
**Dramatising Development, not Post-colonialism: The Femi Osofisan
Example**

Izue Nwankwo E

*Department of English, Gombe State University
Gombe, Nigeria.*

Abstract

This paper examines the concept of “development” in what is today known as “post-colonial societies” in the light of a globalising world. This is engaged through an appraisal of Femi Osofisan’s theatre as being surreptitiously designed to engender development within the society of its parturition. The contention is that development is not something that is just recently being handed down solely by the West, but is rather something that indigenous artists have been doing over time. Subsequently, this paper views “post-colonialism” as being anti-developmental in its construction and attribution of origination of the concept of civilisation to the West through its seeming homogenisation of colonised peoples’ cultures into a monolithic appendage of metropolitan culture. Using Osofisan’s dramaturgy this paper examines how African dramatists have been charting the course of their own respective peoples’ development via innumerable experiments with both foreign and local materials — something that the Western academy, through its myriad critical discursive tools, has erroneously construed as “post-colonialism” writing themselves out of Western epistemology, out of colonialism.

Introduction

Anne McClintock queries the “widespread, epochal crisis in the idea of linear, historical progress” (1992:10) with which post-colonialism is imbued, hence lending credence to the problematic of “post-colonialism” as an apt rubric for all non-western cultural expressions of people that have undergone colonial imposition. The idea of “linear, historical progress” supposes that development came from Europe and then spread to other societies through mercantile/colonialist contacts. This is in total

disregard of the multifarious indigenous civilisations in several societies which these hegemonic contacts supplanted by dismissing them peremptorily as invalid and irrelevant to historical development. It is for this cause that Homi Bhabha reads what one can dub the *minoritisation* of post-colonial cultural perspectives by the Western colonial testimony, thereby reiterating “unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation ... [within] the geopolitical divisions of east and west, north and south” (2000:105). This minoritisation can be a substitute for “inferioritisation.” It could be differentiated from otherness by the way it “inferioritises” otherness through making it something less than the hegemonic Western culture. Bhabha further captures the tenor of minoritisation of post-colonialist culture by averring that post-colonialism is a product of a contemporary intervention in the “discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples” (2000:437).

This observation underscores the unwholesomeness of the *uneven* divisiveness, which the use of the term *post-coloniality* bestows on a majority of the earth’s people — the kind that stems merely from a concept of superiority, which the coloniser has taken for him/herself and his/her culture. The import is that for the colonised there is a state of feeling “outnumbered and outorganized by a prevailing consensus that has come to regard the Third World as an atrocious nuisance” (Said, 1986: 52). This indubitably endorses the supposed superiority of Western culture and development over others. Thus the post-colonial is inferioritised as an intolerable “Other” that needs to be developed. Alternately, the problematic of the term “post-colonial” could be summarised thus:

There is no consensus in the field of Postcolonial Studies either about its object of study or the terminology it uses to describe both itself and its various objects. The field can be loosely characterised as a series of debates around who is ‘postcolonial’, when is the ‘postcolonial’, and what it means to be ‘postcolonial’.
(Biccum, 2002:34).

This is an attestation to the inherent ambiguities that the term post-colonialism carries with it, alongside its supposed parallel, postmodernism.

Nonetheless, by way of erecting delineating boundaries for these nebulous terms, Ato Quayson holds that where “the postmodern is part

of an ensemble of the hierarchizing impulse of Western discourses," the post-colonial "is *conceived* to be more concerned with pressing economic, political and cultural inequalities" (2000:132; emphasis added). Here, one notes the tentativeness implicated in the word "conceived", signalling a chasm between what is assumed and what is real in terms of what post-colonialism does. Moreover, postmodernism is seen "as a re-theorization of the proliferation of distinctions that reflect the underlying dynamic of cultural modernity, the need to clear oneself a space" (Appiah, 2000: 92). But for "post-coloniality", there is an acerbic reading which is that it "is the condition of what we might call a *comprador* intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers whose duty it is to mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery" (2000:93). This uneven definition further hemlines the unsavoury nature of the *post-* thereby underscoring the supposition that post-colonialism could be a term coined in bad faith to express the ruling marginalisation of cultures that it is ascribed to.

