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All Animals are Equal: Rethinking ‘Animalistic’ Names and Yoruba Epistemology in Femi Osofisan’s “Kolera Kolej”

Abstract

This study explores animal names in Femi Osofisan’s “Kolera Kolej” (2001), entrenched in the characters’ animalistic tendencies and nonconformity to Yoruba ethics, values and norms. Despite studies on Osofisan’s theatre and satirical technique, especially the playwright’s commentary on Nigeria’s socio-economic and political crises, there is no compelling research on zoonyms (animal names) anchored on Yoruba epistemology in the work. The study adopted Onomastic semiosis within the framework of Dan Izevbaye’s (1981) sociocultural and literary naming contexts to foreground the Yoruba philosophy *ise èniyàn n’ise ẹranko* equating animals and human beings through names and characteristics. In the Yoruba culture, animalistic or unethical behaviours contradict the *Omoluabi* concept of ideal citizenship. Thus, the playwright’s designation of profound Yoruba animal names ridicules African elites and political leaders’ chauvinistic and greedy nature and its consequences on a nation’s socio-politics and economy.

Keywords: Animal Psychology, Cultural Studies, Osofisan, Yoruba Orature, Zoonyms

1. Introduction

Ìse èniyàn n'ise ẹranko—human traits are like animals.

(Yoruba proverb).

The above maxim in the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria can be understood literally and metaphorically. We invoke it here first, to express the welfarist advocacy for the equal treatment of animals as humans, and second, to highlight noticeable traits in both animals and humans foregrounded within human ethics and satirical names, especially in Osofisan's work. Femi Osofisan, a Nigerian literary giant with over sixty dramatic plays, several critical essays, four novels and five collections of poetry to his credit, a writer whose readership spanned Africa, the Americas, Australia and Europe, is mainly inspired by Yoruba performance and culture. In the Yoruba worldview, far from superior, humans are perceived as 'co-occupants' of the earth, very cautious of disrupting social harmony in the ecosystem/nature (Idowu, 1978). The diffused hierarchy between the spiritual and physical realm blends with the Yoruba worldview of religion, philosophy and art, as perpetuated in festivals, folktales, myths, philosophy, proverbs, rituals, songs, symbols and wise sayings (Ojo, 1966).

Thus, the Yoruba perform communal rites and sacrifices to maintain the liminal bond between the realms of the living, the unborn and the ancestors. The rites and sacrifices are vital to the balance between the physical and metaphysical realms (Soyinka, 1993). However, anytime there is fragmentation in the social balance between human beings and the ancestral realm, there is a cataclysmic explosion of evil occurrences and misfortune causing random natural processes to become unnatural in the community. Thus, the following maxim indicates a state of inertia and sterility in the animal and human ecologies: *eku o ke bi eku, eye o ke bi eye agan o t'owo ala b'osun* 'rodents are not squeaking, and birds are not chirping, and infertile women fail to conceive' as a negative consequence of provoking the deities/nature. Indeed, the Yoruba conservatory stance on animal life/rights is exemplified by such maxims as: *a kimo alaja, kanaa aja re pa* 'when we know and are friends with the owner of a dog, we should not beat the dog to death' (Adewoye, 2007, p. 54). Also, *akeyinje ko mope idi n ro adie* 'the person who consumes the egg does not know the pains the hen endured during the hatching process' (Adewoye, 2007, p. 56). For instance, Owoseni and Olatoye (2014) argued based on Yoruba ethical-cultural practices—especially proverbs,

philosophies, superstitious beliefs and relationships with nonhumans and animals—to situate the global discourse of animal ethics and animal liberation.

Most importantly, the indigenous Yoruba, being animists, distinguish themselves remarkably from the West on animal rights and welfare given that they prioritise non-humans, especially vulnerable creatures, as an organic part of the ecosystem. Therefore, they endorse animal ethics and ecological conservation as espoused in the following mythopoetic line from “Odu Ifa Ogbe-otura – Iwa pele”: “Step aside and watch your feet. Do not kill the insect because that insect you overlook God created it” (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979). Besides the cosmogonic beliefs and conservative insight implied in the mythopoetic assertion, is the sacredness and value of the minutest animal in fostering the life cycle in the environment which contradicts the Western cosmological model of the universe in the ‘Big Bang’ theory (Ogunade, 2005).

Femi Osofisan, a Nigerian literary icon who had his university education under British rule in Nigeria in the 1960s, subscribes to the dramatic influence of the *Alarinjo* (the Yoruba travelling theatre), storytelling, rituals and festivals, Brecht's epic theatre, European writers like William Shakespeare, Nikolai Gogol, or George Feydeau, and Nigerian writers and critics, including Wole Soyinka (Adeyemi, 2009). He fuses George Feydeau’s farcical style with Brecht’s epic theatre. The *Alarinjo* theatre’s¹ influence on the playwright inspired his satirical Yoruba songs and names mainly for political, economic, and religious purposes to deride characters’ shortcomings, flaws, and questionable activities (Adeleke, 2016). Osofisan’s works aim to raise socio-political consciousness, expose moral decadence and class strata, and liberate Nigerian masses from neo-colonial hegemony manifesting as socio-political, economic and religious anomalies in post-independent Nigeria (Awodiya, 1993).

Remarkably, the preponderance of animal metaphors/names as a dominant motif in Osofisan’s works parodies the Nigerian society’s predator/prey relationship between the rich and poor. As espoused by Clement Ajidahun (2013), Osofisan predominantly deploys animal metaphors in his works to typify the bestial traits of the ruling class and the dehumanised poor masses subjected to draconian laws and policies. Paradoxically, the high class are monstrous predators manifesting as looters of public funds and resources while the insignificant and vulnerable animals are exploited Nigerian masses. Below is a highlight of animal metaphors/names in some of Osofisan’s titles:

¹ *Alarinjo* is a Yoruba word and description for someone who dances as s/he walks.

