

Blackism and Pan-Africanism in Post-Colonial African Literature: A Reading of Femi Osofisan's Plays

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Abstract

This article is a thematic study of Femi Osofisan's plays that explicitly capture the essence of blackism, nationalism and pan-Africanism as a depiction of the playwright's ideology and his total commitment to the evolution of a new social order for black people. The article critically discusses the concepts of blackism and pan-Africanism as impelling revolutionary tools that seek to re-establish and reaffirm the primacy, identity, and personality of black people in Africa and in the diaspora. It also discusses blackism as an African renaissance ideology that campaigns for the total emancipation of black people and a convulsive rejection of all forms of colonialism, neo-colonialism, Eurocentrism, nepotism and ethnic chauvinism, while advocating an acceptance of Afrocentrism, unity and oneness of blacks as indispensable tools needed for the dethronement of all forms of racism, discrimination, oppression and dehumanisation of black people. The article hinges the underdevelopment of the black continent on the deliberate attempt of the imperialists and their black cronies who rule with iron hands to keep blacks in perpetual slavery. It countenances Femi Osofisan's call for unity and solidarity among all blacks as central to the upliftment of Africans. The article recognises Femi Osofisan as a strong, committed and formidable African playwright who utilises theatre as a veritable and radical platform to fight and advocate for the liberation of black people by arousing their revolutionary consciousness and by calling on them to hold their destinies in their hands if they are to be emancipated from the shackles of oppression.

Keywords: blackism; pan-Africanism; Negritude; drama; Femi Osofisan

Introduction

Colonialism remains the most atrocious, the most obnoxious, and the most calamitous force that mercilessly stretched Africa supinely on her back and brought the entire

continent on her knees in an ignoble and dastardly way. The serenity and the aesthetics of the African culture were completely vandalised and the indigenous African traditions that were relished and treasured for centuries were demolished with impunity. The invasion of the West can best be described as heinous, barbaric and the highest level of inhumanity perpetrated by man against man. This is most exemplified in the slave trade. According to Clarke (1997 cited in Dima 2008, 22), the slave trade was one of the cruelest experiences Africans ever suffered:

Children, male or female endured the worst sexual abuse, often leaving them bleeding to death or in a state of permanent shock. European diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea were passed on to the victims. Captured and bound with ropes, nets, wood, iron, leather or other bindings, the Africans would then set upon a torturous march to the coast where seven out of ten died along the way.

Describing the horrific experience of Africans in the hands of European marauders, Dima (2008, 22) states the following:

Those who survived were packed into dungeons called barracoons, which held 30–50 captives within a cell of 10 by 15 feet covered with vomit, urine, faeces and blood. Day and night temperatures were well over 90 degrees, dehydration through diarrhoea, vomiting and sweating were a common form of death. Here the Africans were also branded with a hot iron! The burns often became infected, inducing fevers or gangrene. The hapless victims were clubbed, whipped or shot to death as a warning to the others to remain in good health. African women were routinely raped repeatedly, thus creating a host of unwanted pregnancies.

The import of Dima's report is that Africans had harrowing and dreadful experiences in the hands of the colonial slave masters. Such inhuman experiences are outrageous and callous as the Europeans subjected Africans to all forms of unimaginable traumatic experiences.

The erosion of African traditional values soon gave way to Eurocentrism, a prejudicial concept that showcases the supremacy and superiority of Western values and cultures above all other cultures. African cultures, and indeed all black cultures, were denigrated. Africans were thus made to believe that everything about their past was barbarous, uncivilised, scandalous and disgraceful, and that it was the contact the West had with Africans that gave them a touch of civilisation and liberated them from darkness. Africa was emotionally and psychologically traumatised, socially and culturally pulverised and politically ravaged. Africa lost its identity, its languages, its cultures, its values, and indeed its personality.

