

Interview

Interviewee:

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Balogun: Yeah, good evening sir.

Sotimirin: Good evening, very good evening to you.

Balogun: Can I meet you formally sir?

Sotimirin: My name is Olatunji Sotimirin. I'm a performing artist, a musician, actor, play director, storyteller, broadcaster and a university lecturer. I actually teach in the department of creative arts, University of Lagos. My area of interests, or areas of interest, include, you know: play directing, acting, theatre, workshop, workshop on some, and you know, music in the theatre. Yeah.

Balogun: Let's start from the point where you just ended your introduction now. You talked about music and I know, I've seen quite a whole number of works that you've done in the past, *Death and the King's Horseman*, where I saw you as an actor. And then Rotimi's *The Gods are Not to Blame* that you directed and was staged at the prestigious MUSON Centre. Now for you, or somebody who has a band, who developed his own... brand of music. How would you describe music in tragic plays in relation to the play *The Gods are Not to Blame* that you directed and *Death and the King's Horseman* that you performed in?

Sotimirin: Mmm. Of course generally speaking let me take it from the general umm use of music and relevance and a sense of music in play production. Of course to highlight, to identify areas where you want to capture the mood of the actor and in doing so you want also that to be translated into what will very well communicate the atmosphere. To involve the audience, members of the audience. And also to, as it were, you know... enhance the moments we have dialogue. Even moments where you don't have dialogue music plays very significant role in communicating the importance of you know, particular scenes or messages in the play you know. Music also can help to communicate the... thematic preoccupation... in terms of sometimes non-verbal messages to an audience. But specifically, the manner in which I use music in *The Gods are Not to Blame* that was staged at the MUSON Centre which was produced by the Thespian Theatre, you know some years back. I invited some professional artists who are usually- some of them don't traditionally play for theatre productions. But you see nowadays theatre has gone just beyond just staging it, you want to look at

how you can achieve and bring about the commercial viability of it. Therefore one tried to introduce you know those that the audience, the public, already have identified with as popular musicians. For instance I brought in Aralola¹, a female talking drummer- in fact she's celebrated all over Africa as one of the most foremost female talking drummers. Yeah she's done a bit of theatre productions with Wanle Abimbola of the La Campagne Africana. So one cannot totally say that she is not exposed to theatre. But specifically for that production, she was, we had to make her do the traditional drumming which was complimented by other traditional talking drummers you know. In order to, one, I mean for instance it's the scene where we say there's war situation and we made her to give us an atmosphere of war. With the creation of beats that will palpitate the minds of people, that will create fear, that will cause, you know, that tension. And she did it quite well. And the moments where you had the naming ceremony, she also was very effective in, we made her compose you know songs and phrases specifically relevant to celebrate you know naming ceremony. And moments where you had tragic situations, where you know, the announcement "you will kill your father and then marry your mother", you know, a different type of music. Which sort of you know, brought about that melancholic mood, was also explored. So in those kind of situations music came in as a very effective tool to render, okay, the message in very clear traditional uh expressions to communicate the message of the play, yeah.

Balogun: Now you said something about using Ara?

Sotimirin: Yes.

Balogun: As a talking drummer to introduce the play and the rest of that. It does appear that Ola Rotimi has written the play in such a way that it is told by a narrator.

Sotimirin: That's right.

Balogun: So you're saying that, Aralola was the narrator there or she complimented the role played by the narrator?

Sotimirin: Yes, you know, with every production what one tries to do is to bring some kind of fresh innovation and perspective to it. Just like you rightly said... the narrator was there, I mean, in fact working with the Thespian Family Theatre² was uh... you know, she-- the woman, Mrs Jaiyesimi³ who produced the play. Ayodele Jaiyesimi, I mean from a very you know, rich and serious Christian background, wanted us to as it were not delve too much into traditional cultures. So what we tried to do was to create a sense of balance. So Aralola's drumming at the you know, prologue where you had narrator- in fact narrator you know comes into that play at you know intermittent moments. And those moments were highlighted. So complimented by either mood music in the background or to you know, to what do you call it- to announce scenes or situations that will come immediately after, you know, one particular moment. So Aralola was there one, to do her virtuoso drumming to showcase her skills but within the confines of traditional understanding of a Yoruba play. So like you said, she complimented, in spite of those rare moments or situations where she had to do solo performance in the company of other backup drummers. Yeah, you know, I mean the talking drum family... the *dùndún* family. It's not just one person, it's not a one person's show. Although she played the lead talking drummer you have the *kàràngó*, the *gúdúgúdú*, the *iyá-ilù*, you know, the *àtélé* and all the rest of those drums you know. They were there to give it a sense of completeness in projection of those messages, yeah.