“The Chattering and the Song” (1976): Elephant, Antelope, Lion (*Abiodun*), Toad (*Latoye*), Buffalo, Antelope, Hawk (*Sontri*) and Hen (*Yajin*);
 “Once Upon Four Robbers” (1980): Hunting Dog and Sacrificial Ram;
 “Morountodun” (1983): Elephant and Mosquito;
 “Red is the Freedom Road” (1983): Lion and dogs;
 “No More the Wasted Breed” (1983): Crabs/Scorpions and Stray dogs/Maggots;
 “Midnight Hotel” (1986): Hen and Cockroach;
 “Farewell to a Cannibal Rage” (1986): Hyena (*Adigun*) and Antelope (*Akanbi*);
 “The Oriki of a Grasshopper” (1986): Locust and Grasshopper;
 “Altine’s” (1986): Wrath Monkey and Goat;
 “Another Raft” (1989): Rodent/Rat and Sharks/Fishes;
 “Birthdays Are Not For Dying” (1990): Cannibals and Toad;
 “Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen” (1992): Cat and Rat;
 “Nkrumah-Ni Africa” (1999): Vultures, Jackals, Dogs, Cat, Cockerel and Rat;
 “Reel Rwanda” (1999): Jackals and Pests;
 “The Inspector and the Hero” (1990): Wolves and Jackals;
 “Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest” (1993): Hawk and Hen, Buffalo and Antelope;
 “Twingle-Twangle: A twynning taylor” (1995): Monster Bilisi and Big Cock/fish;
 “Tegonni, An African Antigone” (1999): Lion and Fat Pigeon/Fish, Vultures and Goats/Dogs.

Though many of the above animal metaphors are indirect characters’ names in Osofisan’s works, the uniformity of the motifs indicates that the playwright exploited them for satire and social commentary on Nigeria’s ominous socio-economic and political realities while exposing the living conditions of the poor masses. Remarkably, Osofisan promoted socialist/neo-rationalist tenets in his early plays mainly to expose Nigeria’s class strata and evoke political consciousness. The playwright explains that he utilises popular imageries and symbols in Yoruba folktales for adaptation and didactics and to connect with his local audience while projecting his visionary ideology. Moreover, the playwright deploys metaphor and magic, names and nemesis, parody and parable, masking and mimicry as a new art form, ‘surreptitious insurrection’ or ‘uncommon sense’ and covert operation during the military regime in Nigeria from 1966 to 1999 (Olaniyan, 1999).

From an onomastic standpoint, Osofisan crafts names and roles to bond with his readers and propagate the Yoruba culture exploiting three inherent functions of names in African

fiction, namely imitation of reality, characterisation (characterology) and meaning-making (Ojebode and Ayodabo, 2021). Onomastic semiosis as the study's construct foregrounds Izevbaye's (1981) sociocultural and literary naming contexts. Osofisan's Yoruba cultural milieu informs many of his names that it has "become his style, especially in the subtle naming of characters as a way of revealing their characteristic(s)" (Dugga, 2002, p. 106).

Despite studies on Osofisan's theatre and satirical technique, especially the playwright's commentary on Nigeria's socio-economic and political crises, there is no compelling research on zoonyms (animal names) anchored in Yoruba epistemology in his work. This study explores animal names in Femi Osofisan's "Kolera Kolej" (2001), entrenched in the characters' animalistic tendencies and nonconformity to Yoruba ethics, values and norms. The study adopted Onomastic semiosis within the framework of Dan Izevbaye's (1981) sociocultural and literary naming contexts to foreground the Yoruba philosophy *ise èniyàn n'ise ẹranko*, equating animals and human beings through names and characteristics. In the Yoruba culture, animalistic or unethical behaviours contradict the *Omoluabi* concept of ideal citizenship.

2. Animals in Yoruba worldview

As earlier stated in the introduction, the indigenous Yoruba were mainly animists who adhered to totemic practices and the notion of harmony between humans and nonhumans, and the physical and metaphysical realm which are entrenched in their art, culture, festival and religion. Thus, within their cultural worldview, animals can be categorised based on habitat and physiological traits: *eran omi* 'aquatic, sea or water animals', *eran ile* 'land animals', *eran afayafa* 'reptiles', *eran elese meji* 'bipeds', *eran elese merin* 'quadrupeds', *eye* 'birds', *eku* 'rodents', and *eran ile* 'domesticated animals' or *eran igbe* 'wild animals'. In Yoruba ontology, animals can be classed into sub-categories of religion, tradition, economy (food and hunting), and human-animal relations (Olusola, 2005). Thus, the lion is the king for terrestrial animals, the ostrich for birds and the python for snakes (Olusola, 2005). The *Ifa* corpus (*Orunmila*, the god of divination and wisdom), as the primary source for most Yoruba mythological and spirito-religious narratives, projects animals as agencies of stability and vitality of nature. On the one hand, is the Yoruba creation myth that *Olodumare* (the Supreme Being) commissioned *Obatala* (the Arch-divinity god) to create the universe with a mystical rooster and earth in a snail shell. On the other hand, a myth about *Oya*, *Sango's* favourite wife and the Yoruba goddess of the River Niger and the whirlwind, has it that she transformed into a buffalo due to heated rivalry with other wives. Thus, buffalos were

prohibited as game and food within society (Olusola, 2005). The above narrative substantiates the Yoruba belief in transmigration and reincarnation—the temporal or permanent cosmic transfer of spirits into human or animal forms: insects, birds, goats, deer, cats, owls, etc. Also, domestic animals like goats, cocks and cats, wild animals like chameleons, lizards, hogs and deer, and sacred birds like hornbills, vultures, parrots, doves, and owls serve votive purposes. Besides, *adie irana* (‘the fowl that clears the path/fare fowl’) is sacrificed to commemorate the departure of a high-ranking official in Yoruba communities (Olusola, 2005).

