

# Interview

**Interviewee:**

Ben Omowafola Tomoloju

**Interviewer:**

Olalekan Balogun

**Transcriber:**

Jayne Batzofin

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**Balogun:** Okay, I'm here with one of Nigeria's most distinguished theatre director, playwright and a writer by any standard. Good afternoon.

**Tomoloju:** Good afternoon.

**Balogun:** Can you just introduce yourself to us?

**Tomoloju:** Yes, thank you. My name is Ben Tomoloju. I am a dramatist, theatre director and a journalist. I trained at the University of Ibadan, although I graduated in English and Literary Studies I had full training in theatre between 1975 and 1978 after which I got involved in multifarious artistic activities particularly the Greek Tragedy and the performative aspects. I've been a playwright of course over time, I mean (*chuckles*) from as far back as my secondary school days I've been writing plays but more celebrated at the point when I was an undergraduate and I wrote *Flower's Introspect* a deliberately distorted title, you know for the, what I call the 'jeans generation', as a younger generation. I followed up with *Sacrilege and the Broadway*, with other plays, *We Only Went on the Search of Happiness* with other plays, *Let the Vanguard Come to Town*, and then to the other major plays *Jankariwo*, *This Proverb*, *Muje Muje*, *Amona*. I have a whole list of them I don't think I want to exhaust-

**Balogun:** Yeah there's a whole list of them-

**Tomoloju:** And then of course I've been a journalist, I picked it up as a Deputy Editor of the Guardian Newspaper in Lagos. Where I resigned in 1993, and I've been on a consultancy in terms of creative and media activities since then, yes.

**Balogun:** Thank you so very much for this. Okay this project, why we having the interview, this project is entitled Reimagining Tragedy in Africa and the Global South – RETAGS. Being led by Professor Mark Fleishman. Fleishman is the director of the Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies, University of Cape Town in South Africa. And he is also a distinguished South African director, he has run an independent theatre company, called Magnet Theatre, for over 30 years.

**Tomoloju:** Okay.

**Balogun:** Okay now, in this project we're looking at reimagination in whatever form, artistic and what have you, of Greek Tragedy. But then we're looking more into the broader horizon in terms of a redefinition of tragedy itself. And I know, you at a point in time, maybe about 20 or so years ago, you had this highly brilliant adaptation of *Iphigenia*...

**Tomoloju:** *In Taurus*.

**Balogun:** *In Taurus*, that you titled *Iphigenia Finds Ayelala*.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** Now, let's come to this performance, this play. I know Euripides has his own version, Goethe also has his version. Which of the versions did you actually adapt?

**Tomoloju:** Thank you very much. I adapted from the adapted. That is I adapted from Goethe. Of course I peep into Euripides quite alright but I sincerely adapted from Goethe. The same story, various levels of poetic articulation. And then in my own case, I had the challenge to do a kind of comparative, you know, insight into that legend of Iphigenia. From an African perspective. So it's like an African adaptation of Goethe's *Iphigenia In Taurus*, which I called *Iphigenia Finds Ayelala*-

**Balogun:** So in a way you are saying that in spite of adapting Goethe you still had an eye on Euripides?

**Tomoloju:** Of course.

**Balogun:** We still have that connection-

**Tomoloju:** We are fed-

**Balogun:** - between your play and the classic...

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** Now how did that idea come about, off record earlier before, you were talking about the Goethe Institute and some of... can we have an idea into that?

**Tomoloju:** Yes we had a long running project with the Goethe Institute.

**Balogun:** In Lagos?

**Tomoloju:** In Lagos, yes and of course not just Lagos but also the headquarters of the Goethe Institute in Bonn at that time was involved in this entire relationship. Intercultural activities between Africa and Europe. But essentially between, in our own case, between Nigeria and Germany. Alright, and it was something to do with virtually every department of theatre, you know within the practice. Tapping from Europe and tapping from Africa. At the literary level, you know, we could decide to pick a play from Europe, like in the first instance 1996 we did *Oedipus... Rex*.

**Balogun:** *Rex*.

**Tomoloju:** By Sophocles. And my own play *Amona*.

**Balogun:** That's a kind of an adaptation of *Oedipus Rex*?

**Tomoloju:** No. It was an original work-

**Balogun:** But inspired by *Oedipus Rex*?

**Tomoloju:** Yeah, it was of course a social drama with... an African worldview.

**Balogun:** Yeah, what I'm saying is that does it have any connection-

**Tomoloju:** No.

**Balogun:** It doesn't?

**Tomoloju:** Not thematically, not in terms of-

**Balogun:** Any other-

**Tomoloju:** - any plot wise, no.

**Balogun:** Okay so let's come back to the Goethe-

**Tomoloju:** So 1996 we had *Oedipus Rex* and then we had *Amona*. Then we did a workshop in 1997, I think it's Mark Freish...<sup>1</sup> *A Horse On My Back* or something... But we got Osofisan to adapt from Mark Freish, if I'm able to correctly pronounce it. And then Osofisan came out with... okay, we did *A Horse on my Back*...

**Balogun:** *A Horse on my Back*?

**Tomoloju:** - which was a workshop production.

**Balogun:** Okay who wrote that?

**Tomoloju:** Well that was a workshop production.

**Balogun:** Workshop production.

**Tomoloju:** Co-ordinated by my humble self, Jide Ogungbade of blessed memory and... I'll get the name one day, a German playwright, you know. We got artists together, major Nigerian artists Jahman Anikulapo, Yinka Davies, Muyiwa Oshinaike, Bob Okonedo and so on and so forth. So we started fabulating, so to speak, getting some story ideas together-

**Balogun:** Stories, yes.

**Tomoloju:** - until we got that *Horse on my Back*. And then, at the same time Osofisan was commissioned to write *Andorra goes Kinshasa*.

**Balogun:** Yes, I know that.

**Tomoloju:** He wrote and the original title he gave it was *Ah Kinshasa*. But then we had to appeal to him to let us have this, you know...

**Balogun:** German, Nigerian-

**Tomoloju:** German, Nigerian, yes, to scream on the title so that we know that there's some kind of connection. So we had *Andorra goes Kinshasa* and his strong thematic reference area was the problem going on in central Africa-

**Balogun:** At that point in time?

**Tomoloju:** - at that point in time.

**Balogun:** So that adaptation, Osofisan, under the aegis of the Goethe project-

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** Was a kind of a response to an African very violent situation of that time.

**Tomoloju:** Situation yes, that's it-

**Balogun:** Okay that said-

**Tomoloju:** And then after that workshop then we came to the-

**Balogun:** *Iphigenia*?

**Tomoloju:** - area of *Iphigenia*.

**Balogun:** Yes, okay.

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<sup>1</sup> Uncertain if this is the correct spelling

**Tomoloju:** And we had some discussion because we will normally have exploratory discussions, at the level, at the directorial level. And also at the level of the management of Goethe Institute. What play do we choose, who is going to write the play and so on and so forth. So the interesting play was *Iphigenia in Taurus* as adapted from Euripides by Goethe. And I found it virtually all sufficient, although I read Euripides but I relied more on-

**Balogun:** Goethe's version.

**Tomoloju:** - version. Since I was commissioned to do an adaptation.

**Balogun:** Okay.

**Tomoloju:** And they called it African Adaptation. And if it had to be African adaptation then there must be an African input, a strong African input in the body of the work. And of a legendary status as that of *Iphigenia*, and there so I spotlight *Ayelala*. A deity whom I referred to as the youngest Goddess in the Nigerian- in the Yoruba pantheon.

**Balogun:** mmm but Ayelala is not really that mentioned. I mean it's not really as popular as the other ones. That's one. Then the second one, Ayelala seemed to be more umm kind of identified with the Ilaje people. You are Ilaje, maybe you can shed some light-

**Tomoloju:** I will shed some light-

**Balogun:** - in relation to the plays.

**Tomoloju:** Yes I will shed some light on it because she's an epic hero, heroine. Umm... Ayelala is even more celebrated in and around Ijebu and Egbado area.

