

**SOCIETY OF YOUNG NIGERIAN WRITERS**

**ARTICLES, ESSAYS AND E-BOOKS ON DANIEL  
OLORUNFEMI FAGUNWA**



## Reimagining Fagunwa's world on the stage

Unlike the first edition of the Chams Theatre Series where English and Yoruba adaptations of D.O. Fagunwa's 'Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole' by dramatists Femi Osofisan and Akinwumi Isola ran once in four cities, this year's edition will have an extended run.

'Ireke Onibudo: The Fabulous Adventures of A Sugarcane Man' and 'Agbara Ife', the English and Yoruba adaptations of Fagunwa's 'Ireke Onibudo' by the same playwrights, will be unveiled in 11 performances times in four cities.

Osofisan's adaptation, directed by Tunde Awosanmi, will premiere at the National Theatre, Lagos, on Saturday, November 7 while Isola's adaptation, directed Kola Oyewo, will premiere the following day at the same venue.

Computer Hardware and Maintenance Services (Chams) Plc, an Information and Communication Technology (ICT), company came up with the initiative last year, in a bid to revive live theatre and promote cultural values in Nigeria.

'Ogboju Ode...' the first offering, toured Ibadan, Ile-Ife, Lagos and Abuja. Akure is replacing Ile-Ife on the production itinerary this year; and the Yoruba adaptation will only show in Lagos, Ibadan and Akure (in Fagunwa's home state of Ondo).

Similarly, there will be special screenings for students in all the four cities to allow them to experience live theatre and share in its appeals and tradition.

### **A strategic intervention**

In a speech read on his behalf by Idowu Logile, ahead of a preview of the play on Friday, October 16 at the University of Ibadan, Chams managing director Demola Aladekomo, explained that promoting positive values is still the focus of the intervention.

"We are glad to restate that the Chams Theatre Series is a strategic intervention and contribution to the rejuvenation of the arts and stage culture in Nigeria. It is also a means of promoting our culture and re-orientating Nigerians to the values that we hold dear. We believe those values should propel action in our society," Aladekomo said.

### **Onerous task**

Osofisan, the consultant to Chams on the series, disclosed that it was not easy translating and adapting the story for the stage.

For those who might have expected 'Igbo Olodumare' to be adapted this year, Osofisan explained that he and Isola chose 'Ireke Onibudo' because 'Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole...' and its sequel, 'Igbo Olodumare', are about a hunter- soldier, unlike 'Ireke Onibudo' which is about a normal person.

The renowned playwright also explained how he settled for the title of his adaptation. "Literarily it could mean the 'The Sugarcane of the Camp Guardian, or of the Camp Settler, or of the Head of the House', etc. These translations, however, would not make sense in the context in which Fagunwa employs it.

So I had to look further than this. And I found out, from Yoruba scholars such as Pa Faleti and my collaborator Akinwumi Isola that the more familiar use of this term is in 'Kiniun Onibudo', which is to be found in the oriki of the famous war General of Ibadan, Balogun Ogunmola.

"The more I thought about this, therefore, the more convinced I became, that Fagunwa must have had this oriki in mind, in deciding on the title of his book.

Since kiniun (lion) refers to a warrior, and the main topic of his own book is not war but love, I believe it was just logical (and brilliant) for him to look for substitute for 'kiniun', and so came to the equivalent in 'ireke' (sugarcane)".

Osofisan commended Chams for choosing to sustain public interest in Fagunwa's works and reviving cultural heritage. "This is very unique, and boldly unusual, in Nigeria's experience of art sponsorship... [Chams] offers, free to live audiences, a vivid experience of theatre that our people yearn for everywhere, but which for various reasons has become very rare to see these days in our cities," he said.

### **Do your own**

The respected Isola also acknowledged Fagunwa's creativity and echoed Osofisan by stating that doing the adaptation was no tea party. "Fagunwa was not constrained by time and convention in the novel form. He could have gone on and on! But stage performance is incredibly constrained by time, space, and the law of gravity."

He added, "You must have read the novel to be able to appreciate the adaptation. These are two adaptations from one source material. I hope that you find it interesting. If you are not happy with the adaptation, do your own."