Traditionally, animals are deeply implicated in the Yoruba religion to appease and designate deities, especially *Ogun* (god of Iron), dogs, snails, tortoises and rams; *Oya* (the goddess of the River Niger) approves of goats and fowls; *Esu* (the Yoruba trickster deity) black fowl, *Sango* (god of Thunder) ram; *Orunmila* (god of Wisdom, Knowledge and Divination) rats, *Osanyin* (god of herbal medicine) tortoise; *Egungun* (masquerade) rams. Some Ondo indigenes do not consume rodents (*okete*) and the Onikoyi and Alapa families repudiate yellow palm birds or any snake species (Owoseni and Olatoye, 2014). The indigenous Yoruba prohibits the killing of mating and votive animals thus promoting conservative taboos based on moral and religious sentiments. As it will be discovered in this study, the ethico-cultural relationship between animals and humans in Yoruba society is the vantage for the exploration of zoonyms (animal names) in the work of a Yoruba-Nigerian playwright underpinned by characters’ animalistic tendencies and nonconformity to Yoruba ethics, values and norms.

3. Animal metaphors in the Yoruba oral genre

Yoruba poetic genres, *Ijálá* (‘hunters’ poetry’), *orìkì* (‘praise/panegyric poetry’) and *ese-ifá* (*Ifá*, ‘divination poetry’) are replete with animal eulogies. The former genre is dedicated to hunters’ aesthetics, rhythms, and observations of animals during hunting expeditions. Such poetics feature unique characteristics of animals like physiognomies, feeding, sleeping, movement or pace and appearance (Olatunji, 1984). In the Yoruba culture, animals and hunters share a complex relationship. The local hunters perceive some animals as spirits that could transform into human forms during night expeditions. Often, compliant hunters rely on such mystical human-animals to guide them in preparing folk medicine for personal and group fortification (Olusola, 2005). As a result, local hunters generally adhere to cultural codes on hunting to prevent unpalatable consequences, especially for their wives and loved

ones. The following *Ijálá* chant focuses on the elephant (*erin*), praising the animal for its strength, awe-inspiring gait, and economic value of its tusks, skin, and meat:

Erin lábá-owó, erin abikúnlè pelemomo (Babalolá, 1966, p. 93, line 1).

The elephant is pouch-filled with money and monstrous, descending sloppily as a mountain.

The below Yoruba proverb on gratitude complements:

Oḍe t'ó pẹran t'ó sètùtù, nítorí oḣo' òní kọ' o, nítorí oḣo' m̀ìràn ni; èyí t'ó sì pẹran tí kò sètùtù, nítorí oḣo' òní kọ' o, nítorí oḣo' m̀ìràn ni.

A hunter who killed a game animal and made a propitiatory sacrifice has not done it for today but for another day. The one that killed a game animal and did not make a propitiatory sacrifice has not also done it for today but for another day.

Another Yoruba proverb on trusting God's divine blessings on human endeavours:

Olorun lo m'ola, eniyan le sise bi erin koo je ije eleri

God (alone) knows what will be tomorrow; one may work like an elephant but feed like a mouse.

Remarkably, the Yoruba have stringent cultural codes that protect animals. Thus, the following proverb on patience:

*A kò ní torí gbígbó pajá; a kò ní torí kíkàn pàgbò; ẹ̀bẹ̀ ni mo bẹ̀ yín,
ẹ̀ má torí orí bínúù mi*

We do not because of barking kill a dog; we do not because of headbutting kill a ram; a plea is what I am making to you, do not get mad because of my destiny.

Apart from the Yoruba oral genre, animal metaphors are also evident in the family context, especially in the names issued to pets, children and co-rival wives. Consequently, pet owners utilise name-calling to describe, encourage, lampoon, motivate, and express personal or social concerns.

4. Animal metaphors in Yoruba domestic contexts

In the Yoruba culture, animals like humans receive descriptive panegyric names like *Afun* ‘white’ and *Adu* ‘black’ and could be substituted with human nicknames. A few philosophical dog names are *Èyìnlàárò* ‘one must be thoughtful of the consequence of an issue’, *Tantólóun?* ‘who is equal to God?’, *Tanmèyìnòla?* ‘who knows tomorrow?’ and *Béyànòkú* ‘once you are not dead’ (Olusola, 2005). The Yoruba perceive domestic animals as friendly and loyal. Thus, some imageries like the one below convey philosophical/proverbial ideas:

Eyele ko kin bonile je, kobonile mu, kowa dojo iku ko yeri

A pigeon does not dine with its owner, wine with its owner and later betrays him on the day of death.

Likewise, Yoruba pet owners may christen their pets (goats, dogs and cats) with *Kánisùúrù* ‘We should exercise patience’, shortened *Sùurù* ‘patience’, *Ìwà-lèsin* ‘virtue is (true) religion’, *Káléyemi* ‘let my old age be fulfilled’ to express their aspirations, desires and emotions like fear, hope, joy and sadness. On the other hand, in Yoruba polygamous homes, pet owners use animal pet names as a weapon of attrition among co-rival wives. For instance, co-rival wives may issue the pet animal name *Lílò-ni-ẹ-o-lọ* ‘You-must-definitely-leave’ to show their disgust for a co-wife who has been asked to vacate the house; *Ewá-ń-bíwọn-nínú* ‘beauty-nauseates-them’ could be used by a beautiful co-wife to provoke her rivals to jealousy; *Jé-ń-rile-gbé* ‘Let-me-stay-in-the-house’ may be a plea by a co-wife to maintain her matrimony. The husband may christen his pet *Méé-l’Olọrun-wí* ‘God-approves-of-many-wives’ to validate polygamy as modest and divinely approved (Olusola, 2005). Thus, rival wives may lampoon and attack each other’s personalities and sensibilities indirectly through symbolic animal names.