Both blacks in Africa and in the diaspora became the objects of ridicule and irritants before the descendants of the colonists and imperialists. Even though they were born and bred in America, their language was often described as vernacular. They were not fully integrated as full-blooded Americans like their white counterparts. They suffered

oppression and all forms of inhumane treatment. Even the Afro-Caribbeans suffered the same fate. Blackness has become a metaphor for despicability, mediocrity and baseness, while whiteness symbolises perfection, excellence and impeccability. Frazer (1980, 72) posits that “Black clearly stands for the African people: that is bold and unambiguous; white for all those forces which have over the centuries crushed and repressed them.” Blackness here represents African people as well as the stigmatisation of inferiority attached to them by white imperialists. The indirect rule system of government imposed on the British colonies by the imperialists was not as ruthless and superimposing as the policy of assimilation that dominated the French colonies. According to Elimimian (1994, 22), “the French policy of assimilation which attempted to propagate French civilisation at the expense of the indigenous culture, the discriminatory policies of French education to which people of African descent were subjected in France” accounted for the call for black nationalism.

In spite of the independence obtained by African countries from their colonial masters, the imperialistic tendencies and internal colonisation among blacks is similar to their colonial experiences under the whites. African nations appear to have descended into a form of postcolonial barbarism and savagery which manifest both among the leadership and the followership. Africans have evidently betrayed the pan-Africanist ideals owing to personal greed, selfishness and lust for power. The need for caution and enlightenment among blacks to shun all forms of internal colonisation and embrace the spirit of pan-Africanism form the ideological fulcrum of Femi Osofisan’s drama. This article, therefore, examines Femi Osofisan’s plays in which Osofisan calls for unity and collaboration among blacks in order for them to become the masters of their own destinies in tandem with the ideology of blackism and pan-Africanism.

Conceptual Framework

In the light of the odious imperialistic and colonial manifestations outlined above, the formation of pan-Africanism, which was a literary and cultural movement that aimed to redress and restore the primacy and identity of blacks, became inevitable. The movement became a veritable intervention and vibrant platform for the rediscovery and restoration of the dignity and the self-worth of black people. The divide and rule strategy of the imperialists created disunity among Africans even years after independence. Blacks discriminated against one another on the basis of ethnicity, language, race and religion. The need to forge unity among Africans and redress the identity crisis was one of the primary goals of pan-Africanism. According to Riruako (2008, 16–17), due to the long years of colonialism, Africans lost their esteem and thus developed an inferiority complex. Even years after their independence from colonial rule, Africans continue to battle with Eurocentrism and the colonial mentality. Africans now find it easier to appreciate the products, culture and contributions of the imperialists than their own efforts and culture. This is further worsened by the fact that African history has been distorted by the white colonialists. That is the essence of Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*, a novel written to correct the historical fallacies about Africa.

Commenting on the novel, Frazer (1980, 73) states that “Armah’s concern is to provide an overwhelming counteraction to the colonialist distortion of history.” Chinua Achebe (in Bishop 1988, 99) asserts that one of his roles as a writer in a new nation is to let the world, especially the African world, know “that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth.” This is essentially the preoccupation of Chinua Achebe with African art. The need, therefore, for unity among the Africans to stand against all forms of neo-colonialism and Eurocentrism has become a compelling task.

Pan-Africanism as an ideology and as an intellectual movement seeks to liberate the African continent from socio-political inequality, neo-colonialism and all forms of racial discrimination and economic exploitation engendered by colonialism and imperialism. Unity to pan-Africanists is indispensable to the economic and socio-political development of Africans. So, the unity and solidarity of African peoples are not negotiable. Such unity and solidarity will enhance total self-reliance and discourage utter dependence on the West for economic and political assistance. Pan-Africanists wanted a power shift from the West to Africans in line with socialist ideals, which were canvassed and fought for by the founding fathers of the movement like Haile Selassie, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Ahmed Sékou Touré, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, W. E. B. Du Bois and several others both in Africa and in the diaspora. Pan-Africanism hinges on the fact that African peoples share the same history of colonialism and imperialism. They also have a common destiny.