On the question of development itself, it does not solely have a western ancestry, but is grossly culture-specific. On this, one very strongly agrees with Appiah on the contention that "[all] aspects of contemporary African cultural life ... have been influenced, often powerfully, by the transition of African societies *through* colonialism, but they are not all in the relevant sense *postcolonial*" (2000: 94). Appiah further opines that within postmodernism there are cultures that interact "sometimes in synergy, sometimes in competition" (2000:91), yet post-colonial expressions, in spite of their myriad manifestations, are blatantly occluded. This deliberate elision of post-coloniality from the corpus (if there is any) of postmodernism, is grossly leery. Where postmodernism liberates, with its intrinsic space-clearing mechanism for all manner of Western expression, post-colonialism seems to have an in-built reductionist lever with which it not only sequesters itself from the former but also conflates all expressions from the former Western colonies to the myopic monochromatic spectrum of colonial experience. McClintock (1992: 86) validates this with the notion that apart from its reductionism, post-colonialism also arrogates to the Western academy the hegemony of being the standard for defining the historical evolution of other traditions. This is a process of marginalising of other cultures to the extent that "a third-world historian is *condemned to knowing 'Europe' as the original home of the 'modern,'* whereas the 'European' historian does not share a *comparable predicament* with regard to the pasts of the majority of humankind¹" (Chakrabarty, 1992:19).

There-from, one arrives at the age-long Wole Soyinka contention that when a particular culture increasingly denigrates another to the point of hegemonic annexation, it is time one looked at the political intentions of the belligerent culture. He further contends that any culture which claims "indigenous antiquity" in regions that have "submitted to its undeniable attractions is confidently proven to be imperialist ..." worse still, such a belligerent culture "is demonstrated to be essentially hostile and negative to indigenous culture ..." (1976:105). How else would one describe postmodernism which endorses its own inherent polyvocality while at the same time condescendingly reading post-coloniality as an insufferably monolithic Other? If postmodernism is all about de-centeredness, multiple and shifting subjectivities, multivalency, hybridity and indeterminacy, then there is no rationale for the postmodernist/post-colonialist dichotomy in today's literary criticism. Post-colonialist polyvocality should not be subsumed under a homogenising term, but should rather be allowed to interact, compete and co-habit spaces within postmodernism itself.

If we understand postmodern to mean "beyond modernity," and post-colonial to mean "beyond colonialism," the former could be valid while the latter leaves much to be desired because all cultural expressions from the former colonies are not necessarily "post-colonial." When Osofisan, for instance, re-writes Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* into *No More the Wasted Breed*, or Clark's *The Raft* into *Another Raft*, he reacts to the overabundant fatalism within African pre-colonial religion rather than to colonialism itself. His is one of the variegated strides towards the people's emancipation in the light of newer findings and influences which every culture is undergoing. Being faced by myriad anti-developmental phenomena, African writers have not folded their arms waiting for development to be handed down to them, but they have in their various ways taken the gauntlet of catalysing improved living conditions for their peoples. The success or otherwise of these homegrown efforts is a discourse for another occasion.

International Development and Post-Colonies

To say that societies regarded as "post-colonial" or "Third World" are in dire need of resources that would improve the living conditions of their peoples is an understatement. Quayson's observation of "much destitution, poverty and sheer despair" occasioned by "a debilitating anomie brought on by the apprehension of persistent social tragedies"

(2000: 155) is an apt analysis of the conditions of today's post-colonial states. Incidentally, these societies are now being referred to as failed states and colonialism cannot be exculpated as being remotely the cause of their economic woes and doom. Hence, even with the advent of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the gamut of resources and policies geared towards their attainment in every society of the world, there are fears that by the 2015 deadline, most of those targets would not be achieved in a great number of societies. This is, however, not the first effort at international development in human history. The term came into being in 1945 after the devastation of World War II. In the words of British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown:

The Bretton Wood in 1944 signalled a breathtaking leap forward into a new world order. American visionaries helped form the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Not only that, but they put in place a policy of unprecedented generosity—the Marshall Plan. This transferred 1% of America's national income each year for four years to the war ravaged economies of Europe – and saved *the free world*.