5. Osofisan as Trickster Playwright

The Yoruba culture, worldview and indigenous theatrical performances have been primary influences on Osofisan’s dramatic style. While Brecht’s theories are focused on rupturing the extant bourgeois structure and emphasising a materialist, dialectical perspective, Osofisan’s narrative technique is a by-product of Yoruba storytelling which is mainly for didactics, entertainment and satire. Fundamentally, the Yoruba storytelling technique complements

Brechtian theory, on the social character of the narrator positioned in an episodic structure, fluidity of actor identity and audience objectivity (Richards, 1996).

Osofisan's adaptation of Esu as his pantheon deity complements the objectivity of his characters who are crafted to decide their destinies. Because of this, the dramatic interpretation is always subject to change or reversal and the paradigm of his plays is always dialectical. Moreover, as Osofisan states, "revolts must come to have a desired progress" (Awodiya, 1993, p. 81). Richards explains that "Orunmila speaks the secrets of the future, Esu happily generates contradiction" (Richards, 1996, p. 122). The Nigerian playwright often appropriates this 'interpretive process' to avoid conflicts and dilemmas triggered in his works. He draws a parallel between Yoruba myths and folklore and contemporary conflicts, especially in Nigerian society which forms the crux of his dramaturgy. Most importantly, Osofisan "desecrates the divinity" in the indigenous African beliefs by substituting it with modern mythic structures to serve his artistic and ideological functions (Dasylyva, 2009).

Technically, Osofisan's dramas are a product of a protean one-man cast, with or without musical accompaniment as he narrates a familiar tale whose characters are often non-humans, especially with the trickster Tortoise as a hero. The playwright consolidates messages in his plays through antiphonal chants, didactics, folktales, songs, and spectacles. By deploying this strategy, Osofisan presents Nigeria's socio-political crises to the audience for reflection and interpretation. The playwright aims his criticisms mainly at two social groups: the political class which exploits public trust and resources, and the elites, who act as accomplices by their passivity to the State's anomalies engendering an "inordinate horror of insurrection" (Osofisan, 2001a, pp. 65–66).

In the Yoruba literary genre, animal folktales are often deployed to convey the complementarity between animals and humans, especially in the trickster (Tortoise), who is minute, cunning, and devious but "strikingly human in habits, predisposition, and weakness" (Ojo, 1966, p. 21). In the Yoruba culture, the tortoise, otherwise known as *Àjàpá*, *Ìjàpá*, or *Alábahun*, epitomises human conduct and social behaviour essentially for reformative, retributive, and pedagogical purposes. The two paradigms of trickster tales identified in Femi Osofisan's "Who's Afraid of Tai Solarin?" are instrumentality and intentionality. The former is contextualised within a trickster tale to expose the subjects' foibles, and the second features trickster figure/s who become a victim of their mischief. For instance, Isola Oriebora (Ghommid's head), a city fraudster acts as a Tortoisean archetype in "Who's Afraid of Tai Solarin?" as he outwits some corrupt parliamentarians to humiliate and expose their moral rot (Adeoti, 1998).

The portraits of the trickster tortoise in the Yoruba and Igbo folktales depict the animal as mischievous and unpredictable as *Èṣù*, the Yoruba trickster deity and god of crossroads. For instance, Soyinka's "The Road" (1973), Osofisan's "Èṣù and the Vagabond Minstrels" (1991) and Yerima's "Pegunrun" (2020) attest to this fact by portraying *Èṣù* as the god of the crossroads who ambushes victims and incites conflict in the literary space. Nonetheless, notions of *Èṣù* and tortoise as tricksters are debunked by Lawal (1988), who viewed the duo as incompatible, except for their "anti-structural" representation based on ideas of complexities of social order, social hierarchies and human relationships (Lawuyi, 1990). *Èṣù* appears to be provocative and daring while *Ijapa* is sneaky and adaptive and serves the purpose of figuration of human conduct and social behaviour and is essentially used for entertainment and satire. Whereas *Èṣù* is central to Yoruba mythology and religion and is influential to human choices and destiny, the tortoise is often used to convey didactics. *Èṣù* is purely a representation of vigour and laws that govern the earth as well as human desires (Falola, 2013).

Nonetheless, in "Yungba-Yungba", Osofisan deploys Yoruba folktales and cultural practices to interrogate Africa's political leadership and power transfer. Also, in "Many Colours Make the Thunder-King" (1997), the playwright highlights the legend of Sango, the fourth and deified Oyo monarch integrating African leaders' inordinate ambition for life presidency. In "Once Upon Four Robbers", Osofisan leverages the tortoise's folktale to foreground themes of public looting, class struggles and pseudo-tyranny in a pluralistic Nigeria and pan-African society highlighting the history of *Alaafin* Abiodun's tyrannical reign in the Old Oyo Empire. As one of the pioneers of radical theatre in Nigeria, Osofisan's early plays hinged towards Marxist tenets to advocate collective revolt against Nigeria's materialist dialectics after the Civil War from 1967 to 1970. However, by the 1980s, the playwright became intensely dissatisfied with Marxist ideologies as he began experimenting with popular myths and history to attract a pan-African audience (Adeyemi, 2009). Osofisan demonstrates his tact and artistry like the trickster Tortoise in Yoruba folktales, concealing his direct involvement in Nigerian politics, especially during the military regime. The playwright tags this strategy as 'surreptitious insurrection' which becomes a precautionary tool under military dictatorship as collective criticism or protest becomes irritable to public ears. Thus, a literary artist strategically formulates criticism or protest in a tacit cunning mode to avoid a gamble with danger (Osofisan, 2001a, p. 50).