Speaking in a similar vein, Murithi (2007, 2) posits the view that pan-Africanism is a “celebration of ‘Africanness,’ resistance to the exploitation and oppression of Africans and their kin in the diaspora as well as staunch opposition to the ideology of racial superiority in all its overt and covert guises.” Pan-Africanism has been used synonymously with black nationalism, black renaissance, black power, and blackism. According to Ricard (1983, 33), the goal of the black renaissance was “to end shame felt by Black Americans before the attempts to show the nobility and the artistic richness of Africa, and present these on the stage.” In addition, pan-Africanism in the words of Dr K. B. Asante, as reported in *AU Echo* (African Union 2013, 1), has been the “rallying slogan, the springboard, the ideological vehicle for the common efforts to advance the cause of Africa and Africans.” However, pan-Africanism was criticised for its inability to resolve the divisions and the various crises among some countries in the African continent. Nevertheless, the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, which was later renamed the African Union (AU), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was to promote unity, cooperation and socio-economic independence and development among African states. Caribbean creative artists such as Martin Carter, Claude McKay, Derek Walcott and Samuel Selvon have also demonstrated in their literary works the atrocities of colonialism and the need to confront it ferociously through black power and black nationalism. The same thoughts have also been expressed in the works of Afro-American writers such as Richard Wright in *Black Boy* (1966), LeRoi Jones in *Dutchman* (1964) and Ralph Ellison in *Invisible*

Man (1952). In Africa too, some writers like Léopold Sédar Senghor, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe share the same view. This article limits itself to the plays of Nigerian writer Femi Osofisan which exemplify the spirit and ideology of pan-Africanism.

A Discussion of Femi Osofisan's Plays

Femi Osofisan is one of the most outstanding and distinguished dramatists in Africa. He belongs to the generation of Nigerian artists directly following Wole Soyinka. He is an accomplished playwright, quintessential dramatist, literary guru, theatre director, composer, essayist, poet, novelist, newspaper columnist, journalist, and social commentator. His theatre is populist in mode because of his brave attempt to utilise the traditional linguistic and dramatic resources to enhance his ideological perspectives. The playwright has been celebrated both on the local and international scenes for his literary fecundity and thematic profundity. Femi Osofisan has continued to use the platform of the theatre to fight against injustice and the oppression of the poor and the downtrodden in the society. The concept of pan-Africanism is a recurrent theme in several plays of Femi Osofisan. He amply demonstrates, in these plays, that blacks must dump their colonial legacy and come together to combat the imperial forces of oppression, injustice, suffering and exploitation that continue to haunt Africa.

In *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage* (1986), Osofisan preaches love and reconciliation in the midst of war. The play uses the presentational mode in which acting and narrating are combined. It is divided into six parts. Each of the parts has a subtitle that suggests an atmosphere of bellicosity. The fourth part serves as an intermission.

The play focuses on the story of Akanbi and Olabisi whose parents were involved in a bloody family quarrel sometime in the past in which Atanda, the father of Olabisi, killed Akanbi's father. The horrible death of Akanbi's father results in the insanity of Akanbi's mother. Atanda is subsequently killed by Adigun, Akanbi's uncle. Unfortunately and ironically, Akanbi and Olabisi fall in love in Lagos away from their village. Their attempt to consummate their love in a marriage relationship is completely opposed by Adigun, Akanbi's uncle. Adigun takes some time to provide Akanbi with the proper historical background to the family feud because Adigun is getting old, which means the responsibility for the family will naturally fall to Akanbi. That is why Adigun wonders, "How can I hand over the line of my ancestors to a mere bastard?" (Osofisan 1986, 12). In a discussion between Adigun and Akanbi (1986, 13–15), Adigun spends time to convince Akanbi of the reasons why he should not marry Olabisi:

ADIGUN: Listen to me. Listen carefully. Your eyes on mine. You want to marry Bisi, because as you say, she gave you milk when you were thirsty. I am grateful to her. Tell her that, Adigun is grateful to her. But Adigun will not have her as daughter in this house because our family rejects intimacy with serpents ... Bisi is the daughter of Atanda. Atanda killed your father ...

AKANBI: And Atanda? What happened to him?

ADIGUN: I killed him? ... That was proof enough. Well, swear to me now, so I can sleep in peace when next the sunset falls. Swear so I can ride the boat in calm weather.