(2008: 4; emphasis added)

Evident from this statement is that while the United States was spending part of its annual income to make the Marshall Plan work for Europe, the war ravaged countries of that continent were in turn furthering their colonial plundering of countries yet to be granted independence by that date.

History has it that colonialism came to Africa through a conference convened in 1884 by the then German Chancellor, Otto Von Bismarck, to partition the continent ostensibly for Europe's economic development. Bismarck's expressed interest, according to Russell Warren Howe, was "to associate the natives of Africa with civilisation by opening up the continent to commerce," yet we are aware that "no person native to Africa was invited to the Berlin Conference, nor were Africans invited to comment on the outcome" (cited in Hulse, 2007: 37). This resulted in what could be dubbed the gravest economic rip-off in modern times – the free world turned the un-free world into both its site for sourcing of raw materials and for marketing of the finished products. Bismarck's grand design turned out to be largely in the interest of Europe without regard to how it impoverished the peoples of Africa. Hulse's belief that "the present pitiable state of several sub-Saharan African countries is attributable to indigenious government mismanagement and corruption"

could be valid only when one decides to turn a blind eye to the contributions of the Cold War in churning out corrupt and inept leaders on the continent, as well as the vandalism that colonialism came with in spite of its grand standing. He, however, rightly places the “root cause of inter-ethnic and inter-tribal conflict” on the continent to “the ethnically illogical carving up of African territories by Bismarck’s Berlin conference” (37).

With hindsight, one deduces that the reason the Marshall Plan prospered Europe but further impoverished Africa is traceable to the subsisting notion of the free North and un-free South concept. Little wonder, dichotomising terms like post-modernism/colonialism, First/Third Worlds, North/South and West/East, are often reminiscent of the chronic sore of the black continent’s under-handed treatment, thanks to charters and treaties which its leaders so open-heartedly signed without knowledge of the obnoxious and devious intentions of their authors. These polarising rubrics more often than not, awaken the evil consequences of belonging to the *un-free world*. More importantly, they render the magnanimous offer of international development suspect. Put differently, Christine Sylvester posits:

... most of today’s Development work either makes no mention of the colonial period or makes no apology for it ... One gets the impression that the structural adjustment wing of mainstream Development studies aims to finish once and for all the task of fitting the colonies to the still-modern models of Western political economy. (1999: 717)

With no mention and no apology for the past wrongdoings and swindling of the peoples of these societies, how easy is it for them to accept the new offers being made?

According to the Brundtland Report, sustainable development entails ensuring that “... development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Hulse, 2007:10). This report, even though it recognises the value of indigenous cultures as a knowledge source that could be accessed for propelling sustainable development, is still heavily couched in western realities. The idea is largely such that the so-called “underdeveloped” societies need to “catch up with the rest of the world” without any serious consideration for the way in which indigenous peoples survived for thousands of years prior to the advent of colonialism (McGregor, 2004:73). It is this form of indigenous development forms that early African writers appropriated and have been experimenting with over

time. However, due to the subsisting inter-cultural relations of contemporary times, there have been syncretised variations of these development forms, hence a writer like Femi Osofisan's experimentations with forms that have been construed as being analogous with Marxism.