¹ Aralola Olamuyiwa

² THESPIAN Family Theatre & Productions. <https://thespianfamily.com/>

³ Ayodele Jaiyesimi. <https://thespianfamily.com/about/team>

Balogun: Yeah sir now apart from, it appears from what you're saying now that music was really central to your directorial approach to the play.

Sotimirin: Absolutely.

Balogun: Now what other...

Sotimirin: Types of music deployed in the-

Balogun: Yes. Basically so that we can have a feel of-

Sotimirin: The broader you know knowledge of it. I would say also that at some point where you know, for instance there's the *Fúji* music. That of course developed from the *Wéré* tradition where Muslims would wake up in the middle of the night after, to break their fast. We experimented with that by playing the circular music in order to appeal to another type of audience because what we tried to do with that play is to reach out to the old, the young and you know, even those who- even though it focused, it emphasizes the traditional general orientation of the play. But then we also want to- we also want to emphasize the fact that look in this age and time, the youth must be taken along those who have gone to- you know schools- those who are the elite must be carried along. So we created- but that didn't mean that we brought in guitar, no we didn't bring in all those modern instruments. But then the Fuji music, the manner in which it will appeal to modern-day audience was also experimented with and it worked. In an environment like the MUSON Centre most of the time you have high-brow, you know, people, elitist kind of...but then we broke it down. Of course the dialogue is in English, but no matter what those who came to watch the play when it was announced or promoted- or when the promos were running, knew that they were coming to see a traditional play. But then we gave it a kind of dimension that will appeal to contemporary period in terms of the appreciation of the various tools of engagement, of music, of poetry, of chant, of incantation, even rendition by the priests, you know. We tried to break it down and complement with the appropriate dance movement. So that it would be a robust spectacle, you know, to those who came to see it.

Balogun: We understand that it is almost impossible not to have some kind of choreography when you have music especially in a play like this. Now how were you able to integrate the music with the choreography? And what sort of dance steps were actually choreographed for the performance?

Sotimirin: That's right. Okay, fine. Let me take some scenes, for instance the priests. We tried to make the priests have an acolyte you know. Some kind of apprentice who would take him around wherever he needed to go. In fact we didn't just make the priests and his assistant come onstage without having to have- add colour and what do you call it... and choreography to their movement, you know. So... I'm trying to remember the specific song that was composed for instance, and this is just an example I hope that's what we used, if we say (*sings*). You see, the choreography complimented the singing and it became a very, you know, colourful moment that the audience, you know, who may not understand what they are saying but they can move along. And then if you do that kind of a show in a place like Brazil or Mexico, you know, you see the sense of movement in terms of choreography, you know...because there's a specific way in which you have a Priest who is considered and seen to be elderly will move. But we gave the Priest a specific movement to suit his age. And the assistant, in fact there were two assistants with him who also complimented his movements. So choreography became a tool, okay, to engage the audience in a very very, you know, pleasing manner. And apart from the priests you have the war situation, it was not just presented as a war or a state or a situation where you have anomy, the breakdown of peace and laws and all of that. But we organised it in the middle of those crises there was order, you know, we had different factions, different groups. In fact to even bring to bear or to the fall the kind of political, you know, crises that we have in contemporary times. We have factions, you know one group attacking the