AKANBI: Swear?

ADIGUN: Swear to forget this girl. You will find another, someday.

The historical information provided by Adigun only succeeds in bringing confusion to the mind of Akanbi. Should he forget about Olabisi's love because of the families' feud? To answer this question and wipe away his confusion, he seeks advice from his two old friends: Fatai and Gbadamosi. While Gbadamosi counsels him to marry many wives because he himself is a polygamist, Fatai says Akanbi must not marry at all because the only wife he, Fatai, married betrayed him and ran away with a rich man to the city. For Fatai, it is better for a man to remain alone.

Moreover, Titi, the mother of Olabisi, on her part attempts to dissuade Olabisi from marrying Akanbi. She employs the service of Baba Soye, the Ifa priest, to advise Olabisi not to marry Akanbi. The folk story of Simbi and the handsome man and that of the rich stranger serve to warn Olabisi to keep off the relationship.

The response of Olabisi (50–51; 58–59) in the following conversation further heightens the conflict of the play:

BABA SOYE: Don't forget. Impetuous maidens, who fall in love with beasts, end in their stomach. You have been warned. Good day. When Ifa speaks to the young he discards incantations. But, careful! The voice of the Oracle ... Do not say now that you have not been warned.

OLABISI: My heart rules my will
And my heart belongs to him ...
Look at those birds, mother
A new season has come ...
Love owns the afternoon
Hate is for the old season
... He is my life, mother

TITI: And the past?

OLABISI: Let it be buried because
Of us. You taught me love, mother,
I learnt the word on your knees.
The same thing has possessed me.
Akanbi is not guilty of the sins

His parents committed. He is not
Like them. He is different. Mother,
Why not come and see him?

TITI: A leopard's son
Will also have spots ...

OLABISI: A fine dancer, Mother,
Can spring from a hunchback.

Osofisan exposes here a conflict between the older and younger generations in terms of beliefs and morals. But he is quick to give us a foreshadow of what he expects of a new generation. This new generation will know of only love and that love will swallow up hatred everywhere it is found.

In the third part of the play, both Akanbi and Olabisi part in anger but in the last scene they are reconciled. They also decide to depart from Iloto and be together forever. Titi, Olabisi's mother, is now in support of the union, while Adigun still insists that the relationship between Akanbi and Olabisi be broken.

Adigun threatens to kill Akanbi. In a confrontation between the two, which is a replica of their earlier wrestling fight, Adigun is brought down on his back which is a symbol of the death of the old generation. In their earlier fight, the old generation is given a knockout, but now it is outright death. Akanbi wins and says (67):

A new sun's risen, our sun, and we
Are weary of war.
All we want is to live
Just to live, like men
Not like gods,
We shall heal the wounds of war,
Erect a future of peace.
Go into the night
Farewell to Iloto
(*Bisi comes to his side*)
Farewell to hate. Welcome, love.

Adigun, thereafter, having lost the battle, hands over the leadership of the family to Akanbi by giving him a wristlet and says "oh remember me! You head the family now. Head it well. So Salute!" (68). Titi too reconciles with her daughter, Olabisi, and asks her to forgive her. Tragically, Adigun commits suicide because, according to Titi, "He was trapped in a cannibal rage" (64). But to Akanbi it is "Farewell to a Cannibal Rage" (70). Akanbi is saying farewell to that old retrogressive tradition of hatred and welcome to love.

The message of the play is very clear. It is an appeal to all Nigerians, especially those who were directly involved in the Nigerian civil war, to forget about the past and allow love and reconciliation to replace the bitterness, the horrors, the hatred and the wounds inflicted upon their psyche by the ravages of the war.