April Biccum notes a contradiction between what she dubs "the assumed inevitability of Development" and the "necessity of its being actively undertaken in 'third-world' contexts." To her, white and/or Euro-supremacy claims "the highest forms of human Development" while depicting the so-called "'third world' ... as backward, static, traditional and lacking in the capacity to produce wealth, [since they] would 'naturally' require the assistance of the West;" the ambiguity thus deciphered supposes them to be resplendent in "inferior alterity, the 'other', is needed for the West's self-construction as developed" (2002:39). This observation further renders Western international development posturing more suspect because since the economic deprivations of the inferior *other* — the post-colonials, Third World, *un-free world* — help construct it as developed and prosperous, a transformative alteration of the *status quo* would mean the cessation of the West's supremacy and might tip the balance to its disfavour. Hence, since one is not absolutely sure of the subterranean intents couched in handed down charters and treaties, indigenous peoples have in recent times taken their own destinies into their hands. African artists adapt pre-colonial cultural forms into today's realities with a view to catalysing indigenous voices for the development of their peoples. Femi Osofisan's writings are exemplary in this regard.

Osofisan and African Development

There is the story of Eman in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* who moved away from his community to live in another. In his original community, his family is responsible for the annual purification rites of the citizens. It was a prestigious position and people born into his family lineage are mostly revered for this onerous responsibility of being the link between the deities and their communities. They were carriers, the *strong breed* — their mothers never survived the pangs of their birth. However, in this second community where fate brought him, being a carrier is detestable. Eman wastes a whole year trying to rehabilitate the imbecile, Ifada, but he eventually becomes the preferred sacrificial carrier. Sunma, his colleague and friend, tries to make him leave. But for a person manacled by a sense of fatalism, salvation can only come from the powers

that be. Sunma tells him, "One day you will wish that you went away when I tried to make you. ...you must know that it was also for our sakes that I tried to get us away" (Soyinka, 1969:91). Eventually, Eman is not saved. He perishes at the river. In this year, the spirit of the land is said to have demanded more of the carrier than is usually the case.

Eman's tragedy is not isolated. His personal tragedy is necessary for the emancipation of the society. Sacrificing his life and those of other strong breeds like him is what the society under this fatalistic mould needs to renew itself and continue its existence. His kind is further defined thus:

Members of (his) breed seem to have an unnatural nurture. They lack the mother's natural milk and are therefore not fully harmonised with the human system. A peculiar kind of suffering, which starts at their zero hour, is enshrined in their system and they go through life like half-formed beings groping towards a catastrophic end.
(Ogunba, 1975:115)

Ogunba's assertion is valid in conveying the reality of intractable fatalism within the personality constituent of the strong breed personage. They are the "Other" of the society, the ultra-humans (in Soyinkaesque dramaturgy) with an innate self-destruct mechanism. They are equally true African manifestations of Aristotle's tragic heroism — elevated in society and subsequently dragged through the mud by a tragic flaw, to elicit catharsis in the audience. That is Eman's story. He is an upright man, dedicated to the rehabilitation of the societal misfits — the Others of society. But in spite of his sterling qualities, the people whom he was benevolent to decide he is the juiciest offering for their god.

However, tracing the transitional tenor of developmental ideals in African literature, this over-dependence on fatalism did not last long, even within Soyinka's literary corpus. Ogunba perceives that even Soyinka ends the play with an anticipation of a reversal of the *status quo* in the following observation:

Jaguna [Sunma's father] is surprised that the immediate reaction of the populace is one of revulsion at the sad death of Eman. ... This spontaneous revulsion is of great significance for it gives the play a concluding optimistic note. Someone completely innocent and upright has been sacrificed, needlessly, and the community now has an intense guilt feeling. ... It looks as if something carrying a permanent effect has happened to the conscience of the people and that the community will

never be the same again in respect of the treatment of carriers, strangers, idiots and artists.
(1975:116)

While one readily agrees with the preceding assertion that something must have happened to permanently re-order the people's perception, it is arguable that the resultant effect of this re-ordering, as Ogunba posits, is the "conspicuous" emergence of Eman as the people's redeemer. In hindsight, what has happened is that after the generation of the strong breed/redeemers and the colossal failure that attended their liberation efforts, the people's awareness increased and pertinent questions which were hitherto unasked became manifest in multiple forms. This is epitomised in a re-telling of Eman's story by Femi Osofisan in *No More the Wasted Breed*.