other because of a particular interest, you know. So all of those things were factored in to say look let's design, it was deliberately designed, okay, it was co-ordinated in a very organised manner that one could say that look this is a particular group attacking the other and with good singing to compliment the dance movements. So those were the war situations but then again the celebrated moods too were choreographed. You see you had different, the family of Odewale, Aderopo, all the chiefs, and the townspeople. For instance when the King announces to say listen go there and when they came to complain that you know they are sad, they've been struck by all kinds of ailments and diseases and the man says listen, look at me, I'm also sick. Look at my children, you know, they are feeling the same pain that you go through. By the time he gives them some kind of assurance that, you know, if they go to the bush to get some herbs there would be some level of improvement in their lives. From that moment on, a different type of mood was registered. And it was, look, it was hopeful. So the kind of drumming and choreography that was... introduced at that moment you could... title it "Hope". So umm... and... you know... at that point in time you saw celebration, you saw hope, you saw, you know, people who had been dejected, going to town by giving assurance by their leader to say go. So drums, music, choreography came in intermittently in the play. So like you said, music plays very significant- in fact some moments were- there were some moments in the play that, like I said you know, it was just chanting that registered the essence of that scene. You know, for instance Odewale's mother had to wail and cry and became emotional. You could hear, you could feel the pain, the pang of a troubled mother. Okay, so I've been sleeping with my son, you know, that sort of thing. And it was not just dialogue, it was singing, complementing the dialogue at that moment. So you know that's a way we were able to handle that.

Balogun: Okay *The Gods are Not to Blame* has been directed and performed many many times.

Sotimirin: Yes.

Balogun: But I recall that there was this... innovation that you introduced and that's the area of multimedia.

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: Yeah, what... informed-

Sotimirin: Prompted that choice?

Balogun: - yeah informed the choice of whatever you did?

Sotimirin: I will say that, you see most, like you said, people have had several interpretations. But I think the producer, Mrs Jaiyesimi, also was of the opinion that this land of Kutuje it's a small community but then let's look beyond Kutuje. Let's try to represent the mass of generality of the people who occupied different- So what the multimedia was able to achieve was to see them maybe doing, engaging in different chores.

Balogun: mmm.

Sotimirin: You know, the riverside, the farms, you know, some cooking, you know, making their *garr⁴* and food and stuff like- So onstage you may not be able to achieve that particularly with a limited, you know, time and space. But with the multimedia we were able to marry all of those moments and situations. I mean the river area, the riverine area, the cooking area, some young men trying to woo ladies and stuff- So we were able to sort of get into those areas that ordinarily we would not have been able to achieve if we tried to present it. In fact we even went to a large expanse of farm land, you know. So when you had was it Gbonka now or I mean he tried to-

Balogun: The encounter between Adetusa and Odewale-

⁴ Type of food made from cassava.

Sotimirin: Yes. So that way people were able to connect to the reality of, you know, a natural environment as opposed to what you try to recreate onstage.

Balogun: So let's go back a little bit. I realise that unlike some other professional productions I've seen, your cast was slightly made up of young people.

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: What was-

Sotimirin: Responsible for that?

Balogun: Yeah.

Sotimirin: I will say that, again let me say that, this was prompted by the producer who was trying to target the youth, okay. And to say look, let me inject into this production the spirit of youthfulness, you know, the spirit of the youth. Okay, and again if you look at it politically you know, they say "Not too young to rule." You understand me. So we are saying that these elderly ones, they are still very much relevant but then the younger ones are the ones who will take over. Let's start to build them for as long as they have the capacity to carry the roles. Well you could also, you know, observe that yes we had people like Ayo Lijadu and a couple of elderly ones in there, who in a way carried the younger people along. So that is to say, in a way, the philosophy behind all that is to say look, let us take these youths along because they will ultimately be the ones, okay, to lead this community in future. And I think that's the reason why. And again the producer wanted to- because most people go to theatres you know, from the youth category. From the young people they are the ones who go to theatre. This elderly ones, you don't have too many of them.

Balogun: Yes but how I was thinking actually in the direction of the fact that I saw the performance-

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: - I was part of it.

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: The dances that you mentioned were actually really energetic, especially the war scene.

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: My opinion would have been that... the casting was mainly to bring in these young people that are very strong-

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: -because unlike so many versions of the play that I have seen-

Sotimirin: And energetic, yeah.

Balogun: - versions of the play that I've seen. That particular one was *really* really really energetic because the music was so top-notch and the choreography was awesome...to the extent that some members of the audience imagined that unlike *The Gods are Not to Blame* before-

Sotimirin: That they have seen, yeah.

Balogun: - this has some kind of a pace.

Sotimirin: That's right.

Balogun: Was that a deliberate thing to pace up the action?