Generally, one noticeable, overriding social phenomenon that features often in Osofisan's plays is the issue of compassion. Osofisan preaches compassion like an evangelical preacher and a social crusader, because to him the society is saturated with many callous and wicked people both among the rulers and the ruled. The degrading environment in which the people live today is becoming too harsh particularly due to the evils of colonialism and neo-colonialism, bad leadership, religious intolerance and crime, and the desire to survive in the midst of all these is gradually becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. Osofisan urges Africans and blacks in the diaspora to bid farewell to all forms of ethnic feuds, frivolities, and issues that have separated us so that we can unite in the spirit of solidarity and fight our common enemy. For Osofisan, we need compassion and forgiveness for Africa to make significant progress. This is the crux of his pan-Africanist ideal.

In a similar manner, *Another Raft* (1988) contains the themes of oppression, disillusionment, freedom and pan-Africanism. Osofisan employs myth in *Another Raft* to comment on the post-independence historical curses that have plagued Nigeria since its independence in October 1960. One of these is the oppression of the poor owing to bad leadership. Ekuroola, a corrupt business tycoon, has no qualms about giving and taking bribes. Money is everything to him. He represents the class of exploiters. He is the direct reaper of the blossoming farmlands in Aiyedade.

Reore, who is adjudged the best farmer of the year, reaps nothing from the farm. The gains of the farm go to oppressors like Ekuroola. Reore laments this situation when he cries out (1988, 27–28):

We toil and toil, nursing Eledumare's precious earth tenderly. And then one man we never see, who wines and dines in the soft fairly land of that Lagos city we hear so much about, he just sends his agents down to collect our harvest, leaving us the chaff ... They said I was the best farmer of the season. I had the biggest yams, even though they were going into his stores, I had raised the fattest yams, and they clapped for me, and sent me along to placate a goddess I had never offended. Oh God. I could die! (*He cries, freely*).

With people like the corrupt Ekuroola in power, the poor have no hope. Agunrin, a member of the oppressed class, confronts Ekuroola and accuses him of being responsible for the predicaments of the poor in the society due to his excessive and uncontrollable craze for money and unnecessary imposition of unjust taxes (61):

The poor people are dirty, isn't it? Their bodies stink, their feet are eaten by jiggers. Perhaps if they earned more money for their labour, perhaps they would have the leisure to pause and take care of themselves? Perhaps they would be able to look up from their

drudgery, to question those who control their lives? No, they continue to smell, because people like you are in charge. (*Lightning and thunder*). Because you'll never have enough, however much you steal! So go on, have a taste! Go and lick it, and find out what their feet smell like!

In addition to the extravagance of political leaders, the religious leaders like Orousi, the chief priest of Ifa and Omitogun, and a priest of Yemosa, who are supposed to raise and protect the moral standards of the society, instead collaborate with the oppressors to perpetrate evils and oppress the poor. For instance, Lanusen accuses Orousi of betrayal and of double standards (47):

Only a year ago? When you and I, when we set the police and the army against the farmers? Were you not there, on television, on radio, in the newspapers even! Divining for them, telling them Ifa was against their struggle? Asking them to surrender, encouraging the government troops to shoot them! So what are you saying!

Osofisan also indicts the military leadership involved in exploitation, corruption and extravagant spending. This is revealed in the accusation made by Gbebe against Agunrin below (63). Agunrin in the play represents the military ruling leadership.

GBEBE: You're a soldier. You accuse the politicians and the chiefs of exploiting the people and leading us to damnation. But what of you, sir? What else do you do except milk the land?

AGUNRIN: I see! I see now! You envy our lives in the barracks. But you don't talk about our putting our lives at stake. And all of you!

GBEBE: For what war, tell me? Is it the war for which we have waited for so long that our best generals grow bored and retire in their prime, to live lavishly on maize farms?

The play is also reminiscent of the pessimism, hopelessness and despair that we find in *The Raft* by J. P. Clark. Osofisan indicts blacks for wickedness and cannibalism. He gives us a bizarre picture of the stark reality of the personality of blacks with an insatiable delight in oppressing one another.