6. Animal names as aesthetics and social vision in “Kolera Kolej”

Femi Osofisan’s “Kolera Kolej” (2001b) was originally a satiric novel and has been referenced as the playwright’s foremost contribution to Nigerian literature before its adaptation as a play by Dexter Lyndersay, a former theatre director at the University of Ibadan in the 1970s. Nonetheless, both genres share the same plot as a social commentary on endemic corruption among the political class in post-independent Nigeria. Also, it seems Osofisan utilised his work to demystify the widespread cholera epidemic in Nigeria from 1970 to 1990 as emblematic of the contagious and murky corruption being a lecturer then at the University College (later rechristened as University of Ibadan—UI) in 1975. Remarkably, Osofisan artistically highlights Nigeria’s transition from colonial to post-colonial administration and vice-versa from military to civilian rule using histories/settings of the premier Nigerian University which was originally administered by the University of London before becoming full-fledged in 1963.

Due to little compelling literature on Osofisan’s drama “Kolera Kolej” (2001), the study relies on previous scholarship, especially on the prosaic version to underscore the exploration of animal names focusing on the characters’ animalistic tendencies and nonconformity to Yoruba ethics, values and norms. Although Osofisan evolved farcical/satirical techniques as a signature of his comical dramas, especially the “Midnight” series, scholars like Odun Balogun (1984) argued that the piece is a modern African absurdist text given salient features like simple, rational and realistic language combined with hyperbole, irony, exaggeration and satiric irony. From a different angle, Tiziana Morosetti (2013), explores Osofisan and selected African novelists for positive and negative stereotypes of Africa, utilising them to construct a political and representational counter-discourse. Thus, Morosetti perceives “Kolera Kolej” as an allegory of corruption and power abuse on multiple levels which is ‘typical’ of many African political and educational institutions.

The denunciation of democratic governance in Osofisan’s “Kolera Kolej” is a predominant preoccupation that bears on the linguistic structure among the various characters in the social construct of the textual universe in “Kolera Kolej”. The ominous nature of corruption and contamination of the socio-economic and political environment in the narrative is reflected in the bastardisation of the spelling of the lexical items ‘Cholera’ and ‘College’ in the title of the text as ‘Kolera’ and ‘Kolej’ respectively. Consequently, Abiola Irele, writing in African Books Collective (2007), adds that the satirical novel embodies the comedy of politics in a humorous style while focusing its searchlight on the human weaknesses demonstrated by many African public officers. The satire is a critical appraisal of

African politics with prophetic insight into Africa's disconcerting economy and socio-politics realities.

Apart from the portrait of socio-political anomalies and bizarre characters which is typical of dramatic farce/satirical work, Dele Layiwola (1999) and Augustine Aikoriogie (2018) exceptionally highlighted the naming strategies in Osofisan's novel "Kolera Kolej" in a very succinct way. The former identified personal names in the work as farcical pseudonyms informed by characters' moral traits and/or the physiological characteristics in the plot. The names are culturally significant and accentuate the plot, message and narrative flow which is the convention in Osofisan's comedies and tragicomedies. For instance, Professor Belejayan fulfils his name as an intermediary and idle timewaster on the sea of life; "a specialist in animal cohabitation" (Aikoriogie, 2018, p. 44). Ironically, Gedu (African Mahogany) is thin like a broomstick but as impulsive and brash as African Mahogany. Kukute (a tree stump) has dwarfish esteem and shape. The novelist tags him "a diminutive man, a pacifist by physique" (KK 21). Also, Dr Dekiitan is a habitual polygamist contracting marriages without children, and Professor Agborin (lit. deer) is a nimble antelope of a man. Metaphorically, political scientist Dr Pannole exemplifies a venomous adder "A jungle of hair masked his lower jaw and the VC-elect did not recognise him". Also, Comrade Ijimere (reddish-brown Monkey), the energetic and sneaky Students' Union leader teams up with Gedu'nyaju to seal a secret pact with Belejayan during an impromptu midnight visit as soon as the latter was declared the Vice-Chancellor of their College. Most importantly, the character of Ijimere (nocturnal monkey) blends perfectly with his association with Gedu'nyaju (timber) given that the monkeys climb and move on trees. Thus, Osofisan exploits the characters as a social commentary, especially the scheming nature of Union leaders and institutional executives in betraying and exploiting their members.

Likewise, Augustine Aikoriogie (2018) read the names as dramatic signposts to stimulate political consciousness, especially among Nigerians on the symptomatic decadence in their society. For her, Osofisan deployed symbolic names in the novel (Belejayan — busybody, Gedu — log, Prof. Agborin — antelope) to enhance his narrative strategy. Most importantly, African writers, including Osofisan, draw inspiration for their characters' names from the Yoruba naming tradition. They become intentional and inventive in name choices because it could either enhance or endanger a literary text's narrative flow or action. Often, characters with designated names may transition from being "neutral" to "active" (Soyinka, 2016). However, such names are crafted to form a significant piece or key to interpreting texts, especially Femi Osofisan's selected text. The naming strategy in Osofisan's "Kolera

Kolej” is appropriated in Izevbaye’s (1981) naming contexts in African fiction, that is, sociocultural and literary. Thus, the animal names (zoonyms) analysed in this study follow the naming process of nicknames, that is, the “formation of a personality, and the second, the creation of a character” (Izevbaye, 1981, p. 169). They emanate from identifying a person’s physiology, words, or ideologies associated with such a person. Thus, society (the audience) observes an individual natural attribute and then “gives him a new name befitting his character” (Izevbaye, 1981, p. 169).

Osofisan’s drama “Kolera Kolej” (2001b) unfolds with the Acting Principal’s speech to the College community recounting the disturbing fatality ratio of academic personnel affected by the cholera outbreak, initially overlooked since it ravaged only the neighbouring countries. He informs the audience about his colleagues’ sudden deaths, particularly the “misguided” Bursar and the Dean of Religious Studies. Meanwhile, the “Mother Country” quickly intervenes by enacting a charter that grants the infected College Campus independence but makes impositions on their culture, economy, politics and security. The cholera epidemic takes a new turn, leading to more high-ranking parliamentarians’ and academic personnel’s deaths. In the meantime, there are simultaneous coup d’états within the College as Alhaji Dr Paramole, Dean of Defence and Sporting Activities, topples Prof. Belejayan with the Hockey Team’s assistance during a public debate. Also, Dr (Mrs) Paramole, Head of Mass Communications and the former’s wife detain political rivals with Comrade Ijimere’s Student Representative’s support.