**Balogun:** Yes.

**Tomoloju:** But the legend started from Ilaje and interestingly, Ayelala the deity was not an Ilaje.

**Balogun:** Oh.

**Tomoloju:** She was actually an Ekiti slave girl.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** So could find this connections-

**Balogun:** So she is actually deified?

**Tomoloju:** She was deified. Now the story goes from the research of Professor Awolalu, Venerable Archdeacon, Professor Awolalu. I always referred to him because of the way modern day Christians demonise our history and our legend. To tell them that Awolalu was a clergyman, Lucas was a clergyman, Bolaji Idowu was a clergy man-

**Balogun:** Yes.

**Tomoloju:** - Awolalu was a clergyman of a very high status-

**Balogun:** And these are the distinguished Reverend Father-

**Tomoloju:** Reverend yes.

**Balogun:** - who wrote about Yoruba culture?

**Tomoloju:** Exactly. So I collected a few information, a background information from Professor Awolalu of course. Apart from the stories we have been told, you know...

**Balogun:** From childhood?

**Tomoloju:** From childhood. That's... there was a war between the Ilajes and the Apois over some kind of trespassing. I don't know who trespassed on the other, whether it was the Apois you know-

**Balogun:** Yeah.

**Tomoloju:** - that trespassed or the Ilajes trespassed. And it sparked off a war. And that was in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** Having been located at the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century I found that the Henry Townsend of this world were already making their marks on the Nigerian society. Mary Slessor was already making her mark on the Nigerian society. That in fact, Ayelala was younger than Mary Slessor.

**Balogun:** Interesting.

**Tomoloju:** And so she was within the cosmogony, you know it was exclusive of the Western, you know, Western encroachment and Western civilisation.

**Balogun:** It's amazing.

**Tomoloju:** And yet at that time the Westerners were already in Nigeria making impact and then we are busy creating, you know, deifying somebody. Now when this war took place it was very tough and the elders on both sides decided to meet and say we should bring an end to this war. It was a war on the rivers, not... it wasn't this guerrilla thing that we know. So the elders sat together and wanted to bring an end to the war. Then they said, they consulted the priest, the Ifa Priest. And the Ifa Priest who was ministering at that time on the Ilaje side was a grandfather to our own Professor Awolalu.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** Which probably umm you know sparked his interest in that aspect of Ilaje legend. So umm, so they said each community should bring a sacrificial, you know, a personage-

**Balogun:** Material?

**Tomoloju:** Yeah, somebody for sacrifice. So the Ilajes- the Apois brought a male and the Ilajes brought a female. And the female was actually not an Ilaje indigene.

**Balogun:** That's Ayelala?

**Tomoloju:** Ayelala herself was-

**Balogun:** Is that her real name?

**Tomoloju:** That's not her real name. The name emerged after her apotheosis. At the point of transition.

**Balogun:** Transition?

**Tomoloju:** Yes. So they brought this slave girl- Ekiti slave girl in Ilaje land.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** So the Apoi male sacrificial offering was, you know, was sacrificed and then when it was the turn of this slave girl to be sacrificed she said, she arrested everybody psychically and spiritually and said "everybody should stop and listen." That she knew she was going to die, she was actually prepared to go. She said "but let me warn you all, I should be the *last* human sacrifice to be... to be passed on in this land. I should be the last human being to be sacrificed."

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** "There should be no war amongst you, between the two of you anymore. And if there is war I will come back and I will deal with all those who proposed and who executed the war. Let me warn you, nobody should hurt one another. Witch, wizard, sorcerer, all of them, if I find that anyone hurts another human being... You know what you should do is throw a cowrie inside the water and call my name and I will come back and fight those people. Thieves and all sort of anti-social human beings should be aware because the moment you throw a cowrie into the water and into the river and invoke my name, I will go and destroy that person. I'm dying an innocent person, and it is with that voice of innocence and with all the power that is attached, that I'm speaking with you do not transgress against my law." And she dives into the water and said "Ayelala o" "The World is big", and that's why the deity is called.

**Balogun:** Ayelala, the world is big.

**Tomoloju:** And surprisingly she has expanded her horizons beyond Ilaje and Apois into Ijebu, into Ekiti, which was her original home, anyway into a Egbado, Ilaro... you know all over, even in Lagos here, you know. Now what became interesting to me in particular is her moral canons. That she sounds contemporary, against internecine wars, against all things that hurt, the very things that even the conventional religions preach against; she preaches against it, she doesn't only preach she also casts retribution, retributive spell- and such- yes. And so I developed it also to a point that I make her, I make of her a reincarnation in a character that I feature in *Iphigenia Finds Ayelala*.

**Balogun:** Okay.

**Tomoloju:** And that reincarnated character is called Yetunde, that is mother has come back. Which is a very very significant name among the Yorubas.

**Tomoloju:** So it's the ancestress coming back and Ayelala, and Iphigenia, which I fused into one single, you know, legendary reference point, you know. So they become like Siamese, you know. And now incarnated in the life and soul of Yetunde, the principal character.

**Balogun:** Alright sir, this story of Ayelala...

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** - that you've told...

**Tomoloju:** Yeah.

**Balogun:** ... and using it to recreate the Yetunde character...

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** In what ways can we link Ayelala's story in the way that you took Goethe's *Iphigenia in Taurus*... that you adapted?

**Tomoloju:** Thank you very much. I did not want to distort the flow of the legend of Iphigenia.

**Balogun:** By Goethe?

**Tomoloju:** By Goethe. I retained the plot.

**Balogun:** Okay.

**Tomoloju:** But I *expanded* it to also accommodate the Ayelala dimension.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** And so umm... one phenomenologically, you know in terms of even the setting, pictorially, scenographically. The setting I, you know this umm houses on the stilts?

**Balogun:** Stilts?

**Tomoloju:** Yeah, you must, you have travelled far.

**Balogun:** An Ilaje environment?

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** That was the location?

**Tomoloju:** That was my set. So that house on...

**Balogun:** Stilts.

**Tomoloju:** - on stilts with the platform and then you know- that was my set designed by Shina Ayodele. So that was it, to make it stand out, to know that this is the geographical location we are talking about. Not-

**Tomoloju:** Not, yeah, not the Western not the-

**Balogun:** Yes... where the set is, yes.

**Tomoloju:** So then I also bring in to it the rituals associated with-

**Balogun:** The Ilaje?

**Tomoloju:** With the Ilaje people and worshippers of Ayelala. And even whether you worship or not, there is the confessional. Which is attached to ritual, the idea of casting the cowrie into the river

becomes a part of the plot until the retribution was given because there was an antagonist against Yetunde, Erelu, who's hard-core traditional woman who doesn't even like the idea of, you know (*chuckles*), in this time around Yetunde is a nursing sister in charge of the health centre.

**Balogun:** So Iphigenia becomes Yetunde the nursing sister?

**Tomoloju:** The nursing sister.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** And the message was so socially relevant to a point even of women emancipation, you know. (*Chuckles*) So you know. So she just doesn't want Yetunde hanging around, and Yetunde is a Priestess. And that's an overriding power over the King.

**Balogun:** Okay so what you are saying is that this nursing sister doubles as a Priestess.

**Tomoloju:** Priestess, yes.

**Balogun:** So which means that the character is a kind of has some form of duality-

**Tomoloju:** Duality.

**Balogun:** - that fits into Yoruba concept of being.

**Tomoloju:** Yeah that's it.

**Balogun:** That's interesting.

**Tomoloju:** She has a kind of duality and symbolic too of taking care of the spiritual health of the community as well as the physical-

**Balogun:** Physical.

**Tomoloju:** - yes health of the community. And you will also note as time goes on that she also takes care of the ideological health of the community.

**Balogun:** mmm in what ways?

**Tomoloju:** In commanding, you know, the community to refrain from all sorts of anti-social activities-

**Balogun:** That could harm the-

**Tomoloju:** - that could harm the environment and harm the citizenry. No- there was to be a human sacrifice as in Euripides and Goethe.

**Balogun:** Yes.

**Tomoloju:** Human sacrifice was you know-

**Balogun:** A significant part of the plot.

**Tomoloju:** Ah yes. And in accordance with Ayelala's re-

**Balogun:** Original story-

**Tomoloju:** - original story-

**Balogun:** - that you-

**Tomoloju:** - should not.

**Balogun:** Interesting.

**Tomoloju:** So she enforces that to a point that she has a, just like a turning of the eyes between herself and the King.

**Balogun:** Sir let's ask, let's move out of the play into the environment now.

**Tomoloju:** Yeah

**Balogun:** This performance was given what year?

**Tomoloju:** 1999.

**Balogun:** Was there any specific social situation going on reality, maybe in Nigeria, in Africa, that we can say that the play alludes to?

**Tomoloju:** Yeah. Just around that time, we were just getting out of a situation of dictatorship.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** And we were also into...