Sotimirin: Yes it was because traditional plays sometimes can be boring if you don't inject something that will sort of titillate members of the audience to keep them on their toes. You see in modern times if people get distracted the next thing they will do is to pick their phones and be pinging, I mean sending messages. But we had to ensure that we didn't allow all of that to happen by engaging them with appropriate music, dances and good acting that will lift the spirit of the audience for every- In fact the acting you know, people like Ola Rotimi who came in, you know much later into the play who played Odewale, Ayo Lijadu that is of course elderly. But then we told him that look pace

would be of essence in this part of our production. Shafi Bello who is very much celebrated in the home video industry came in to bring her expertise as a performer and a regular in the home video- In fact it was, like you said, a celebration of you know, people from different backgrounds. You know the elderly ones even the drummers understood they had a lot of energy and added value to the new orientation that we were trying to achieve. I think you know, in a way it was well accepted and it registered a great deal of significance in the minds of the audience.

Balogun: Yes, in terms of the costume I noticed that generally you still subscribed to the traditional costume-

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: - the *aso òkè*...

Sotimirin: That's right.

Balogun: But considering that you also wanted a play that has a lot of pace and energy-

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: - you don't think that's a bit out of-

Sotimirin: Contradictive if you like?

Balogun: Yeah in a way.

Sotimirin: Let me say that there is no way that you can completely shy away from something that is traditional. Again in trying to toe the line or respond to the request of the producer Mrs Jaiyesimi. Yeah she's a Christian, but then she also wants to explore you know, something that is rooted in the Yoruba tradition. So in fact she actually chose those costumes to say look this is *agbádá* that will be fitted proper King in the Yoruba land.

Balogun: The producer was also the costumière?

Sotimirin: Absolutely, she was a costumière. She actually you know, chose those costumes to say look in spite of the fact that I want it to appeal to modern-day audience they must also know that we have a history. We have an identity-

Balogun: A culture.

Sotimirin: - a culture. So that was why she you know had to use those costumes. I mean for every character there's a defined, you know, a designed purpose you know, purposeful costumes, okay. To say look this is your character you are old. And for people like Aderopo who of course you know... if they had to go to the farm and all of that there are some kind of thing that will suit them to wear to go and work in the farm. So we had all those traditional things. So that was the purpose, to represent tradition- (*sneezes*)...

Balogun: I know that you said you are a composer, a musician. The songs, the music that you used for the production. Did you compose them by yourself?

Sotimirin: I did compose some, some of those songs. And I also encouraged, because as a director, what I realised was that most of the singers that we brought in. People like Funmi Abe and her brother...I can't remember his first name now. He's also-

Balogun: Seun

Sotimirin: Seun, yeah. And they came in with the mind-set that look they worked with the National Troupe and they are familiar with a lot Yoruba songs, so they just felt that they will just be injecting those songs that they knew. I said no. What I wanted was to bring you know some kind of freshness into songs composition in play productions.

Balogun: So they were made to compose?

Sotimirin: They were made to compose apart from the ones that I composed. But they were meant to, so Funmi... you know who responded very well and composed some new songs.

Balogun: But what guided these compositions? What guided it?

Sotimirin: Of course you know the philosophy- I mean if you remember what we tried to highlight in the play was this statement of the fact that there are some kings you will want to stay and stick to power but then they have some destinies and fate that have been designed you know. Perhaps by you know some means...will not allow that so it will upset whatever plans that they have. So all of these things guided the musical compositions, the choreography, everything. So those were the issues that we looked at in trying to compose you know new songs. And we didn't veer away from that philosophy of okay fine, here's a new political agenda, a new set of people occupying governance, you know in our community, in our society, in our country. But then you can't be- you see when you become authoritative, too powerful there must be some kind of motivation behind all of that. It may not be deliberate it may be something that is in it that you don't know. So not until someone you know sort of calls your attention to it. So these are things that we were able to throw up in trying to project the play's philosophy. And that guided the direction of the singing, of the dance, of acting, of character interpretation.

Balogun: Okay, in relation to *Death and the King's Horseman*.

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: It is another tragedy. Now how would you describe tragedy and what is tragic. Let's take it from *The Gods are Not to Blame* then *Death and the King's Horseman* and then we'll look at it in specific reality.