In this second version, the strong breed – once the exalted "Other" of the society due to their mediatory role between the gods and the community – become the "wasted breed"; and what better title to give to this latter version than "No More the Wasted Breed." This title alone captures the predominant sense of disillusionment with the strong breed class and the attendant fatalism that is the hallmark of their dispensation. Osofisan's revision captures so vividly the intersection between the transitions from being the *strong* to being the *wasted* breed. It is only here, where the cloak of fatalism is discarded that a mere mortal could accost the deities in order to save his friend – a would-be strong breed – from making a "wasteful" supreme sacrifice again. He says so irreverently:

The town has done nothing but make sacrifices to Olokun in the past few weeks. The people have fed him so much that our stores are empty and we face the threat of starvation.
(Osofisan, 1982:103)

And he is not done yet:

You complain of pollution, but who brought the ships of merchandise from across the ocean to our shore? You complain of being abandoned, but who brought the predators who impoverished our people and turned them into grovelling slaves? Did our conquerors not come across your seas, Olokun? Did they not berth in your waters, goddess? (105)

Saluga, who utters these words, is of a different breed. He is not a carrier but a liberated member of the society whom some might prefer to

call a revolutionary. He is a friend to Biokun, who obviously is of the strong breed. He has nothing against Biokun's religion. But he is simply averse to people making wanton sacrifices to deities that ordinarily stand by and watch strangers plunder and despoil their worshippers. Saluga sees fatalism as being distasteful. To him, one's response to social situations should stem from one's social reality which takes into cognisance one's abilities and circumstances. For him therefore, there is no room for passing the buck of blame to the gods and other "powers that be." Saluga is thus the quintessential hero of Osofisan's drama. To Saint Gbilekaa, the difference between heroism in Soyinka and Osofisan in the two plays above is that "whereas Soyinka has tied his hero to the inevitable cycle of fate, Osofisan has liberated him from this ritual cycle" (1997:133). In other words, Osofisan opens up vistas hitherto regarded as anathema in African religious sphere. The dismantling of the structures of fatalism through what some regard as revolutionary/Marxist theatre is the first step towards the alignment of Africa with the demands for international development. This is because no development can be achieved in a society that is not liberated to the point of asking questions in myriad forms about their status, goals, aspirations and visions. As long as these questions remain tied to the answers, which can only be provided at the behest of some super-human forces, as is the case under the tenure of the 'strong breeds', such a society will continue to wallow in under-development.

The disparity between tales and their re-telling as part of Africa's home-grown development efforts through drama is not limited to Soyinka and Osofisan. In fact, the dramas of most of the major dramatists of the earlier generation have been subjected to Osofisan's technique of re-telling. This is evident from his 're-telling' of J. P. Clark's *The Raft* as *Another Raft*. The characters of Clark's narrative are just like Eman, manacled to fatalism. The preponderance of the atmosphere of gloom and melancholy in the story appears unending, especially with the characters' growing helplessness in the face of disaster. They all appear to be irreversibly trapped in tragedy so much so that salvation can only come if granted by a supernatural force. To buttress this, rather than turn to their human resourcefulness, Ibodo complains to the unseen soul of his dead grand-mother:

I promised you a goat
At the next festival, my great – grandmother. Now
How have you led us into this?
(Clark, 1962:102)

As the same force that liberated them from the whirlpool breaks up the raft and sets them adrift once again on an aimless sojourn, Kengide summarises the pervasiveness of despondency by saying: "We are all adrift and lost Ogrope, we are all adrift and lost" (p. 112). This statement comes with as much surrender to despair as the character could muster. In this state of mind, it is only possible for the characters to apportion blame as they are grossly unable to do anything to save themselves. It is easier for them to blame their employer whom they said was oblivious to their plight while he is wining and dining away in Warri (p. 120), and the government at failing to protect people like Kengide from the brutal treatment he received at a foreign-controlled company where he used to work (p. 131), rather than look for things which they could do for themselves to better their lot.

