiences of the plays that you've done as a kind of a preamble to what we are going to be discussing today.

Kosoko: Okay, let me list some of the plays first. We have *Scar*, we have *A Little more Purple*, *Ade Ire*, *Ojuola*, *Oya*, *The Banter*, *Our Son the Minister*, even the last University of Lagos Convocation play, *The Gods are not to blame*.

Balogun: Okay, good. Most of these plays that you mentioned, maybe one or two, just give us a background into the experience, some kind of a synopsis and later we talk about what connects them in terms of tragedy.

Kosoko: Okay, *Scar* is basically a play about young girls that were physically, sexually, emotionally abused. So it's basically just them telling their stories to people, making them see that, okay these things still happen outside. So, speaking of *Oya*, the story is not like, it's real or something but it's like a sociological play but using the Gods to represent things are still happen in our society. It's about Ogun and Sango fighting over Oya. Oya being Ogun's wife, but Ogun is always at the battle front, he never had time for his wife. Eventually Sango comes for her and in the end she agrees to be with Sango.

Balogun: Okay, I said that earlier, that most of these plays are tragedies in some way. From your experience of being involved in most of these plays how would you describe tragedy to people, how would you explain it, in your own words, what is tragedy?

Kosoko: In my words, tragedy is pain. Pain that you either inflict by yourself or someone else inflicts on you. So using *Scar* as an example, I played the role of Eno. Eno is a young girl that umm... she lost her parents, her uncle sent her out of the house and she met a woman on the streets, who took her in. She took her in and all of a sudden she's talking about a particular chief. She takes the young girl to the chief, but Eno being a girl that grew up in the streets, she is smart, she found her way out. Like she stabs the chief and all of that. These things still happen, like it's everywhere. We have young girls outside, they don't have anywhere to stay and then these older women that are supposed to be like helpers to them, see it as an opportunity to use them to make money.

Balogun: mmm. So in a way *Scar*... *Scar* really was a kind of a play that addresses the you know-

Kosoko: Issues about young-

Balogun: - female prostitution, child trafficking-

Kosoko: - child trafficking-

Balogun: - and all of that.

Kosoko: Not just-

Balogun: So you talk about tragedy being the infliction of pain. So, are you saying that a play like that, apart from the fact that it reflects a society of us, you think it gives us another idea about what it means for a situation to be tragic?

Kosoko: Yes because looking at the story of Eno for example, the pain was not just inflicted by her. It started right from her family, it still happened, I don't know why-

Balogun: What do you mean that it started from her family?

Kosoko: Her family, yes, cause her uncle who through her out of the house is supposed to be an important member of her family. She lost her parents, and then in most Igbo communities, even now, once you don't have parents your family just wants to take over your parent's properties but they don't care whatever happens to you.

Balogun: mmm. So you are saying that, that kind of a tragedy apart from the fact that it is dramatised onstage in a play like *Scar*, it reflects some of the inner workings, the relationship that is still going on among the people.

Kosoko: Yes, yes.

Balogun: Okay now, let's relate to, when you were staging that play, what was the process, what was it like? You're given that role, what was it, give us a bit into the preparation for that kind of a tragedy.

Kosoko: Okay, when I was given the role, I would say it wasn't too difficult for me to present myself as Eno because I'm a girl and according to what I say...say 95% of girls in this world have been abused in one way or the other. It doesn't have to be physically, it could be emotionally, it could be psychologically. Even men working on the road, where guys talk to us alone, it's an abuse.

Balogun: Okay so you're saying most of the time, girls, young girls, have to endure verbal abuse-

Kosoko: yes, verbal abuse.

Balogun: - verbal abuse and this and that.

Kosoko: Yes a lot of it. So I read Eno's line, I tried to put myself in her shoes 'cause bad situations- okay let me give you an instance of when I was in a bus one day and there was a woman carrying a small baby and she had a little girl of about 5 years. She could not carry the both of them at the same time. She told the man sitting beside her to carry the child for her. All of a sudden the girl started acting like something was wrong. Then the mother was smart enough to notice that something was wrong with her daughter, she didn't let the guy know that she wanted to take the baby away. She just took her and immediately everybody saw that the guy's zip was already down. He was already

touching the girl, thinking that no other person would have- another problem was that people saw him but they didn't-do anything- it's not my business.

Balogun: So he just, in a public bus, you even had a paedophile have the confidence to even try to defile a young girl?

Kosoko: A very very young girl, not just-

Balogun: Okay, if you look at it, if you look at that situation, you are saying that, it was one of the tragic experiences that you had that helps you to prepare for the role. What does that particular incident say about the kind of society that we are in?