**Balogun:** Oh I think I remember, that's the beginning of the Third Republic.

**Tomoloju:** That's the one-

**Balogun:** Right

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** - after more than 23 years of military-

**Tomoloju:** - yes military era.

**Balogun:** Fourth Republic?!

**Tomoloju:** Fourth Republic

**Balogun:** Sorry.

**Tomoloju:** Fourth yeah.

**Balogun:** So is that supposed to be some kind of exorcism of the (*chortles*) the violent, military spirit that took over Nigeria? Can we say that?

**Tomoloju:** Umm well to some extent when you look at it spiritually, yes. To the extent that we invoke the higher orders.

**Balogun:** mmm what do you mean by the higher orders?

**Tomoloju:** Of course the celestial... of course the deities-

**Balogun:** The deities?

**Tomoloju:** Yes-

**Balogun:** Okay that is how-

**Tomoloju:** - the deities-

**Balogun:** - Ayelala's story becomes really very relevant?

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** In terms of-

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** That's interesting.

**Tomoloju:** To see, to yeah, the exorcism-

**Balogun:** Exorcism yeah.

**Tomoloju:** - of all these ills.

**Balogun:** ills yes.

**Tomoloju:** All the dirty things that the country has been experiences, the murders, the tortures, sending people to the gallows. And you know Nigeria was replaced with such in those days. And you find that just shortly before then Saro-Wiwa was killed-

**Balogun:** he was killed yes.

**Tomoloju:** - you know journalists were being bombed, you know. Political opponents were being assassinated and then some incarcerated, you know. And in the context of that play you find that there was there was even an attempt to use the younger brother of Iphigenia now Yetunde, and his friend as human sacrifices because they stepped on the island, you know at a point where strangers were not supposed to come over to the island. So they infringed on the laws of the land-

**Balogun:** Unknowingly?

**Tomoloju:** Knowingly and they were candidates for, you know, as-

**Balogun:** Human sacrifices.

**Tomoloju:** Human sacrifice and Yetunde had to intervene without even knowing that the victim, the would be victims were his own brother-

**Balogun:** Own brother?

**Tomoloju:** - sorry her own brother... and...

**Balogun:** His friend?

**Tomoloju:** ... and his friend.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** And so her disposition was just being natural, be humanitarian, being altruistic. And so what we celebrated in the play was the altruism, you know. That should dominate the affairs of a country like Nigeria and a continent like Africa and in fact the entire world-

**Balogun:** Universe?

**Tomoloju:** - universe.

**Balogun:** So let's now come back to it. You say the play now, the Goethe's original that also gets us towards the Euripides' version...

**Tomoloju:** Yeah.

**Balogun:** Is now relocated into the Ilajes, what are those cultural aesthetics? That you now brought from the Ilaje environment and you infuse in the play and the performance. Now I want to talk about the performance, those staging choices. So what are those cultural elements, those artistic elements, resources that you use in the play?

**Tomoloju:** Thank you. Firstly I have mentioned the scenography.

**Balogun:** Yes.

**Tomoloju:** Straight from the Ilaje landscape.

**Balogun:** In terms of the set, the symbolism?

**Tomoloju:** Yes. Then the names are altered, definitely.

**Balogun:** Yes.

**Tomoloju:** And they're altered and symbolic significant of the tradition of the Ilajes, you know names like Erelu, names like Yasere or... Ojomo and these Chieftain names-

**Balogun:** Chieftain yes.

**Tomoloju:** - yes yes. And the King himself is called Adegun. So we altered that in terms of the nomenclatures. And then we also ensured that we follow what tradition we met on the ground from our old masters like Hubert Ogunde. We had an opening-

**Balogun:** An opening glee

**Tomoloju:** - Opening glee. Which was like a procession, you know. It was like a ritual procession. Not just opening glee for the fantasia of it, to catch the attention of the audience and later made them concentrate on the play when eventually starts running. No but it was ritualistic and so the performers were, you know, dancing and-

**Balogun:** Can you still remember any of the songs that you used? I know you composed your songs.

**Tomoloju:** (A wa omolule awa seba/ Awa majuba kibase o/ awa ma lule awa seba)<sup>2</sup>

**Balogun:** So what does that mean?

**Tomoloju:** We the sons and daughters of this land have come to pay homage. We the sons and daughters of this land have come to pay homage. We have made obeisance, may our obeisance receive your endorsements. We the sons and daughters of this land have come to pay homage. So that's the-

**Balogun:** So this song, this song obviously is part of a repertoire of music when Ayelala is worshipped or you composed this?

**Tomoloju:** No no I composed it. I just don't like to-

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<sup>2</sup> See meaning in the next conversation.

**Balogun:** Pick from the-

**Tomoloju:** - pick from the national repertory because it's very similar to, not necessarily, but of course we had a (*sings: Ayelala ugbo koko/mama jaye baje o ayelala igbokoko*).<sup>3</sup> Alright? Now that's an original song of the Ayelala ritual-

**Balogun:** What does that mean?

**Tomoloju:** - that is Ayelala of Ugbokoko.

**Balogun:** Ugboland

**Tomoloju:** Yes, Ayelala of Ugboland. Do not let the world be spoilt Ayelala of Ugboland. There's an extension of it. So of course this will be an embellishment, a linguistic embellishment.

**Balogun:** So that song, so to speak, is like still trying to lay emphasis on the role of Ayelala some kind of an arbiter, some kind of a-

**Tomoloju:** Oh yes, yes-

**Balogun:** -central figure.

**Tomoloju:** - intercessor-

**Balogun:** - ok-

**Tomoloju:** - yes, yes.

**Balogun:** Okay so let's look at other aesthetic choices-

**Tomoloju:** Other aesthetic choices of course even as it is written in English, so we also bring in some local proverbs, some Yoruba proverbs. We also have the rhetorical display of the Yorubas, you know with wise-crackings and stuff like that. But like I said, there's also the ritual of retribution. Which also is within the Ayelala, you know, worship and Ayelala world view.

**Balogun:** World view, okay.

**Tomoloju:** So the victim this time around was the Erelu the antagonist to Yetunde, who is a reincarnation of Iphigenia and Ayelala combined. So we had the tossing of the cowrie, you know we had the confession of Erelu. And we also had the confession taking place in an act of possession as described by J.P. Clark in *Aspects of Nigerian Drama* or something like that- or *African Drama*. You know, possession. So that one was there as our own input. And I think even as composed as Yetunde is, she also gets into her own level of possession especially when she has to confront-

**Balogun:** The spirit imbibes the human body?

**Tomoloju:** That's right, yes. So when Erelu began to offer incantations and spells and so, it has to be countered at the same level, even higher level by Yetunde the Priestess/ nursing sister. So that one is also there. Well of course costumes will play a role there.

**Balogun:** Yes.

**Balogun:** The choreography, the dances-

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** Who choreographed the-

**Tomoloju:** The choreography was done by Saidi Ilelaboye, who was also the music director. And we did a sort of (*chortles*) a re-enactment of a regatta, you know. Because this thing-

**Balogun:** As part of the play

**Tomoloju:** yes

**Balogun:** - you know just to show the specificity of the play to the environment, yes.

**Tomoloju:** - to the environment yes. So it was just, we had to exercise an economy of cast. So two/ three girls, you know playing-

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<sup>3</sup> Ayelala of Ugbo(land) do not let the world be spoilt/crumble.

**Balogun:** The regatta?

**Tomoloju:** - in the river and then Yetunde watching them. So we also brought that in. This- and then of course it wasn't brought in just for the sake of, you know, explaining the environment. It was brought in as part of the story evolving-

**Balogun:** Part of the narrating?

**Tomoloju:** Yes. Like the young girls wanted to know, why Yetunde chose not to get married.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** And she being a role model, they felt a bit disturbed that she should have a husband, you know. They were teasing her and eventually got close to her and were asking her asking questions, about her personal life. This will be expected from an African girl-

**Balogun:** yes

**Tomoloju:** - "why are you not married, why, are you not a woman, are you telling us the younger ones not to also get married? But you are the Priestess, why don't you marry the King? We even understood that the King wants to marry you, why do you refuse the King?" And so things like that we brought all this in and so much more, there was the combat between King Adegun and Yetunde's younger brother, whom we call Okanla

**Balogun:** Okanla

**Tomoloju:** Okanlawon is also specific because he was the only male among three prince and princesses. In his own land. The pride of royalty is as it is in Europe as it is in Africa. So a Prince, a crowned Prince, meets a King. And so that pride, you know, swells. And so it leads to a clash of ego and so that was what developed into the combat until it was realised that in fact Okanlawon was a younger brother to Yetunde. That one we kept intact, but we kept it also realistic to the African-

**Balogun:** Environment?

**Tomoloju:** - environment and thought system. Then most importantly there was a tragic trend but we recall that the Ifa, when the Ifa casts, (*pause in recording*) when the Ifa Priest casts the divination objects and he can see tragedy ahead. The supplicants is free to ask Ifa, isn't there any other thing we can do about it?