Sotimirin: Let me start with *The Gods are Not to Blame* in terms of the tragic import and what that portends in an African environment. Umm there are times when people... Ola Rotimi clearly you know states it in the play. A matter of it could be destiny... it depends on how you interpret it. But majorly there are times when you want to defend the integrity of your family of your culture of your environment of you're the identity that you think you stand for. And you want to enforce it, even as a ruler. And you probably don't know about your past and in *The Gods are Not to Blame* Odewale for instance you know became you know authoritative and would dish out instructions and people will wonder okay fine he's a warrior, someone that is highly respected on the war front even on the home front. And then but some of those decisions he didn't know why he was doing it but he just felt that listen, as a leader this is what- But those things were inherent in his personae as an individual. He didn't know it's in his blood. Like one of the priest, you have a hot temper you know you have a hot temper. Is it Alaka that told him you know, one of the characters...and it can be a human nature, a temperament that you... perhaps it's something that is endemic in your family. But then it's a tragic thing if it is not well managed. And that's the thing that brings a lot of crises into some families, some nations, you know some societies. When you are rash. The military regime has that capacity to impose draconian rules on people because it is the mentality that they have. But in the case of Odewale... you know from my own observation and research and understanding of this character, I want to think that it is just a human element you know in him. So- but he couldn't manage it. He became so downcast at the end of the play when he it was- you know when the eyes were gauged and all of that and you know. Of course all of that you know, it's like Samson in the Bible, when you know the hair had been shaved. He became powerless and that's what happened to Odewale, and that's the tragic- but the metaphor in that is you know, yes, as much as you want to take decisions you know, rule your people with all the power and the knowledge that you have. There are times when you don't just look at things from one direction. You have to be able to balance you know your decisions and temperament. He couldn't handle that. And some nations are suffering you know, Idi Amin and the rest of them you know, which other ones now... there's really draconian rulers in African nations.

They have that kind of temperament. So that brings about the tragic essence. So you saw at the end of the day how it sort of... because a communal tragedy, yeah because look at all the family you know the children you know didn't have a choice but to go with him wherever he directed them. So he wasn't an individual, it became a communal problem. And that also is similar to what happens in *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka. That is, it's interpreted to... be something like umm what do you call it you know... something that is- it's tragic, it's sad but- there's a particular word I'm trying to remember in terms of describing the communal nature of the loss of power, of you know... the essence of umm... of putting- of sustaining a tradition. And once you lose that sustainability of a traditional system, you allow, the Yorubas say that...because of the weakness of Elesin Oba for instance there's a kind of penetration of you know into which sort of brought about in some ways you know the havoc that was wrecked... that actually wrecked him. Even though some of these things were his own personal decisions and were you know inspired by his loss for carnal things. So we can look at it from different ways.

Balogun: Okay so what you are saying that, is if you consider *The Gods are Not to Blame-*

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: - and *Death and the King's Horseman* as tragedy.

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: We're saying that tragedy generally is a reflection of people and society.

Sotimirin: Absolutely. Absolutely because it's always good to put it against a backdrop of what one experiences in the social environment that you find yourself. And umm when you talk about leaders who exhibit or demonstrate this capacity for or propensity for irresponsibility. There's a way in which it brings about some kind of tragic, you know, falls in their lives and subsequently it affects the society. I mean look at Abacha today we are still suffering. The loot and the kind of harsh, you know, nature of that government you know, the military rulers you know, even some of the politicians who amass money and stuff like that who don't care. There's a way in which...it's not all the time that when you kill or when you maim that should be looked at as tragedy. The fact that the economy itself is bad because of your mismanagement because you siphoned money because you don't provide good health facilities because you don't provide good road. I mean if you link it to Soyinka's *The Road* again it's bad management...you know. So when potholes are there, accident will happen. So it's bad governance and it's tragic because you are there also it will now mean that individuals are got to now fend for their lives. When there's no electricity people have got to go and look for generator and in doing that, they may just cause more harm you know, petrol tankers will move on the roads, they'll just explode and it will cause natural and national disaster for those who didn't plan it. So it's about leadership. If the leader put things you know in the right place then it would... the tragic... they would use the tragedy that people will encounter. And then they'll be-

Balogun: But then if you look at it critically. Sometimes, almost all the time, the tragic situation-

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: - the tragedy that we see may not necessarily have to be the ones that are caused by those in power.