In Osofisan's re-telling, the story is different. The voyage on the raft is ill-fated from inception. Oruosi, the Ifa priest, colludes with corrupt government officials and deceives the people into believing that the recent flooding in Aiyedade community is caused by the neglect of the worship of Yemosa. Nine persons are thus delegated to go on a cleansing mission aboard a raft. The raft is set adrift midstream, this time not because of any malevolence from ancestral forces and deities but due to the corruption of some members of the cleansing mission team. They had embezzled funds meant for building proper drainage and water channelling system, thus the community is flooded. For the fact that the mission is flawed from the beginning, no shrine is found, thus the cleansing could not be effected, thereby leaving the team adrift at sea. Six members of the team drown in the process. As one tragedy follows on another, the corrupt officials are forced to open up. Oruosi turns on Lanusen, and Reore learns for the first time how their earlier revolt against government corruption was sabotaged by the very chief priest they had consulted before embarking on the worker's strike, which had necessitated the gamut of reactions from the rulers (Osofisan, 1988:47).

The injection of Yemosa as these revelations are taking place is not in any way to facilitate supernatural aid because it would be tantamount to a promotion of fatalism. Rather, her coming is to serve as catalyst to making the men make use of their potentials in wriggling themselves out of their predicament. By throwing a riddle at the men, Yemosa makes them realise that if they work together in honesty, there is no difficulty that they cannot surmount. At that realisation, Reore invites the deities to aid them in rowing the raft to safe waters. To this, the deities reply:

Yemosa II: On board, fellows! What are you waiting for? They've won!
They've recovered their will! [*The sea goddesses singing their song,
climb on board the raft.*]

Yemosa III: And bring out your paddles! [*They do so from under their
costumes. ...*]

Yemosa II: Take your positions! Begin to row! [*They begin to row, singing the
song, "Let it come, let it go/Row the story like a boat," etc ...*] (pp. 84-85)

Through the effort of all of them, the raft moves, causing Reore to exclaim: "There's no goddess but our muscles! The strength of our forces combined! Rowing together, working together!" (p. 85). In this second version of the story of a troubled raft, therefore, the characters are not subjected to the whims and caprices of supernatural forces that they can accuse unendingly and blame for every catastrophe that they experience, rather there are substantial factors responsible for every anomaly and disaster that the people meet. Corrupt government officials who embezzled funds for proper channelling of floodwater in the community of Aiyedade are seen to be responsible for the flooding of the community. It is this same crop of corrupt officials that hoodwink the people into believing that all they needed to do is to placate Yemosa with a cleansing offering and the flooding will stop. In the end, no shrine is found; a way of getting rid of the fatalistic sensibility in the people. It is the inability to locate any shrine, the numerous drownings and the interminability of their voyage that prompts confessions, which lead to the denouement.

The differences in the two versions of this story are as a result of generational change in the approach to tackling societal issues. Over time, we have read these differences as being solely based on ideological differences. But there is more to them than mere variation in ideology. Osofisan observes that there is a consistently altering effect in the forms of "shaping" art, and this he calls "Paradox of the New Exotic" (2001a: 43). This altering, to my mind, with the hindsight of recent studies, is not only limited to individual ideology but also to generational awareness and consciousness. By this I mean that it is the same way that art relates to society that it also relates to the consciousness of every epoch. In this manner, therefore, Osofisan's version of Eman's tale differs from Soyinka's because of the difference in generational perception and is an offshoot of a disavowal of the *status quo*, and this form of ideological difference or social vision is merely incidental and could be attributed to generational fad.