*(Audio recording ends)*

**Balogun:** Okay sir, you were talking about the role of Ifa and how central it is to the performance of *Iphigenia Finds Ayelala*.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** Can you now elaborate on that?

**Tomoloju:** Thank you. I was, let me just say that I'm referring to Ifa because it will tend to temper down the harsh mobility that is involved in tragic stories that are not particularly African.

**Balogun:** mmm what do you mean by that sir?

**Tomoloju:** Yes because in Ifa divination when the diviner casts the Ifa nuts

**Balogun:** Nuts

**Tomoloju:** - nuts, yes. And it portends a looming tragedy. It's very possible or even it is allowed for the supplicant to seek further information to ask the diviner isn't there anything we could do about it?

**Balogun:** Sir, so let me quickly point out something here. You know Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are Not to Blame...*

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** ... begins on such a note.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** When the Ifa Priest says the boy is-

*(Feedback from a cell phone builds up and then a cell phone ring begins to play. The audio recording ends)*

**Balogun:** Okay sir I was going to say just to draw a comparison between *Iphigenia finds Ayelala* and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are Not to Blame*, another adaptation of a Greek tragedy. I was saying that Ola Rotimi's *The Gods* begins with a scene where the Ifa Priest comes in and defines you know for Kind Adetusa and his wife Ojuola, that the son that they just had, he's going to kill his father and marry the mother. But Rotimi was a bit silent on what you were going to say about- because normally in any Yoruba community if a supplicant goes to an Ifa Priest and divines... irrespective of the message, he's still going to ask a question, what are we going to do? Ola Rotimi is silent in his play, when the Priest says the boy will kill his father and marry his mother.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** And then it is just for the people actually decided to throw the boy away. Perhaps that's one of the major reasons that prophecy eventually came to pass. Because it's impossible in a Yoruba environment that there won't be an outlet whatsoever. I don't know if... in your elaboration, in your play, you are able to maybe "correct" something of that nature, that Ola Rotimi did.

**Tomoloju:** Yes you see the tragedy has begun to manifest-

**Balogun:** Okay.

**Tomoloju:** - at the opening of either *Oedipus Rex* or even *The Gods are Not to Blame*.

**Balogun:** Yes

**Tomoloju:** I mean symptoms maybe of tragic occurrence have started in view of the crisis, you know, environmental crisis, health hazard and so on and so forth. That made them to request the Priest either Tiresias or Baba Fakunle, whatever you know. So at that point they have actually, they actually want to know what they can do to avert the crisis. So, and the Priest who came, I think it's more of an Oedipodean Priest than the...

**Balogun:** *(Laughs)*

**Tomoloju:** ... Yoruba Priest.

**Balogun:** Yoruba.

**Tomoloju:** But you know this is literature so the playwright has his own objectives and focus. In my own case, yes it could have been possible for Okanlawon to be offered as sacrifice and then blood will flow probably to end up in war between the Adegun and the homeland of Yetunde. But we are informed subliminally by the tradition of our ethos, the Yoruba ethos, the moral ethos. That we really don't, I don't think I need to put a Priest, at that point, that brittle point between Adegun and Yetunde or between Adegun and Okanlawon.

**Balogun:** So in your own play what did you do?

**Tomoloju:** What we did was rationalisation. We just- reason, we allowed Yetunde to have a free mind to think. She has been the one who had restrained the community from offering human sacrifice.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** She definitely detests bloodshed and the catastrophe of the dimension of Western trial judges who'd be irritating to her. Yet there is tragedy waiting to spark off between two communities.

And even to a point that it could lead to the destruction of the monarchy here and even the destruction of ourselves. So informed as such, she becomes the soul decider of the trend of the story towards the denouement. And so it was either that she should decide to marry Adegun, remain in the land of Adegun or escape with her brother who was already planning to take her away by night, or something. And then cause friction between Adegun kingdom and her own father's kingdom.

**Balogun:** Yes. Where her whereabouts is unknown.

**Tomoloju:** It's unknown. So we decided not to, for me, I didn't think I wanted to celebrate the tragedy with a catastrophe. So there was something of a subtle, melodramatic end in that area.

**Balogun:** Just to change that-

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** - very ending.

**Tomoloju:** Yes. So a slight departure from you know- even in Goethe, I took it upon myself that we had to tailor down the Gods and ego of Yetunde even as she does not submit to the, what they call it now... the seemingly savage instinct of King Adegun. She at the same time uses logic and persuasion to rescue him from his savagery. It could be something like, I don't want to use that metaphor, but she also tamed his savage instinct.

**Balogun:** Okay that means that Adegun in this context is a metaphor for the military era that your play is trying to address-

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** - you know.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** Discountenance everything terrible that is associated with the military.

**Tomoloju:** Yes

**Balogun:** Then Erelu in the play will also represent what aspect of the Nigerian life?

**Tomoloju:** It's umm, she represents the politics of antagonism.

**Balogun:** Yeah that's a very common thing in this part.

**Tomoloju:** And particularly the one that is of self-preservation, conservative to the point that it is blind to civilising principles. I will wallow in that "comfort zone" of rapacious elements of the society that just want to scoop all the good things in the society-

**Balogun:** All the resources for themselves?

**Tomoloju:** And abandon the populace to the devil.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** So you know... and blindly too. So that is Erelu. Yes and so you have the "barbarising", using the words of Wole Soyinka, the "barbarising" principles and the civilising principles in contention against one another. The "barbarising" being the Erelu in linkage with Adegun and then the civilising being Yetunde and perhaps, you know Okanlawon and co

**Balogun:** You know earlier on you mentioned something about the gender principles that we can also begin to look at it.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** Starting from the fact that Yetunde is herself an embodiment of the male and female principle that Yorubas recognise. At the same time, should we be looking at this play, if I look at it from the perspective of Yetunde now, as a way of speaking out in favour of gender complementarity-

**Tomoloju:** Surely, it echoes. In the play it's recorded there. Said "you don't think you can", I can't remember the real lines, "don't think you can harass me because I'm a woman".

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** And then she then vents her passion this time around as a woman. And to a point that some (*laughs*) chauvinists said that woman, you know, was also trying to bring her down. I don't know, one of the chiefs tried to bring her down and say you are a woman you should respect the authority of the King. To a point that they went into some kind of prurient talks about-

**Balogun:** Yes, yes.

**Tomoloju:** - Yetunde, the prospects of Yetunde getting a son, a bouncing baby boy-

**Balogun:** From the King?

**Tomoloju:** Yes. If you can give him a chance, at least the last drop of his sperm-

**Balogun:** (*Laughs*)

**Tomoloju:** - can bring forth a bouncing baby boy. And then Yetunde replies, not verbatim as I want to say it, you know replies "No, I deal with the Gods-" (*chortles*) ?? he's the second to the Gods, then Yetunde said "I deal with the Gods"-

**Balogun:** Not the second.

**Tomoloju:** - "not the second". (*Laughs*)

**Balogun:** (*Laughs*)

**Tomoloju:** And then said "I cannot open my laps to an ordinary mortal". (*Laughs*). That's Yetunde saying that. So you can see the gender element there, she was very strong.

**Balogun:** That's interesting.

**Balogun:** So let's now look at the process of putting the play together. Let's start from how, you know, the process of casting the play. How was it like?