Sotimirin: Yes.

Balogun: How about those-

Sotimirin: Who are governed?

Balogun: - common people.

Sotimirin: Governed people yeah.

Balogun: So in that sense-

Sotimirin: mmm.

Balogun: - to what extent can we say that a play like *The Gods are Not to Blame* also reflect the way people-

Sotimirin: Respond to their leaders?

Balogun: - yeah or how people respond to tragic situation or are even responsible for the tragic situation.

Sotimirin: Well to start with again the common person is a member of a society just as the leader, who is not common, you know, he's a member of a society. So they both live in the same society. It's just that the capacity of opportunities are different. But if we are saying now look not all the blame should not go to the table of the leader some of these blames or problems can be caused by common people. Yes, yes it is the same human nature but I think one is stronger than the other. Yes, I mean, for instance the Boko Haram thing... you want to investigate what exactly is the cause of Boko Haram? What exactly is the cause of kidnapping? What exactly is the cause of several groups, okay, insisting that they must have their say- they must have their voice, they must have, you know the Shiite group and stuff like that you know, Sowore and the rest of them you know agitating to say look we must we must dislodge this government. So those are individuals against leadership because they feel that things are not... it's not an African issue alone.

Balogun: mmm.

Sotimirin: It's a global issue.

Balogun: Like the way some people-

Sotimirin: Like the West... they have- but they just- it may be a psychological- we all have different issues, problems. Even when you are satisfied, you have everything provided for you. You just feel like, look this society is, I'm fed up, it can be psychological problem. Okay that may cause disharmony or harm in any other way. So umm I mean, if we take the African environment for instance most of these issues are caused by leaders.

Balogun: mmm.

Sotimirin: There are some other tiny issues, caused by people because of perhaps frustration. I mean look at the example of... the lecturers who have been accused of sexual immorality and all of that. I don't think that the government is a cause of that one. That's an individual problem. So if you relate it to a psycho-emotional problem that people can't manage that I think is responsible for that. And that is affecting development- if the youths are affected and maybe a student gets pregnant for he or she cannot continue or she cannot continue her education. That is causing some kind of stagnation in the life or career of that person and emotionally that family is going to face chaos and crises. That's an individual point it's not a leadership issue. So it is both ways. But if you look at it broadly, for instance they say workers are clamouring for better pay in Nigeria. What do you call it- salary increase.

Balogun: mmm.

Sotimirin: Wages, you know and so what do they call it now, there's something about...

Balogun: Earned allowance?

Sotimirin: Earned allowance that's for... I'm even saying generally in Nigeria the-

Balogun: Minimum wage.

Sotimirin: Minimum Wage! Look some people whatever they earn it is not even enough to take them home. That's another problem. Okay? That's on the part of government. But on the part of the individual some people will have a lot, they pay themselves, they are rich you know. But then they still siphon money from banks, from oil companies, look at the politicians. Look at our people in the

Senate, House of Assembly and stuff like- they earn a lot. Yet they still want to amass some money and siphon-(money). Look so huge corruption can cause disharmony in any- So it is tragic because at the end of the day there is no way it will not affect the development of- it's not, like I said, it's not only when it involves death that it is tragic.

Balogun: So sir you think, you think tragedy like *The Gods are Not to Blame...*

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: ... actually highlights in a very strong way the crises that the society is facing.

Sotimirin: Yes.

Balogun: Is that your point?

Sotimirin: Yes, it's a reflection.

Balogun: It's a reflection.

Sotimirin: You see it might be set in a traditional Yoruba environment but it is a metaphor to express an opinion that no matter where we find ourselves in the world human nature, human minds work in the same ways, whether you are White or Black. So in *The Gods are Not to Blame...* it's a very interesting drama in terms of twists of fate, in terms of reaction by even the common people and all of that. But because they want to respect the status quo, they may not want to... That is why we have people occupy some positions of authority. The priests, Baba Fakunle, a custodian of culture he knows the- he has deep knowledge.

Balogun: Yeah you said something about fate.

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: But, what I recall of your directorial approach...