Soyinka's earlier dramas tended to largely anti-colonial ideology, which entailed prompting the people, back to their roots. The reification of fatalism in these earlier works possibly came from anti-Christian/anti-Western sensibilities, which emanated from encountering firsthand the hypocrisies of the harbingers of this new religion. Hence, Soyinka's tale of *Eman* is valid within the generation in which he wrote it. The same is also true of Osofisan's version. In the same vein, J. P. Clark's tale of the troubled raft is as valid as Osofisan's version of the same story. The difference is in the ruling generational consciousness at the time of writing. Hence the social vision of any writer is not actually valued by its accuracy or utilitarian superiority, but should be viewed as being part of the developmental metamorphoses of the society. It is for this reason that the emergence of Osofisan's theatre is said to be as a result of the overarching abysmal failure of the ruling elite to effect any tangible transformation in the people's fortune.

Moreover, for Osofisan too, there has been an increasing move away from Marxist ideology in his writings. For instance, in place of his Marxist idealism-suffused *Oriki of a Grasshopper* there are plays, like *Reel Rwanda!* (1999) and *Women of Owu* (2006), which treat the issues of the 1994 Rwandan genocide and that of ordinary women in war situations respectively. Both plays are commentaries on the evils of war, especially on the psyche of dispossessed peoples. *Women of Owu* was written with an eye on the continued decimation of humanity in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as Darfur. This can hardly be construed as being a reaction to colonialism, but rather it is a critique of all forms of under-development. Essentially therefore, Osofisan dramatises these obnoxious living conditions in order to shock the sensibilities of his local audiences into the realisation that apart from bad leadership, civil unrest and wars especially do more harm to our living conditions. The type of subversion that one witnesses in these recent plays therefore is bereft of the Marxist rhetoric of his earlier plays. This is an indication of a chain of transitions, a fine-tuning of development aesthetics in Osofisan's dramaturgy.

One thing obvious from the foregoing is that over time, there have been multifarious transmutations in modes of artistic expression based on the prevailing consciousness of the subsisting epoch. In the highly multi-cultural society we live in today, changes in social awareness and consciousness is as transient as can be. Owing to increased intercultural interactions, people are more susceptible to having innumerable views about one situation. Thus, as these different views emerge, they alter the subsisting view(s), thereby giving rise to newer views. In the same vein

also, the dominant view is increasingly shifting because as newer views emerge, the older become less and less appealing to the majority of the people and as such their otherwise dominance is increasingly undermined. The changes in Soyinka's and Clark's stories in Osofisan's retelling of them as highlighted above, are instances of *othering* of tales in order to suit and convey newer insights in peculiar situations. As such, *otherness* is here read as a positive artistic tool that enables writers/artists to invent/appropriate their situation-specific responses to issues, situations and events that catch their fancy. Subsequently, it is important that we note John Shotter's identification of a third strand of expression which emanates from the intersecting paradoxes of the old and the new epoch:

In the active relations between us, in the unfolding, contingent or paired interplay, between our outgoing responsiveness toward an other or otherness and its incoming, complimentary responsiveness toward us, a third (at least partially) living unity is created in our meetings with these others ... (2004: 453)

The implication of this statement to our discourse is that forms of artistic expression are problem-centric and there are mutations in them stemming directly from the prevailing consciousness of the era in which they are used.

Conclusion

The preponderance of poverty and underdevelopment among more than half of the world's population means that the traditions of this economically insignificant populace become less relevant as the world globalises. The issue of economic imbalance poses a more valid *differencing* and *othering* criterion for the so-called "Third-World" literary traditions than metropolitan 'postcolonial' critics would have us believe. In other words, the disparity in relations which seeks to homogenise traditions of the imperialised peoples of the earth while at the same time maintaining the heterogeneity of the colonising societies, is largely a result of economic differentiation. Furthermore, bracketing contemporary African writing as being post-colonial because it is supposedly a reaction to colonialism is grossly erroneous. For instance, in re-writing Sophocles' *Antigone* into *Tegonni: an African Antigone*, Osofisan brings the classical *Antigone* into the play itself. James Gibbs avers that in doing this Osofisan "creates a situation characterised by the 'approximate

duplicates' that allows him to present" a range of discussions on "tyranny, the relative merits of decrees," and most importantly, "the response expected" from people like Tegonni; those who have principles" (2006:81). Thus, in his characteristic manner of re-inventing "popular" myths, Osofisan presents Antigone as a "twin revolutionary sister of Tegonni ... united across continents and ages in defiance of tyranny..." (2006:81).