Kosoko: I think first of all, similar to me, justice is not really done to those who do these things.

Balogun: mmm.

Kosoko: 'Cause if literally they punish them if you ask me, I will say sexual abuse is punishable by death and death alone. Not, they will take them to prison and they will come out eventually and they will still continue what they were doing. 'Cause some of them, I don't see these prisons as anything, anymore. And it's not even just about the girl child, we have older ladies abusing younger boys.

Balogun: mmm. Okay so it's a two way thing.

Kosoko: It is.

Balogun: While we know that we have paedophiles, we also have some elderly women-

Kosoko: Yes, yes.

Balogun: - also taking advantage of young boys.

Kosoko: 'Cause even when we staged *Scar*, we made it mixed-gender, mixed-culture, we made it mixed gender.

Balogun: Okay.

Kosoko: There's another role of Ofure.

Balogun: Okay.

Kosoko: Ofure is a girl, her own father was the one giving her-

Balogun: Who was abusing her?

Kosoko: Yes. Giving her cocaine and the rest. To give to someone else.

Balogun: Oh okay, the father of Ofure actually turned her into a courier.

Kosoko: Yes, yes.

Balogun: Wow, that's interesting.

Kosoko: So we made Ofure a guy, the one we staged at Terra Kulture. So it's not just the female child, it's both ways.

Balogun: So if you look at this incident that you just mentioned now, two now. You have a young boy whose father was- who was turned into a... you know... a kind of a cocaine courier, drug addict. And we have a paedophile who was trying to abuse a young girl, right in the public bus. If you sum up these things together, these two incidents, these tragic incidents, how then can you begin to conceptualise tragedy even outside of the stage performance?

Kosoko: Well left to me, I feel tragedy is in a way accepted in this country.

Balogun: Why do you say that?

Kosoko: Because like I said earlier, justice is not being allowed to prevail. Like we see a lot of things and we just move our eyes.

Balogun: mmm.

Kosoko: Like I said, some people, it was after the mother of the girl removed her daughter, people in the bus were saying "ah, oh we saw him, we just didn't want to..." So you saw him but you didn't want to talk? Because you don't want to get into trouble.

Balogun: So people are actually even complicit in tragedy, with their silence.

Kosoko: Yes, it's because they don't want to get into trouble-

Balogun: So silence is some kind of endorsement so to speak.

Kosoko: yeah, yeah.

Balogun: And, what does that say about our society then? Or the societies in which some of these things happen?

Kosoko: Well, I would say that... (*sighs*) I don't know.

Balogun: So you think the kind of tragedy that happens in the outside world is even more (*chortles*), how do we say it...

Kosoko: Tragic.

Balogun: - more *tragic*. The tragedy that happens (*chortles*) is more tragic than what is dramatised onstage.

Kosoko: Sure, definitively.

Balogun: Okay now relate that to *The Gods are Not to Blame* that you mentioned, which is actually one of the most, one of the *main* concerns of this interview. *The Gods are Not to Blame*, you know this story very well. You've been involved in a number of plays before that, tell us your experience in *The Gods are Not to Blame*.

Kosoko: Okay, in *The Gods are Not to Blame* I acted as a chief. And to me, the play is, okay let's put it this way, starting from Odewale, when Odewale was born. I don't know but, up until now we still have people who believe in- I'm not trying to insult their Gods...but whatever it is, I don't know, people believe so much in their Gods that we forget that, there are some things that we should think of, humanism and the rest.

Balogun: Okay, so you feel that by your participation in the play, allowed you to form the opinion that even now people believe so much in supernatural to the extent that-

Kosoko: Yes.

Balogun: - what they are supposed to do to address certain things by themselves, they leave to the Gods.

Kosoko: Yes.

Balogun: You think that's tragic?

Kosoko: To me. 'Cause it's not just the traditional Gods, even the God that we worship.

Balogun: In terms of?

Kosoko: In terms of the churches, let take churches for example.

Balogun: Okay, okay.

Kosoko: The kind of-

Balogun: And Islam as well

Kosoko: Yes, the kind of rules that they have. I'm not trying to pinpoint any church, but we have churches that say you can't take blood transfusion, 'cause it's a sin- who is mixing... Someone is dying and then you just believe it's not done...

Balogun: That it's a sin to take blood transfusion-

Kosoko: Blood transfusion, yes.

Balogun: And then for that person, who is dying, who maybe had an accident or-

Kosoko: The person would-

Balogun: - who needed blood-

Kosoko: Would not take it-

Balogun: - would not take it.

Kosoko: - because it's a sin and the person would rather die. So who are we to blame in that situation?