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: Is you tried to move a little bit away from that conception of fate-

Sotimirin: It must be fate-

Balogun: - or destiny rather than trying to emphasis human actions.

Sotimirin: Absolutely.

Balogun: Human actions.

Sotimirin: Yeah yeah-

Balogun: In terms of-

Sotimirin: I remember now.

Balogun: - being responsible for-

Sotimirin: Whatever decisions you know actions that you engaged- Yeah. Now you've just sort of reminded me, yeah. But truly, yes. Still it's an individual thing. I always say that even if I find myself in the position of leadership, I mean everybody every soul has one weakness or the other or one strength or the other. Umm... Baba Fakunle as I was saying has been around, he knows, he's even served various leaders in that society, in that community. So for Odewale to be arguing with him, he didn't want to listen to the truth he probably feels that it's insulting for a blind man to tell him the truth.

Balogun: mmm.

Sotimirin: If Gani Fawehinmi, Falana... and all these human activists who attack, attack in the sense of trying to redirect the mind of some leaders and they don't want to listen. Then there's problem because I mean Fela is human activism as a musician, he used his music as a tool to warn government. That's an individual. In the same manner that-

Balogun: Baba Fakunle.

Sotimirin: Baba Fakunle is warning or warns Odewale- So these are people who have voices in their little little you know, ways. But the voices have been suppressed. Some people don't want their voices suppressed that's why they can you know-but Fela was oppressed. Gani was suppressed because he shouted until he went into his grave. He was arrested several times and that's the thing. Sowore is now suffering, Soyinka was arrested. Soyinka was jailed you know for saying the truth- in fact he was going to be killed they had to- disguise. You know Tinubu and the rest of them... So there are voices who are speaking in order to say look, let's have a sense of order, let's give welfare, let's have an orderly society... we can be better than this. If we could only do this and do that. So it's not only the leaders like we said-

Balogun: Like you said.

Sotimirin: Yeah. Umm yes there are some people there who don't want it or- because I mean look at it. Some people- perhaps they are the ones funding... for instance generators are being imported because some people have made up their mind that there should be no electricity in this country any more.

Balogun: mmm.

Sotimirin: So it's a very complex situation but at the same time there's no way- like going back to Soyinka again. When he wrote *The Road* or this is a bit of digression but it's important in terms of trying to bring the tragic essence.

Balogun: To the-

Sotimirin: Yeah to the discourse. He personally, as an individual felt that people were dying on the roads. So he volunteered, look let us set up some kind of you know organisation...

Balogun: To take care of--

Sotimirin: Yeah to take care-

Balogun: He looked into road accidents.

Sotimirin: Yeah...

Balogun: - road accident-

Sotimirin: - road accident- so he wrote *The Road*. Even at his own expense he wrote *The Road*.

Balogun: mmm.

Sotimirin: Okay umm... the other idea was the whole concept he had tried to listen to him but then they stifled it-

Balogun: Now, sir let's take it from the example of Soyinka's tragedy *The Road* and-

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: - At a point in time Rotimi mentioned that he wrote *The Gods are Not to Blame* to decry the very ugly aspect of our tribal affiliation.

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: The play opened in 1968, right in the middle of the Nigerian Civil War.

Sotimirin: mmm.

Balogun: And if you look at it very well. Now the tribal sentiment is even very deep.

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: So are you saying a play like *The Gods are Not to Blame*... a tragedy that it dramatizes in its opening in 1968

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: Are you saying the play is as much relevant to the Nigerian situation now that is more divided by tribalism, than when the play even premiered? More than (*chortles*) 50 years ago.

Sotimirin: mmm the issue of tribalism. I mean you have cited the example of you know the... a national, the nationalistic kind of culture that you have a national identity. And that's a problem. It's very hard for us to say here is a national identity.

Balogun: The tribal-

Sotimirin: The tribal sentiments have actually split us as groups. This is why every time people discuss let us go our separate ways. It's because we have not been able to come together- But at some point we lived as one family when we had, when we were still operating or existing as regions, regional governments, regional... Then the tribalism was not really that pronounced. But then when it became look, let the Yoruba be the ones who are leading, let the Igbo, let Hausa...forever. Listen, everywhere you walk whether it's in a transport business, whether it's a haberdashery, whether it's a technology what... The issue of tribalism, ethnic bias is always there. And when you try to get admission for your children, they will say look you are also an Igbo, so that they have created the platform and forum to say "go to the north, go to south". If you're coming to an area they say look, we don't have your whatever, this thing for you, there's no space for you. So instead of- in other climes once you are qualified they don't want to know where you come from. Well you know some people may be...because everything that happens in Nigeria, there's a replication of something...