**Tomoloju:** Thank you, thank you. I, you know, in Africa projects we-

**Balogun:** By Goethe?

**Tomoloju:** - by Goethe Institute. It's a collaboration between Nigerians and the Western- the German counterparts. And so once we had resolved the play, it's been written, the casting was also done in a collective way. We also had to be economical with the-

**Tomoloju:** - resources including the human resources. So I, of course I performed as King Adegun.

**Balogun:** You also wrote and directed-

**Tomoloju:** I also wrote, yes yeah. So in terms of the casting we looked around, we found that Tina Mba would be most fitting for the role of Yetunde and she really did it good. Then Norbert Young as Okanlawon, Jahman Anikulapo as a friend of Okanlawon and then Omokaro Okonedo was one of the Chiefs. Then the music director was also I think a chief, Ojomo, and then we got some other ladies, Lola Onikoro, I think she is now married she was Erelu. So we got all of this together, the casting was done between us and-

**Balogun:** Goethe

**Tomoloju:** Yes the German director, there is a German co-director.

**Balogun:** Oh, okay.

**Tomoloju:** Matthias Geert from 1996, he co-directed *Oedipus Rex* with Jide Ogungbade. And even my own *Amona* was co-directed by both, Matthias Geert and Jide Ogungbade. We also had a workshop, a collaborative workshop at the time that I was always producing. I was the production consultant, then we had the workshop of *A Horse on My Back*. "Ajoda" meaning workshop. Sorry I am not going to go-

**Balogun:** No it's alright.

**Tomoloju:** - too far away from what we are discussing. And *Andorra Goes Kinshasa* was a collaborative, directorial duty of Matthias Geert and Jide Ogungbade. In 1999, *Iphigenia Finds Ayelala* was co-directed by my humble self and Matthias Geert.

**Balogun:** Okay, and you also acted in it?

**Tomoloju:** Yes I acted. Now it's a very simple formula that if I had to be onstage and needed another eye-

**Balogun:** To see what you're doing.

**Tomoloju:** - to see what I'm doing in relationship to what the other actors around me were doing. So we separated my scenes where I appeared from the others where I did not appear. So I directed the scenes where I did not appear. I also gave some conceptual input to the scenes where I appeared but my German co-directed who has always been the German director, the director from the German side. Directed all the scenes where I appeared. And so we had that-

**Balogun:** So how many actors put together now?

**Tomoloju:** Together we were 13.

**Balogun:** 13.

**Tomoloju:** And we had a very sound commendation, a high commendation from Professor Dapo Adelugba who we used the play to celebrate I think his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday at that point, in Lagos. And he said he was happy that we didn't have to bring a whole crowd onto the stage. Though we had 13 actors.

**Balogun:** So the play went on tour, to Germany?

**Tomoloju:** Oh no it was one that didn't go to Germany. But we only toured Nigeria.

**Balogun:** Okay so how many performances did you have altogether?

**Tomoloju:** We had a performance at Goethe Institute, we also moved to the main- that was in the island and two performances on the island. We also moved to the mainland, you know for one performance, and later we travelled to Ibadan, to the University of Ibadan for another performance. That was how far we went. Then the play has been restaged by other vested interests in the academia, University of Ilorin staged it as one of the project plays. University of Lagos, I mean no- Lagos State University also staged this as a major, I don't know if it was a convocation play or something like that? So that's I think how far *Iphigenia Finds Ayelala* has gone.

**Tomoloju:** But the casting was- we also had a, you know, double-rolling. That's one thing that will interest you. In which case somebody will perform two or three other roles apart from you know-

**Balogun:** In the same play?

**Tomoloju:** - in the same play. And to the extent that when there had to be a chorus performance in music, virtually everybody who is not onstage will be there.

**Balogun:** So you didn't really actually separate, okay this is the orchestra, the other-

**Tomoloju:** No.

**Balogun:** - everybody-

**Tomoloju:** Everybody was doing things.

**Balogun:** So obviously in terms of choreography, everybody, almost everybody also danced?

**Tomoloju:** Well we had the same task in one way or the other, yes yes yes yes.

**Balogun:** And then the props that you used, what extent were these props... locally specific so to speak?

**Tomoloju:** Yeah that to a very large extent because we, from the paddle you know where we needed the paddle, you know even if we had to mime the paddling, you know. To the cowrie, to the umm even... there's a drum as part of the set and part of the prop, you know. A big drum you know.

**Balogun:** What was the symbolism of the drum. That was onstage right?

**Tomoloju:** That was the epicentre of communal communication.

?: mmm.

**Balogun:** mmm that's the-

**Tomoloju:** That was the very first sound that came out on stage. No voice came, apart from the songs, the opening songs. No voice came before the drum.

**Balogun:** Before the drum?

**Tomoloju:** The mighty drum. Yes.

**Balogun:** So in the context of that play.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** What is the relevance of that drum?

**Tomoloju:** In fact the drum transmogrified into part of the set and we used a revolve-

**Balogun:** A revolving stage?

**Tomoloju:** - to have a revolve under the drum. The drum is so mighty, over-

**Balogun:** The height?

**Tomoloju:** - over three feet.

**Balogun:** Three feet high?

**Tomoloju:** Over three feet high and maybe about two feet wide. You know it was an ellipses of something, you know.

**Balogun:** Okay.

**Tomoloju:** So at a point in the play although we are not so technically equipped in Nigeria, if we could have done it outside Nigeria we would have had a more perfect usage in the situation. But then at the climax when Ayelala wants to fight, when she wants to inflict her retributive, you know, act on the maladroitness elements. The drum spun 180 degrees and what was facing backstage is now facing the audience and that face was Ayelala's face.

**Balogun:** Okay on the drum-

**Tomoloju:** On the drum.

**Balogun:** - is an embossment-

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** - of Ayelala's image?

**Tomoloju:** Yeah, at the reverse side.

**Balogun:** Is it the real Ayelala, as what she was or the character?

**Tomoloju:** No it's just the character.

**Balogun:** The character that is playing the role?

**Tomoloju:** Not the character but image.

**Balogun:** An image?

**Tomoloju:** Image.

**Balogun:** What's that supposed to suggest, when the face, when the drum turns and the face-

**Balogun:** - the image is now facing the audience. What is the meaning?

**Tomoloju:** It indicated a turn around.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** From the happy-go-lucky socio-political activities-

**Balogun:** The chaos?

**Tomoloju:** - yeah the chaos-

**Balogun:** The reverse.

**Tomoloju:** - and so on.

**Balogun:** Yes.

**Tomoloju:** To a point of... of intervention-

**Balogun:** Rebirth, kind of?

**Tomoloju:** A point of intervention to begin with. The retribution actually started at that point.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** At what point in the performance?

**Tomoloju:** The retribution into a birth-

**Balogun:** At what point in the performance was this highly significant action?

**Tomoloju:** At the point when the cowrie was cast.

**Balogun:** Okay.

**Tomoloju:** At the point when the cowrie or maybe a little after or whatever but that was when the cowrie was cast and Yetunde had invoked Ayelala.

**Balogun:** mmm. Invoke the spirit of Ayelala?

**Tomoloju:** The spirit of Ayelala.

**Balogun:** To bring down some form of a reversal in the ways things are-

**Tomoloju:** In the way things are going, yeah you know, to deal with the situation you know. So that was a signal, that things are no longer the same and that the Goddess is prepared to-

**Balogun:** Can you recall, I know Soyinka says that a moment of, a highly charged moment or spiritual awakening like this, is usually accompanied by music because music is a vehicle of ritual.

**Tomoloju:** Yes yes.

**Balogun:** Can you recall the kind of music that you added to *this* particular scene?

**Tomoloju:** Umm I know that the real music of Ayelala that is Ayelala igbokoko.

**Balogun:** Okay that you sung earlier?

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** But you didn't use that particular one in this scene?

**Tomoloju:** No, the girls played with it at the waterside when they were having a kind of chat with their role model Yetunde. So yes, the girls danced on the platform and then dived into-

**Balogun:** The river?

**Tomoloju:** - into the river to swim and also to tease their auntie and so on and so forth. But then that's Ayelala igbokoku. But beyond music is sound.

**Balogun:** Okay.

**Tomoloju:** What we used mainly to celebrate was sound. It will sound like music but it-

**Balogun:** What was it?

**Tomoloju:** - it was like thunder storm-

**Balogun:** Okay.

**Tomoloju:** - sound effect for that brief 30 seconds or so, or maybe less.

**Balogun:** To *enhance* the effect of that action?

**Tomoloju:** Yes that spiritual umm... that spiritual elevation that yes, that moment when we're moving from the normal mortal plane to the spiritual-

**Balogun:** Was that also a kind of a gesture towards the real story of Ayelala, of being apotheosised. Is that a reflection of that, that moment of her apotheosis?