In “Kolera Kolej”, Prof. Belejayan’s name has an animal reference denoting ‘One who fries others’ fishes’ or ‘Third Party’. Being the VC-Elect of the rechristened College, he acts as an intermediary between the corrupt Mother Country and the institution. Significantly, the character’s name exposes his divisive role in exploiting the animosity among the foremost contestants for the post of Vice-Chancellor for his selfish ambition. The four contestants are namely Prof. Belejayan (Professor of Pig Nutrition and Management), Prof. Gedu’nyaju (Professor of Mathematics), Prof. Kukute (Professor of Sociology) and Dr Dekiitan (Head of Population Studies). They are accessed democratically based on propaganda and ballot votes from lecturers, students and workers in the College under Prof. Agbonrin’s umpire. Interestingly, Prof. Belejayan, an advocate and outspoken labour unionist, campaigns to improve his co-workers’ general welfare. The dialogue between two leading workers reveals their preference for the candidate:

1st Worker: Na who figtham to bring us here?

Others: Belejayan! Belejayan! Belejeyan!

2nd Worker: If no be him, dem go' gree us vote?

Others: No! For where? (KK 121).

In this regard, the playwright deploys Prof. Belejayan as irony, given his name and role as a former unionist who hijacks a VC post as a 'Third-Party' to become a primary stakeholder and gregarious looter and negotiator with the corrupt Mother Country. In reality, Prof. Belejayan parodies Chief Ernest Shonekan, a lawyer and statesman. He acted as Nigeria's interim Head of State from 26 August 1993 to 17 November 1993, following Babangida's forced resignation in August 1993 due to his questionable annulment of the highly successful presidential election on 12 June 1993. During his three-month tenure as Nigeria's president, Shonekan could not manage the political turmoil that ensued from the annulment of the election. However, he attempted to schedule another presidential election and a transition to democratic rule but failed due to public unrest, especially the national workers' strike.

Meanwhile, Prof. and Mrs Agbonrin have their root in a Yoruba animal name for a 'harnessed antelope', underscoring its religious and philosophical connotations within the Yoruba culture. There are different etiological myths in the *Ifa* corpus regarding Agbonrin's (harnessed antelope) transformation from an animal into a human being. Most importantly, the story behind the antelope's characteristic and sacred white stripes. Anja Oed's (2001) exposition on the antelope and buffalo woman motifs in contemporary Nigerian literature reveals the former herbivore as one of the foremost thieves in the Yoruba worldview. Initially, he was a man, one of the kings, Orunmila, the Yoruba god of divination's slaves, and he turned into a harnessed antelope to steal a slice of thigh meat belonging to the king from the Ile-Ife market. However, a similar myth in *Odu Iretemeji* recounts that the harnessed antelope (*agbonrin*) stole a particular sacred/ritual knife (*abe isenbanye*).

Nevertheless, the animal was hotly pursued by Orunmila, who was aged and could not outrun him but stretched and branded the animal's body with his mystical fingerprints. Thus, Obatala/Orisanla's mystical marks of white chalk (*efun*) and camwood (*osun*) on the harnessed antelope distinguished the animal as a rogue and the white stripes scars from lashing after it was caught (Aderinkomi & Ogundele, 1993). Likewise, in Fagunwa's "Igbo Olodumare" (1950), the protagonist entices the deer (also *Agbonrin*) by disclosing a lush okra plantation, suggesting further the animal's mischievous and dishonest nature. Meanwhile, the general portrait of the harnessed antelope in the Yoruba culture distinguishes the animal with

special privileges meant for 'big people' manifested in its agility and outrageous ability to evade capture and get away without punishment (Barber, 1981).

Significantly, Osofisan in "Kolera Kolej" (2001b) transfers the same reprobate personality to Prof. Agbonrin, an expressive and fraudulent electoral umpire and record-breaker in a "tea-drinking" competition. Comrade Ijimere extols Agbonrin for drinking "four hundred and seventy-one cups of tea" (KK 123). Initially, Prof. Belejayan offered the Professor of Marine Science Prof. Agbonrin the office of Grand Admiral of the Navy but after a rethink due to the College's land-locked geography (instead of the ocean) settled for the most appropriate. Prof. Belejayan rewards the character for manipulating the electoral outcome to his advantage with an appointment as "the first desk Grand Admiral" for the College (KK 127). The former character charged his friend to utilise the College's swimming pools and fishpond for his new cabinet post. Thus, the playwright parodies the mismanagement of public funds in educational and political settings by contrasting the antelopes' pants for water. The following Yoruba proverbs on animal characteristics and worth highlight Prof. Agbonrin's leadership qualities and traits, including *A kii fi eran ikun gbon ti agbonrin nu* 'One does not discard an antelope's meat for squirrel's'. Also, *Agbonrin esi ni e n je lobe*, 'You are still feeding on last year's antelope meat'. Ironically, the subtle quality and relevance underscore the character's high-sounding eulogies like "Agbonrin the Invincible, Indestructible, the mighty potentate" (KK 123) to identify him as a highly influential leader by the voting audience.

Consequently, Osofisan seems to deploy Prof. Agbonrin's name to parody Prof. Humphrey Nwosu's involvement in the Babangida-led government. Being his prominent cabinet member, Nwosu, the appointed chairman of the National Electoral Commission (NEC), held office from 1989 to 1993. Thus, Agbonrin's name conflates the cunning personalities of both Nwosu and General Ibrahim Babangida. The character's name foregrounds moral filths and unmerited appointments of public holders at the Federal level from Nigeria's first republic from 1963 to 1966 to the military era from 1966 to 1999.