Balogun: Everywhere.

Sotimirin: Yeah. Everywhere. It's in the UK-

Balogun: Even the xenophobia in South Africa, we have some (*chortles*) everywhere like that. The Boko Haram-

Sotimirin: Exactly! So the tribal thing is a human issue. Okay umm to get people appointed or promoted in some Universities, Institutions and stuff like that even media organisations, why should he be the one, you know he's not from... bring your CV, bring your CV because I know you, you are a Yoruba man. And I want you to be there even when I'm leaving, I think it will be- it won't be a bad idea to make you the head because in order to sustain that tradition so that when I want to come and bring somebody next time, you'll be the one to help me.

Balogun: So what it means is that even when Rotimi says his play talks about the Civil War.

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: (*Chortles*) To some extent he was even just being modest. This idea of tribalism, favouritism is actually... it is deep into-

Sotimirin: It has.

Balogun: - every facet of the Nigerian society.

Sotimirin: If you want to... like Osofisan would... say, let's do away with all of that. Let's look at things objectively from afresh... let's do things afresh rather than the traditional way of looking at things... If you want to do that... there's a way in which you are stifled, your ideas are stifled. We know a lot of people who have objected to this, at different times and occasions. Umm... writers have written about- you know Soyinka and the rest of them you know. Umm... Ola Rotimi, like you said... but they don't want to give them voice, they don't want to celebrate all of that. So what happens in a situation where... you know, your voices are suppressed. You can only do what is within your limits. And that's the thing- So in going back to *The Gods are Not to Blame* I mean (*chortles*) the title itself... it's another- yeah and it depends on how you interpret it. It's not as if the Gods will have a problem, it is actually us. Yeah, so the Gods represent tradition...

Balogun: mmm.

Sotimirin: Right? So... in other words in trying to say look... let's move on with life and create a new life for ourselves, we have to do away with a lot of things that have been endemic in our lives.

Rawlings for instance, Jerry Rawlings I mean in Ghana took a revolutionary attitude. That was how there was some kind of breathing space in Ghana you could see some development when he was there as a ruler. Because he had to like the Ogun, creating path for new idea.

Balogun: By eliminating-

Sotimirin: Yeah by eliminating his own people, I mean it just had got to happen and that's a revolution. So umm... so it is not the Gods that should be blamed it is actually the people who are you know, the custodians- aha, who want to stay forever and say this is how it should be, no it shouldn't be like that. "It's not your turn, it's our turn"... just give it, just give opportunity to those who are qualified, who can do it. And it's the same problem that we are facing. So it is not the Gods that are to blame really, if you investigate properly. I mean that is my own opinion that I've been having. So it is the individual mind, the conscience that should be blamed. If we all think along the line of our development, which most of the writers have, you know, propounded all this while. Whether it's in a, you know, *The Lion and the Jewel*, all Soyinka's plays, even Ola Rotimi and the rest of them. It is about look, let us... yes we are using the platform, Osofisan using folktale, traditions, songs, music and all of that. To say let us stop you know... oppressing ourselves. Give opportunities to those who can do it.

Balogun: So that's another aspect of the tragic situation in the country.

Sotimirin: Yes.

Balogun: And when people are oppressed,

Sotimirin: Yeah.

Balogun: - when they are denied opportunity, when they are...

Balogun: Okay thank you so very much for this interview. I really appreciate meeting you this very late in the night.

Sotimirin: (Chuckles)

Balogun: Thank you so very much and I really appreciate-

Sotimirin: Any time.

Balogun: - the production that you were talking about is well over five years.

Sotimirin: Yes.

Balogun: It's amazing that you're still able to remember-

Sotimirin: To remember so all these...yes and when one had done quite a lot more.

Balogun: Yeah.

Sotimirin: Yes.

Balogun: Thank you so so very much.

Sotimirin: It's a pleasure.

Balogun turns off the audio recorder