**Tomoloju:** Yes it will not directly reflect that... well... you know you could say it reflects, I think it's simulates the-

**Balogun:** Simulates that-

**Tomoloju:** - that moment-

**Balogun:** - that moment.

**Tomoloju:** Yes. But we cannot recapture that moment-

**Balogun:** Of course, for artistic purpose it is doing something, reversing the fortune of the environment in which a new is set?

**Tomoloju:** Yes definitely.

**Balogun:** That's a very strong point.

**Tomoloju:** And it is about the passion. As in passion in theatre.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** As in every other passion, you know, of Ayelala worship.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** Because it is mind-gripping, hair-raising, it's... it's yeah frightful.

**Balogun:** So the real, the real culturally specific Ayelala ritual-

**Tomoloju:** Yeah.

**Balogun:** - is now appropriated onstage as a reflection of a Nigerian society of that time in relation to the play that it has been adapted from?

**Tomoloju:** Yeah

**Balogun:** Let's look at now, the role that culture, the African culture now plays in terms of reimagination of Greek tragedy?

**Tomoloju:** Thank you. Well people have defined tragedy in simple terms, you know a play that starts well and ends- no- starts blissfully and ends in catastrophe. That's at the most-

**Balogun:** The simplest-

**Tomoloju:** - simplest level, you know. With all the ingredients, you know. From exposition-

**Balogun:** Tragic flaw-

**Tomoloju:** - and yes flaw, reversal, recognition and all this things and the rest of it. But what I conclude is that tragedy is tragedy.

**Balogun:** mmm. So how do you define tragedy in relation to your adaptation? I mean in a broader perspective of your play responding to the Nigerian condition.

**Tomoloju:** I will look at tragedy existentially.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** Tragedy is not just one string across a particular environment or one storyline, from one beginning to an end. Or the one that has a head, a middle and a tail or something like that. I will define tragedy as a state of existence of people as it is, which is existentialism. Life as it is, as opposed to essence which is as it should be. And so as it is, you find that tragedy is in our own society as we are now. Tragedy is staring us in the face everywhere to a point that a smiling man at Oshodi bus stop is actually the most tortured mind.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** And he could be smiling. I have seen somebody, a motorcycle rider who ran into a ditch, and you expect him to be weeping, he carried his motorcycle and was smiling.

**Balogun:** *(Laughs)*.

**Tomoloju:** And I thought so where is tragedy? What is tragedy? *(aside Ben whispers: I have to attend to...)*

**Balogun:** So it's a whole lot of definitions.

**Tomoloju:** Yes so I...

*(The audio recording ends)*

**Balogun:** Sir you were trying to look at that concept- tragedy.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** Yeah. So can we go on sir?

**Tomoloju:** Yes. So it's always there and it's not at all times that we could temper it down. From location to location, from individual to individual there is tragedy written over a jobless person, he's already tragic.

**Balogun:** (*Chuckles*).

**Tomoloju:** That he's jobless, you don't have to wait until he runs out of his mind and a vehicle knocks him down.

**Balogun:** mmm. So tragedy is a lived experience-

**Tomoloju:** It's a living experience it's also dynamic in its own right.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** For a country that is indebted and is perpetually...seemingly perpetually indebted.

**Balogun:** mmm and it has all the resources in the world-

**Tomoloju:** To get out of that, what they call the debt trap. It's tragedy. So I think I will lean upon the existentialist writers, to look at tragedy, rather than the old order.

**Balogun:** The Greek Classical definition of it?

**Tomoloju:** Yeah yeah yes.

**Balogun:** Now, isn't this a little bit more like... linking the idea of tragedy to what Arthur Miller tells us. The Aristotelian thing while it is valid on its own-

**Tomoloju:** Yeah.

**Balogun:** - but then it doesn't take care of all of these

**Tomoloju:** All of these-

**Balogun:** - Whole ideas. In front of man. Look at a man you just mentioned a man at Oshodi should be highly traumatised but he's still smiling. Perhaps this is the breadwinner of the house but... he's going through hell.

**Tomoloju:** Hell.

**Balogun:** So-

**Tomoloju:** It's only that he has not communicated it. And sometimes he only communicates it inside his bedroom or in the corner or his residence that this is what I'm going through and that thing is so pervasive from individual to individual to communities and communities when there's inflation and people cannot go to the market and buy what, you know, they have a low bargaining power. When you don't know when somebody is only limited to one meal a day or no meal at all. We don't have to wait until everybody dies and they become carcasses on the streets before we say we have tragedy.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** Tragedy is like you said, it's a *living* experience. And so in my play, in *Iphigenia Finds Ayelala*, I know and see that the tragedy has already established itself.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** Once there is a civilising principle on this side and there is a "barbarising" principle just-

**Balogun:** On the other side?

**Tomoloju:** - on the other side. And they are in confrontation with each other. Once there is this NGO civil society organisation, the human rights organisation and so on, on this side. And there is a despotic administration on that side you know, administration on that side-

**Balogun:** On the other side.

**Tomoloju:** - trying to level down the citizenry and trying to deny them of their rights to life. Trying to, you have a situation in a country like Nigeria where somebody is given a national mandate and he desires to implement a sectional, you know, interest. So, I mean, the very fact that somebody departs from the norm and from the rational-

**Balogun:** Itself constitutes tragic.

**Tomoloju:** Yeah it's constant tragedy. So tragedy is not physical, it's not blood, it's psychosomatic.

**Tomoloju:** So that's why I just didn't want you know maybe Adegun kills Okanlawon. Or Okanlawon kills Ayelala. I leave it in the soul of that personage, that divine or yes... a divine personage. That element that is spiritually elevated above the rest of the community to resolve it for the community.

**Balogun:** And that's Ayelala?

**Tomoloju:** That's Ayelala. That is Iphigenia coming to Africa now. That is Yetunde, the new image of Iphigenia and Ayelala combined. And that is the Priestess. That is the diviner. We give her moments of meditation. In fact I give great credit to Mattias Geert.

**Balogun:** The German director?

**Tomoloju:** My German co-director.

**Balogun:** Why?

**Tomoloju:** Because at a point when we were onstage and the thing was closing up and the dilemma of whether Yetunde should marry Adegun and get herself saved or run away and get her brother and herself killed...invoke a moment for her to meditate.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** But my co-director said "No, let us go further, 60 seconds, keep quiet, don't talk. Both Yetunde and yourself as Adegun should stand side by side and stare at the audience and see how much capacity you have to hold the audience spell bound with silence".

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Balogun:** So in that performance silence is used as a very strong dramatic tool.

**Tomoloju:** Tool.

**Balogun:** What was it meant to do, specifically?

**Tomoloju:** It was the meditative moment. It was the moment when like the diviner would consult the oracle to ask where do we go from here.

**Balogun:** From here.

**Tomoloju:** It is unregistered verbally, it is unregistered physically, it's registered spiritually and psychologically.

**Balogun:** Sir let's relate that moment of silence in the performance...

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** To the reality of the Nigerian situation. At the time you had this performance...

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** The country just kind of escaped more than two decades of military dictatorship.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** But if you look at it now, after 20 years...

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** It doesn't seem as if anything has changed. In fact there's a downward trend in the way things are.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** Is that supposed to be a kind of a missed opportunity. The type that the performance provided for the audience to reflect. Are we saying *Iphigenia Finds Ayelala* is suggestion that there's a missed opportunity to actually turn things around for the country?

**Tomoloju:** Yes, you mentioned the word 'reflection'.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** That is what we have not had any time to concentrate upon in my country, Nigeria.

**Balogun:** Perhaps-

**Tomoloju:** We have not had-

**Balogun:** - the whole continent?

**Tomoloju:** - yes perhaps the whole continent. We have not had time, we have not cared about sitting down and examining problems-

**Balogun:** Critically.

**Tomoloju:** - critically and bringing solutions rationally. We have not respected the institutions that are established to promote reflection.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** And we have not even respected whatever outcome there is from reflective... undertakings.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** Scholarship, you know, and so on and so forth. Artistry and other things. You expect that country should sober down.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** That 60 seconds silence-

**Balogun:** In the performance?

**Tomoloju:** - in the performance is the moment when the community, the country, the continent-

**Balogun:** The individual.

**Tomoloju:** - the individual should sit down and rethink.

**Balogun:** The actions.

**Tomoloju:** The actions.

**Balogun:** And the inactions.

**Tomoloju:** Inactions that had you know taken place and probably-

**Balogun:** Shaped destiny of-

**Tomoloju:** - destiny of the country.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** So it was yeah, it was a moment of decision. And what came up after that was simply Yetunde shocking the whole world that she will stay back.