In Osofisan's text, about a year and a half into Prof. Belejayan's democratic government, the Independent College's administration appointed Dr (Mrs) Paramole as the Chairwoman of the Committee of Elders for Re-naming the College (CERC) to rechristen the institution. The three suggested names are "The People's REPUBLIC OF KOLERA KOLEJ – that's spelt K-O-L-E-R-A and K-O-L-E-J. Kolera Kolej", "Odualand" (KK 175) and alleged "Cadaver Coast" (KK 178). Prof. Agbonrin and Prof. Gedu'nyaju clash due to individual preferences for the republic's new name. The former strongly believes the first

suggestion is “Too long and pretentious. The man in the street will never be able to pronounce it” and is supported by Prof. Gedu’nyaju, who suggests that the name “would keep recalling our origins as a country born out of the affliction of a dreadful disease” (KK 175). However, Prof. Agbonrin objects to the suggested second entry by Gedu’nyaju, “Are we to cater to tribalism, as our Mother Country does? Or shall not show our independence of that as well?” (KK 175). Eventually, Alhaji Dr Paramole, Dean of Defence and Sporting Activities symbolising Nigeria’s former Hausa Heads of States, signals to the College Hockey team to detain the three contenders for the VC post emerging the new republic’s dictator sticking to the first entry. He addresses the College community: “Ladies and Gentlemen, citizens of the Campus! Please excuse the abruptness of the proceedings. You have just witnessed a bloodless coup d’état. (*Silence*)” (KK 177).

In November 1993, three months into Shonekan’s administration, General Sani Abacha, the minister of defence and chief of defence staff, orchestrated a palace coup overthrowing him with full military backup. Also, Babangida, the former Head of State, contributed to the flaws and collapse of the interim government by putting it under the military’s close surveillance. Most importantly, Osofisan draws a parallel between the Committee of Elders for Re-naming the College (CERC) and the military Provisional Ruling Council (PRC). The latter was the military’s main decision-making organ, which rules by decree. The PRC oversees the 33-member Federal Executive Council composed of military officers and civilians. Meanwhile, the mid-eighties to the late nineties in Nigeria were horrendous due to frequent civil unrest, coups, assassinations, detentions, bombings, false promises to transit to democratic government, and despicable atrocities committed, especially by General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida from 1973 to 1993 and General Sani Abacha 1993 to 1999 (Okunoye, 2011).

In the text, Alhaji Dr Paramole detains Professor Aina (Head of Classical Studies), Mr Rakunmi (Chief Honourable Keeper of the Zoo), Prof. Sugbon (Population Statistics), Dr Jilala (Head of Engineering) and Professor Atioro (Head of Electronics) on the grounds of conspiracy and reckless political ambition (KK 177). Pointedly, the two animal names (zoonyms), Mr Rakunmi (camel) and Professor Atioro (hornbill) underline the characters’ designations and qualities as members of the underground journalist team highly critical of Belejayan’s administration and networking to restore sanity to chaotic politics. The image of the camel underscores the character’s toughness and resilience against the administration’s (military) repressive and corrupt administration, while the image of the hornbill may portend the character’s oratory and advocative skills. Most importantly, Rakunmi, being the College’s

Zookeeper, is illiterate and a non-academic member of staff like the remaining members of the leftist movement. Suggestively, Osofisan may have used the character to parody Nigeria's weak and failed educational system which breeds unqualified and unlicensed academics. As indicated, the character participates in a heated political debate with the other four activists but has incomplete historical knowledge of the revolution in the United States. Responding to Prof. Sugbon's allusion to the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, Rakunmi notes "And even the United States, no-insense! They had a war of Independence and a Civil War, or something like that!" (KK 150). He also demonstrates his illiteracy in the preponderance of 'No-insence' and misspelt words in his dialogues "At woiince! No-insence" (KK 150). For Osofisan, being illiterate and uncivilised is the same as being an animal (camel).

In the text, Atioro exemplifies one of the physiological qualities of the hornbill, especially its wings as he struggled to hold on to his scroll in his left hand and sheath a machete underneath his armpits simultaneously which he had previously used to threaten Prof. Belejayan given his incompetence and failed administration (KK 152). Also, Atioro, being an orator is the spokesperson for the activist/journalist group and has a signature scroll (perhaps written with a moulted feather quill) from where he reads the group's indictment against the College administration (KK 151). Most importantly, it seems Osofisan utilises the character's name to foreground themes of betrayal and mistrust in the Tortoise and Hornbill (*Ijapa ati Atioro*) folktale to parody the power-play and manipulations in the Nigerian political domain. The popular Yoruba folktale climaxes as the hornbill and other birds forcefully pluck their feathers from the oratory and cunning tortoise for betraying their trust during the food party organised for the birds in the sky during a gruesome famine in the animal kingdom. Thus, this led to the amphibian's crash from the sky splintering its shell, but which was later patched by a powerful medicinal man. Ironically, in Osofisan *Kolera Koleja*, as the tortoisean archetype, Dr Paramole, the succeeding VC of the College alleged Atioro and other four journalists in his leftist movement of participating in an "underground newspaper campaign," to impede the electoral contest. Thus they were indicted for "treasonable felony" and "were required to take a life sabbatical" (KK 178) in a military prison. The Yoruba proverb, *Keke pa m'atioro l'enu* denoting the 'allied hornbill is mute' aptly captures military authoritarianism and judicial murder in the text. Historically, Babangida was intolerant of criticisms and checks by the Nigerian press. On 19 October 1986, Dele Giwa, an outspoken Nigerian Journalist and founder of Newswatch magazine, was assassinated in his residence through a letter bomb with the government seal. Despite widespread international criticisms, Ken Saro-Wiwa, a

prominent writer and minority rights activist and other four Ogoni leaders were hung on 10 November 1995 (Okunoye, 2011).