The persona of Tegonni can be identified in most of the over thirty plays that make up Osofisan's dramatic corpus. It is also very interesting to note that among these revolutionary characters there are more women than one can find in the dramatic oeuvres of most other African dramatists. The most memorable of them are Iyabo in *A Restless Run of Locusts*, Yajin and Funlola in *The Chattering and the Song*, Titubi in *Morountodun*, Alhaja in *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Altine in *Altine's Wrath*, Olabisi and Folawe in *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*, Yobiyo in *Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen*, Moni in *The Oriki of a Grasshopper*, Tegonni in *Tegonni*, the three heroines of *Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest*, and Orisaye in *Women of Owu* who is undaunted in exerting revenge on their conquerors by the intent to murder Balogun Derin, the man to whom she is destined to lose her virginity.

Osofisan's employment of heroines did not come with the concern "to improve gender rights and rights of women" mantra of the MDG charter. It is something that has been with his theatre from the beginning. Tied to the preponderance of poverty, hunger and deprivation on the continent — the very things that Osofisan's theatre is reacting to — Osofisan views the emancipation of women as pivotal to the liberation of humanity. Furthermore, to buttress this point Osofisan has often expressed disavowal with the ruling post-colonialist supposition that views his and other African writers' works as solely reacting to colonialism (Osofisan, 2001b:153-173). This is not a rejection of the reality of colonialism itself. Ordinarily, plays like *Tegonni* and *Women of Owu* easily lend themselves to the convenience of blaming Africa's present-day woes on colonialism. But Osofisan deftly steers away from such a reading in order to actualise an "incisive vision" that he readily "puts at the service of oppressed humanity." Rather than heap blame on colonialism, therefore, Osofisan's theatre posits that "the machinery of oppression in human society is created by man" — the inhabitants of society — "and man is also capable of demolishing it" (Olaniyan, 2006:143). Hence, the numerous dramatisations of the precarious living condition of humanity

as witnessed in Osofisan's theatre are part of the grand design to bring humanity face to face with its situation with a view to tackling it.

Just as Osofisan demystifies myth in his theatre as exemplified by the retellings of the myths of Moremi in *Morountodun*, and Oba Abiodun in *The Chattering and the Song*, as well as the classical Greek stories of Antigone and the women of Troy as told by Sophocles and Euripides in *Antigone* and *Trojan Women* respectively, Osofisan problematises the construct that equates Africa's continued impoverishment with colonialism. It is to this end that one finds characters that epitomise colonialism like Lt. Gen. Carter-Ross in *Tegonni* not being demonised or held culpable for the continent's perennial woes. Furthermore, one still finds Osofisan's theatre operating not only beyond apportioning blames to colonialism but also above racism. Hence, one finds characters like Jane in *Nkrumah Ni! Africa Ni!* and Francoise in *Reel, Rwanda!* as white women endowed with positive attitudes that are beneficial to the continent and its people.

It is my contention, therefore, that in his dramaturgy Osofisan has been involved in experiments on how the living conditions of his people could be improved upon. These experiments are not reactions to colonialism and as such not post-colonial in that sense but are part of the indigenous efforts of the people at developing themselves. Consequently, the present Western-sponsored development activities on the continent will eventually bring more harm than good if they are continued without regard for the subsisting development ideas and practices that have been advanced by the Osofisans and other indigenous development exponents of the people who have been working tirelessly within their abilities to ensure that their respective peoples have the best life and the wherewithal to live their lives with.

Notes

¹This is another way of saying that there are more people in the geographical areas designated as "post-colonial" than in the rest of the earth's surface.

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