**Balogun:** To marry the King or just to stay back?

**Tomoloju:** Not specific.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Balogun:** Okay so you leave them with that- in the mode of African performance where the storyteller does not actually say specifically this is the solution. Believing that the audience is wise enough to decipher-

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** - and take whatever thing that suits them. The destiny is always in everybody's hands.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** That's a very powerful turn. So that missed-

**Tomoloju:** Missed-

**Balogun:** - opportunity-

**Tomoloju:** - opportunity.

**Balogun:** - for reflection, we can locate the tragedy in that?

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** Yes for them, for the characters onstage, there's a dénouement.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** The characters, all those, there's a dénouement.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** And it's left hanging because modern dramaturgy you don't have to lead your audience by the nose.

**Balogun:** Yeah.

**Tomoloju:** You just lead them, there is the thought. There's belief that it's for the benefit of humanity if she doesn't flaunt her ego. She has achieved something, that there is no human sacrifice.

**Balogun:** mmm she's able to stop that?

**Tomoloju:** She's able to stop that, just like Ayelala ordered.

**Balogun:** Yes. Of the-

**Tomoloju:** Of the-

**Balogun:** - inspiration?

**Tomoloju:** Yes. She has saved her brother.

**Balogun:** Is there some kind of similarities there in Euripides' *Antigone*, so to speak? Where Antigone insists on burying her brother and Creon insists that he's not supposed to be buried. Isn't there some kind of a...

**Tomoloju:** I think Iphigenia's story stands-

**Balogun:** On its own?

**Tomoloju:** - on its own.

**Balogun:** Okay.

**Tomoloju:** That is why it's particularly interesting to us, it stands on its own. And we look at what's been written-

**Balogun:** Goethe specifically?

**Tomoloju:** - Goethe. And see how it correlates with our own, you know-

**Balogun:** Environment?

**Tomoloju:** - environment here and our thought systems and so on. And you find that again there was something contemporaneous about it. We were fighting for human rights and right to life is part of it. We also have agitation on gender basis which also is reflected.

**Balogun:** Yes.

**Tomoloju:** We had the contest between the benevolent... beneficent and maleficent forces, you know in terms of the struggle that goes in Africa and the struggles of the civil society to have a...

**Balogun:** Good governance.

**Tomoloju:** - good governance, you know. So these ones have been partly sorted out by Iphigenia or Yetunde, as it were. What is left was that things were still going to be at breaking point.

**Balogun:** mmm, yeah because drama reflects and still points at okay, this is what is happening but then it is left for the audience, the people-

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** - to take advantage of the message from it.

**Tomoloju:** Thank you. And Osofisan would go beyond what I have done. And said so what do you think audience-

**Balogun:** Yes.

**Tomoloju:** - what do you think? Do you think she should marry the King or do you think she should-

**Balogun:** Do this, yes.

**Tomoloju:** But I didn't want to do that.

**Balogun:** Yes.

**Tomoloju:** While I acknowledge my master who I appreciate. So I didn't think it was necessary so we had to, you know...

**Balogun:** Okay sir, this Nigerian/German relationship...

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** In your own estimation, trying to revive a classic tragedy. How would you generally assess the project?

**Tomoloju:** I think the project promotes mutual respect between cultures. Being an intercultural project it helps to bring about understanding between the West and Africans. And that thing really worked because Amona... of course we were... (*Side conversations being had*). Jide Ogungbade co-directed *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. And we used the African costumes, African songs, African props, in fact we Africanised *Oedipus Rex*, you know. And to a point that we played it to an African audience and it was so highly appreciated.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** At the same time in the same edition my play Amona was also performed. It was a fresh script which was even staged for the first time in 1996 here and in Germany.

**Balogun:** Okay.

**Tomoloju:** But the surprise we had in Germany, very pleasant surprise, was that we were appreciated in the theatres we performed, where we presented Amona. But in particular in Chemnitz, that is a city of the old eastern Germany, which of course has benefited from the breakdown of the Berlin wall. We got a standing ovation for 15 minutes.

**Balogun:** For the performance?

**Tomoloju:** For the performance of Amona.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** And so the objective of the Africa project was very well met because the German audience appreciated you know that African play. It had not been staged anywhere else except in Goethe Institut and also in three cities in Germany. And that was the objective and from there friendship grew, you know.

**Balogun:** But more specifically let's look at that interaction-

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** - of the two cultures that have got a cultural interaction.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** How would you describe that? I mean bringing European German, European tradition... by the side of the African, Yoruba ritual and its aesthetics.

**Tomoloju:** I think basically one helps to enrich the other.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** So we cannot deny the fact that we had a quite a lot that we learned and gained from the interaction with our German colleagues. And of course I don't expect that they will deny benefitting

from the cultures of Africa that they're exposed to with that kind of interaction. And that's the essence also-

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** - of that project. And then of course there are other dimensions to it. You know, futuristically certain of the- laying the foundation for further cultural intercultural activities. And further intercultural exploits. Which I cannot put it empirically but I know that other groups have also done so much like that.

**Balogun:** So in a way when we look at Euripides' version, Goethe's version and yours. It does appear that the present reality is still being defined, so to speak, or being influenced by the past.

**Tomoloju:** Yes you know what I find particularly interesting is the topicality and transcendentalism of issues raised in a particular location in a very remote past. Being applicable-

**Balogun:** The German down here?

**Tomoloju:** Down here from the-

**Balogun:** There's still that connection.

**Tomoloju:** Yes. To the age of enlightenment and then to this African period.

**Balogun:** Of the post-colonial?

**Tomoloju:** Of the post-colonial, thank you. And so you still find... similar similar things... people may have intervened one way or the other but it challenges the human community to do the right thing about whatever shortcomings exist in their generation. So it's a continuous flow of challenges and attentions to such challenges. So that's one thing I find most particularly exciting, it also helps in maintaining standards for playwrights like us in the, as you rightly termed, in the post-colony. You know studying works of past dramatists and getting inspired by such works. And having the opportunity to also register our own contemporary ideas and ideals you know, in the flow of the creative process.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** Yes and with due respect to T.S. Eliot you know, the artists and individual... talent- "Tradition and the Individual Talent." There must be something new you are bringing in and this offers us opportunity to bring something new into the flow of creativity in Iphigenia.

**Balogun:** From Athens down to-

**Tomoloju:** Athens.

**Balogun:** - the age of enlightenment and-

**Tomoloju:** To the post-colony.

**Balogun:** Yes. Especially in an African environment that has not been able to take advantage of political independence from colonial-

**Balogun:** So in a way could we say that *Iphigenia Finds Ayelala* also, in one way or the other, dramatises an African environment that is grappling with some form of internal colonialism so to speak. Considering the role of Adegun.

**Tomoloju:** yes.

**Balogun:** In that context and Yetunde/Iphigenia.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** Trying to challenge that orthodoxy of tyranny.

**Tomoloju:** I think it will have to do firstly with self-preservation, you know that's in terms of the domain of Adegun. Trying to disallow anybody from breaching its boundaries you know on particular occasion-

**Balogun:** But that's parochial isn't it?

**Tomoloju:** It's parochial.

**Balogun:** And the legend of colonialism so to speak.

**Tomoloju:** Are we not having it now you know, boundaries are closed?

**Balogun:** mmm. Even in America and-

**Tomoloju:** America-

**Balogun:** - sending Mexicans away-

**Tomoloju:** yes...look at the EU?

**Balogun:** So now look at it. You had the play 20 years ago. Trump's administration was just three years or five years.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** So it means that you've actually mentioned Trump-

**Tomoloju:** (*Laughs*) Yeah.

**Balogun:** - so in a way we begin to look at Adegun as-

**Tomoloju:** as Trump and whoever in Nigeria (*laughs*).

**Balogun:** He's doing something like that, you know.

**Tomoloju:** (*Continues laughing*) And I'm told-

**Balogun:** There's a time of Thatcher and you know Abacha..

**Tomoloju:** Yes. And whereas there are conventions and agreements: international agreements, regional and sub-regional that there should be free flow of-trade- you know, trade.

**Balogun:** So all of these things that we talk about, you know, closing borders, you know, discrimination of some sort-

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** - xenophobia.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** These are all pockets of tragedy.