Balogun: mmm. So you think sometimes religion also aids the kind of situation-

Kosoko: Yes.

Balogun: - that we consider to be tragedy in the society.

Kosoko: Yeah because some people...we have them...something will go wrong and then the first person they will go to is the pastor, instead of the hospital.

Balogun: mmm.

Kosoko: People now believe pastor prayer is more useful, they should rather take drips, injections and rest.

Balogun: Yeah, situations requiring medical attention-

Kosoko: Yes.

Balogun: - they take to the church.

Kosoko: Church.

Balogun: Okay. Now let's go back to *The Gods are Not to Blame*. You said you played the role of a chief.

Kosoko: Yes.

Balogun: What was it like putting the play together? Tell us a bit about the experience in terms of the rehearsal, in terms of the directorial approach of the director and all of those staging choices that were made.

Kosoko: Okay first of all *The Gods are Not to Blame* as adapted by Lekan Balogun...is something that I'm sure nobody saw coming. Even when we were in the play, at some point I was confused I did know where play was going. 'Cause the director wanted to make it the unusual umm... *The Gods are Not to Blame*. Because everyone knows the story. So we had about 11 chiefs, which is not in the play normally.

Balogun: As opposed to four?

Kosoko: It's supposed to be four, yes. So umm... being in the play was really tasking especially for me as the chief, 'cause I didn't really have lines and I had to be in the play for every second so...

Balogun: So how did you manage that? Your presence was meant to add to the- even in spite of not having lines to deliver in the play but you were onstage. How were you able to manage this process? And you are onstage for almost 70% of the time, so how did you cope with that?

Kosoko: Well, like-

Balogun: Considering that in other plays, you are either the lead role, you are either the supporting, the really supporting role and usually really significant. And then this role you are talking about in *The Gods are Not to Blame* is important but it doesn't have a line. How did you cope with that?

Kosoko: First of all, like I said, I'm a professional actress. Basically it's- all us do it, my facial expressions, like for every second I put myself in the play, 'cause at some point Odewale's line was really long and I want to get out of character but I still had to come back to being the chief. Learning some things about the Benin, because I play the Benin chief.

Balogun: mmm.

Kosoko: I learnt some things, some accents, some lines I could just put in between every line Odewale says.

Balogun: Okay now let's look at that play now in relation to what you talked about heavy reliance on the supernatural now in the modern times, you know. People getting more religious than necessary.

Now let's look at it. To what extent can you say that *The Gods are Not to Blame* that was done reflect the society that we live in. Apart from those two examples that you gave previously.

Kosoko: Okay although *The Gods are Not to Blame* is like, is ancient it was set in the ancient times but we understand that they only believe in their God. But now we are in a civilised world, at least we are better than we were before. But it's funny how until today, some people still believe so much in whatever it is that they believe in and whatever it is I feel is right-

Balogun: Destiny kind of?

Kosoko: - destiny for an example so...

Balogun: Okay so let's now talk about *Once upon an Elephant* where you were also, you played a major role of a woman who was forcefully taken from her betrothed husband and who also secretly now goes behind, continued the relationship then gets pregnant and was trapped between having to publically disclose the man that's responsible for the pregnancy at the risk of her own life, since she is now married to a tyrant, the King. How were you able to, you know, play this role? And the process of putting yourself in the mood to play the role, you know, for that tragic play?

Kosoko: Okay. Umm the role, I played the role of Omoyeni, who was married to Ajanaku, the tyrant.

Balogun: mmm.

Kosoko: I was married to Ajanaku, the tyrant as the King. So, let me first relate the story, you just narrated story, to our present society. A lot of girls, they are still forced to marry people they don't want to be with.

Balogun: mmm.

Kosoko: Just because they have an upper hand. That the people they are getting married to have an upper hand. And it still happens in the Northern society.

Balogun: The Northern part of Nigeria?

Kosoko: Yes. Like they make young girls, really young girls, get married to older men. That's you say because of money. But in the case of *Once upon an Elephant* Omoyeni is not a young girl but she was made to marry the King because he had an upper hand and because he wanted to marry her forcefully. So, me putting myself in that character was, it took a lot of practice because at some point I didn't really understand the character, it took a lot of reading of the script over and over again. But in the end I was able to put it together, by understanding the script.

Balogun: Okay so now how would you consider the kind of tragedy that is dramatised in *Once upon an Elephant* to Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are Not to Blame*?

Kosoko: (Sighs)How do I explain that? Okay... for *Once upon an Elephant*... (very softly) I don't know.

Balogun: Okay, thank you very much Temi Kosoko for granting this interview. Thank you very much

Kosoko: Yes sir, thank you sir.

Balogun turns off the audio recorder