In the meantime, Dr (Mrs) Paramole (Green Snake or scientifically *Opheodrys Vernalis*), Head of Mass Communications and opportunist who advocates for internal governance, topples her husband, assisted by the misled Student Representative Leader, Comrade Ijimere (reddish-brown *Erythrocebus patas* monkey). The latter character ironically exemplifies salient characteristics in monkeys as the character chants (similar to grunting/squeaking) being one of Gedu'nyaju's supporters. The repetitive chant is interrupted by the entrance of a group of male and female students, led by Comrade Ijimere, the President of the Students' Union (KK 121). Ijimere is a sneaky and smart messenger always on the move and cross-carpets between preferred elite groups as a means of political survival as would a monkey that jumps from one tree to another to get convenient spots; Prof. Belejayan asks for his whereabouts which Dr (Mrs) Paramole responds that she has asked him to check on some documents. The former character reiterates, "A good errand-boy that Ijimere" (KK 154). Given Ijimere's misguided role and sneaky personality, this Yoruba proverb describes his ironic character: *Eranko bi obo o si loko, afi Ijimere ti npe ara re ni oloogun*, ('No animal like the *patas* monkey which brags as a medicine man'). In the text, Dr (Mrs) Paramole's deviousness and stealth are salient characteristics of the adder snake which often blends in with its surroundings and hides from plain sight to bite and envenomate its prey or victims.

Accordingly, Mrs Paramole entices Prof. Belejayan, Prof. Agbonrin and her husband with her beauty, flattery and self-confident nature to infiltrate and topple their administrations. Still, she is sneaky and undetectable like an adder snake. Her entry into the event hall to meet the Minister of Education for the Yandi Convention (College Independence) complements the snake's characteristics: "Ceremony participants begin to enter in the surrounding darkness, joining Dr (Mrs) Paramole and sitting at assigned places" (KK 139). Also, the scene of the quarrel between Dr Paramole and Dr (Mrs) Paramole amplifies the adder snake's attack mode. The imposing latter character began to pound furiously after being criticised by her husband for suggesting inconsequential and irrelevant names for the College name change. Immediately, her husband cautions her about a repeated rape, and Mrs Paramole "wraps her fingers around the pestle firmly". At the same time, Dr Paramole cuts his abrupt laugh as he "sees his wife advancing with the pestle." (KK 167). Like two mating adder snakes, both characters begin to chase each other around the house as

Mrs Paramole “begins to strike wildly at the floor” while Dr Paramole hops and skips, and finally collapses into a heap. The former character allows her husband to roll away after fainting from the shock of becoming the next Vee-Cee (KK 168).

Given the Paramoles’ role, they earn the Yoruba proverb *Ika ni ko je k’omo paramole o dagba*, (‘sheer wickedness hinders the baby adder’s survival’). Artistically, Osofisan blends the portraits of Babangida and Abacha’s sneaky and dictatorial personalities in the union of Alhaji Dr and Dr (Mrs) Paramole. The late Sani Abacha, former Nigerian Head of State, was more despotic than General Ibrahim Babangida. He imposed himself as a life president on the five registered political parties. He shut down media houses, detained and executed several journalists, activists and writers, especially nine leaders of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and Ken Saro-Wiwa, a notable Ogoni writer and environmentalist, hung on November 10, 1995. Also, Kudirat Abiola and Alfred Rewane were murdered in cold blood by unknown state agents. Moshood Abiola died unexpectedly on 7 July 1998, the day of his release and the same day as General Abacha’s death (Okunoye, 2011). The analysed names in Osofisan’s drama are close to the prosaic albeit the deployment of farcical pseudonyms to designate characters’ moral traits and physiological characteristics to x-ray key players in Nigeria’s political history. *Omoluabi* can be classified into personal and social, either positive or negative. Bewaji (2004), on the other hand, explains that good conduct *Iwa pele/Iwa tutu* (‘meekness’) and *Iwa rere* (‘good conduct’), *Iteriba* (‘respect’), *Oro Siso* (‘spoken word’), *Akinkanju* (‘bravery’), *Ise* (‘hardwork’) and *Olopolo pipe* (‘sound judgment’) contrast unethical behaviours *Iwa buburu/Aidaa* (‘lawlessness’) and *Iwa Ibaje* (‘negative character’), *Imele/Ole* (‘laziness’), *Ole* (‘theft’), *Iro* (‘lying’), *Ainiteriba* (‘haughty’) and *Ojukokoro* (‘covetousness’) (Olanipekun, 2017). As indicated above, the characters’ animalistic or unethical behaviours (greed, betrayal, power lust) contradict the *Omoluabi* concept of ideal citizenship. Thus, Osofisan’s designation of profound Yoruba animal names to lampoon African elites and political leaders.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes that the animal names, mainly offshoots of Yoruba proverbs on animal characteristics, highlight the characters’ designations and traits. The two of Nigeria’s former Hausa Heads of State, General Babangida and Abacha, within the political arena, exhibited animalistic tendencies, coups, assassinations, detentions, bombings, dictatorship, false promises to transit to democracy and anti-cultural behaviours, contradicting the principles of

modesty and communality epitomised in the *Omoluabi* concept. The Yoruba philosophy is a benchmark to criticise moral and immoral behaviours in Yoruba society and conveys character formation and virtues that must be internalised. Thus, Osofisan's deployment of animal names in the text is an allegory of the Nigerian military's untamed passion, instinctive greed and immoderate power lust. Essentially, animal names in "Kolera Kolej" (2001b) underline the indigenous name-calling, diatribes and satirical butts at the characters' violation of societal values and ethics of the *Omoluabi*. Therefore, the playwright demonstrates his tact and artistry through the Yoruba animal names like a Yoruba storyteller, concealing his direct involvement and commentary on Nigerian politics, especially during the military regime.

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