**Tomoloju:** That's right! Surely. And people have not- they're happening. People are not-

**Tomoloju:** - saying it, they are not seeing that the tragedy is on the ground.

**Balogun:** mmm. It's lived experience.

**Tomoloju:** It's just lived.

**Balogun:** It's just there?

**Tomoloju:** It's lived yes it's lived. You can only write a story of a man who wants to buy buscuit next door and then is smashed on the head, and then you say yes tragedy and so people revolt.

**Balogun:** That's just a tragic situation-

**Tomoloju:** It's a tragedy of the- of the larger cosmic, you know...

**Balogun:** Tragedy-

**Tomoloju:** Tragedy.

**Balogun:** - that has engulfed the world.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** So, I mean we have lived through apartheid regime, you know everything, post-apartheid, post-apartheid has not quite peaceful then we're now going into the age of xenophobia and then you know, distrust between African and African. You know, hostility between African and African... Blacks on Blacks... These Blacks on Black violence, you know, which is what is termed now, you know. So we all feel it, we all feel it. So like we talked about Adegun. Adegun closed- shut his boundaries, the borderline of his own community. And that is it. Like you said for Trump.

**Balogun:** (*Laughs*).

**Tomoloju:** Like you said for Nigeria...

**Balogun:** And even the claustrophobic, you know, environment of South Africa. For other Africans... EU and UK as you mentioned now, alright. And then the crazy island, is the island that is now trying to swing it that this way or that way. Not sure where to go. So umm I just, I don't know, I just respect the prophetic impulse of the dramatists. I call them the-

**Balogun:** Yeah.

**Tomoloju:** - the dramatic visionaries.

**Balogun:** It's really powerful when 1999 you're talking about a leader. A leader of a community closing his borders against people in- you know? And then we have Trump doing that nearly 20 years after you had the performance.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** And then we look at the tragedy that constitutes for those people who are leaving the community and those who are migrated into that community.

**Tomoloju:** And to have a white Adegun. You also have an African Adegun. And it's not in Nigeria alone, you go around African states you still find them.

**Balogun:** The name itself is even antithetical.

**Tomoloju:** (*Laughs*).

**Balogun:** Thank you so much for this wonderful...wonderful interview.

**Tomoloju:** I appreciate. I just hope I have made a-

**Balogun:** Yeah, it's really-

**Tomoloju:** - a modicum of mark on the-

**Balogun:** It's actually really really illuminating. I mean some of the way you have been able to connect your play to the Nigerian, even a global reality-

You know, a couple of weeks ago we had the performance of *Antigone (not quite/quiet)*, that's Mark Fleishman's adaptation of Antigone... It was a very brilliant performance. I mean, it was really really an amazing work, but then what is most intriguing about it is the way he's able to connect the performance to the reality in South Africa. The play opened around the time that the last, you know, last incident of xenophobia was going on. While that was going on in Johannesburg. In Cape Town where we are, where we had the performance, the University was mourning the brutal rape and murder of an undergraduate student, who had gone to a post office to get a package and then she was assaulted by a man working in the post office, who raped her and killed her and then buried her. For over a week she was-

**Tomoloju:** No...

**Balogun:** - yeah until her body was discovered somewhere then the man was- And then you see another strange thing about it is a woman actually came out to say that, *she* could have been the victim. Because the trick that the man used on the lady, girl-

**Tomoloju:** Girl.

**Balogun:** - he actually tried it on the woman and- you know he just failed. And then just a couple of days after that, we had another set of people were- another set of young girls were- So it's a whole lot of thing.

**Tomoloju:** Recurrent-

**Balogun:** *Antigone (not quite/quiet)* actually captured that very vividly, even talked about the drought that is going on in South Africa, you know. Everywhere you turn there is always something that tells you, don't misuse water, or don't use water anyhow, it's drought. And the whole lot of it.

**Tomoloju:** mmm.

**Balogun:** That's the capacity of reimagination of Greek classic-

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** - to continue to reflect the society in which it is produced.

**Tomoloju:** Right.

**Balogun:** So at the end of the day you will find that...the performance stage... it's just a tiny-  
??: space.

**Balogun:** - you know a tiny space to reflect on-

**Tomoloju:** Life.

**Balogun:** - the larger-

**Tomoloju:** The larger-

**Balogun:** - society we are in.

**Tomoloju:** - society.

**Balogun:** - which is real..

**Balogun:** Look at it now, we're talking about *Iphigenia Finds Ayelela* in 1999, and you already talked about Donald Trump of 2019.

**Tomoloju:** Yes yes.

**Balogun:** I mean it's-

**Tomoloju:** And Nigeria.

**Balogun:** And Nigeria recently we are talking about RUGA

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** Every state was talking about not having a, you know, cow colony and-

**Tomoloju:** And the boundaries are shut-

**Balogun:** Yeah-

**Tomoloju:** - you know inflation is galloping.

**Balogun:** It's a lot of... So it means that there's something really so significant about Greek tragedy.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** And the reimagination, the African and the Global South.

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** In terms of how those works continue, how somebody like you, like Mark Fleishman, Osofisan, Ola Rotimi-

**Tomoloju:** Yes.

**Balogun:** - and a whole lot of them. Continue to use materials from the classical period-

**Tomoloju:** Yes, yes.

**Balogun:** - to reflect the on goings in society. More so in a way that it captures some of those tragic moments.

**Tomoloju:** Yes, inspite-

**Balogun:** And then you know, speak directly about the tragedy that individuals and the collective experience every day.

**Tomoloju:** You're quite right and we want to also look at how the Romans, the development of the Roman, you know, literati... relied so very much on the Greek-

**Balogun:** Classical-

**Tomoloju:** - classical Greek materials. And they had to...Seneca and the rest of, they had to adapt, translate and do a lot. And it made the Roman civilisation to flourish-

**Balogun:** Okay.

**Tomoloju:** - even with its own traits.

**Balogun:** But do you think we are doing that in recent times-

**Tomoloju:** No wa-

**Balogun:** - if you're in Africa?

**Tomoloju:** If the Classic Department, the what do they call it, the Department of Classics-

**Balogun:** Classics at the Universities.

**Tomoloju:** At Ibadan...the joke that there wasn't classic, what is classic about this Department.

(Laughs) Classic Department. So I think it is now that they should be empowered to return us to standards...

**Balogun:** With the support of the Performing Arts?

**Tomoloju:** Of the Performing Arts, yes there should be further collaboration. To be fair to the University of Ibadan, Department of Classics, you know, one of the professors contacted me concerning *Iphigenia Finds Ayelela* but the communication was not quite thorough because they didn't, they thought I was such a free person I could always run after them, you know. And I didn't think I had to do that...

**Tomoloju:** And what is my own little fault I will say is that, look this idea of publishing I'm not desperate.

**Balogun:** To publish?

**Tomoloju:** I'm not desperate. I put my play onstage, it's there. I keep it but I know eventually it will get published-

**Balogun:** But *Iphigenia* is not published?

**Tomoloju:** It's not published.

**Balogun:** It's not published.

**Tomoloju:** But I'm planning to do that. I'm just a late learner that I have to make publishing part of my responsibility. And this is because of the negligence of those who call themselves publishers, you know. So as we were, you know, saying the Departments of Classics, you know, should be empowered in all ways, in all manners: resource wise, financially and so on. To be able to explore the horizon of the Humanities to turn attention to global standards. Especially in the world of letters and performances. So I expect that that should happen. And then we'll- we have to- if any layman sees *The Gods are Not to Blame* they enjoy it and I think they have translated it into Yoruba too. Yes, in fact, no when I was in the secondary school in my class four, we translated *The Gods are Not to Blame* and got a 45 minutes play out of it.

**Balogun:** mmm.

**Tomoloju:** It was later in life that I told Professor Ola Rotimi that we've done *The Gods are Not to Blame* in Yoruba with the title "Ebi Awon Orisa Ko." And my, one of my classmates Steve Falaiye led the translation. I was also part of the team to translate. And then I, we all secondary school- So when I told Professor Ola Rotimi, of blessed memory, he was like (does an impression of Professor Rotimi being astonished) "I didn't think about that. Oh my God, I think this is something I should pursue immediately". But he wasn't able to, you know, live to handle that.

**Balogun:** Okay.

**Tomoloju:** So we should, that cultural dispersal is very important.

**Balogun:** Thank you so very much.

**Tomoloju:** My pleasure.

**Balogun:** Thank you so very much.

*Balogun turns off the audio recorder*