As long as this continues, there is no hope at all for the entire continent. As the carrier is thrown into a trance, Gbebe shouts (1988, 54; 69):

But I ... I can tell you why, yes! ... It's because we must eat one another. Can't you see? ... Men have always eaten other men of course. Look at history, so many cannibal suppers. And the screams of humanity, out of the throats of victims and revellers, bind the rafts on which our corpses float ... We are the only race of animals with an insatiable appetite for the children of our own flesh. Black men killing black, feeding on black. Forever and ever, black men are always slaughtering other black men ... I ask you, isn't that the meaning of our journey to a faded goddess? What else is our continent, but the

black man's graveyard? ... Let us prepare all to die, without fear ... Well, there's nothing left for me to do on the raft. My duty is ended, which was to lead you through the hidden channel in the waves of history to the turning edge of knowledge ... Each of you is a nation of Africa, each of you is the black race, each is the son of a Shark, to be eaten by other sharks. Our future is ... death. Go on, wait no longer, embrace one another, say your adieus.

However, Osofisan does not want to end the play on a pessimistic note. He uses the story of the king and his three favourite sons to drive at unity as the only weapon humans have to wipe out oppression. In this story, the King wants to abdicate the throne and he also wants one of his three sons to succeed him. He has a problem in determining which of the sons deserves the crown. The first son is called "See Far," the second son is called "Fly Fast" and the third is "Heal-At-Once."

The three sons possess different but indispensable supernatural abilities which are meant to complement one another's. The three sons each need each other to succeed. The indispensability of their collaboration is similar to the indispensable collaboration that should exist between Song, Drum and Dance in the story of Song, Drum and Dance in Osofisan's other play *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* (1993), which shall be discussed later. The three sons represent the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. All of them should have equal access to the leadership of the country. Therefore, they must work together in unity. Only then can the problem of political drifting end. In this play, the problem of drifting is overcome only when the boatmen resolve to work together.

Osofisan in this play portrays African peoples as the architects of their fate. As long as they are willing to struggle and liberate themselves, there is no goddess that can stop them. The Western powers cannot stop them. What is needful is simply this: "There is no goddess but our muscles! The strength of our forces combined! Rowing together, working together!" (85). That is more powerful than the power of the oppressors. Even the goddesses acknowledge this when they say the following (83):

YEMOSA THREE: But all such powers as we have are made only by your will. Our force is your fear for like hyacinths, we are capable of endless benefits for the use of man, but only as long as you yourselves give the command!

YEMOSA ONE: But if you abandon yourselves recklessly to our caprice as most of you insist on doing we have no power anymore except to drift with the current of your cowardly surrendering and choke up the fresh springs, and the waterways of your lives.

The play then suggests that humans are their own gods. Their gods are their arms. They are directly responsible for their own destiny. Humans in *Another Raft* are their own gods and the determiners of their fate. You are oppressed if you choose to be oppressed. You remain drifting if you choose to remain drifting. The oppressions, the exploitations,

the injustice and the inequalities in the society can be overcome if the people are united to resist them to the end. Only then can sanity and justice return to the nation of Nigeria. This is a challenge to Africans to believe in their abilities and their self-esteem to take Africa to its Eldorado.

Moreover, Osofisan addresses the issue of the corporate existence of the country in *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* (1993). To some Nigerians, it is no longer useful for Nigeria to remain a single nation. The three major ethnic groups should, therefore, exist separately. Osofisan is of the view that as long as we insist on tearing one another apart, the tyrants will always triumph. The message is made clearer in the following conversation (1993, 107):

Ayoka: That is what you need to help us teach our people. A tyrant triumphs only on our errors. A tyrant triumphs only on our errors. If we insist always on anarchy, on tearing one another apart on the smallest disagreements, or in needless clashes, then someone is bound to come who will profit from it, by imposing his power on us, in the name of peace. And gratefully, oh so gratefully we will accept his coming, till he has trapped us in his net ...

Dunbarin: Freedom is sweet, but only when the people work for it.

Laboopo: And it lasts only with our constant vigilance.

Ayoka: That is the meaning of Yungba-Yungba Iyaloja! That is all we wish to teach our people.

When the people of a nation are living in disunity, the people will always be calling for a “messiah” to take over who will eventually misrule the people. This is reinforced in the story of Song, Drum and Dance. Song, Drum and Dance are daughters of one woman called Felicity. Each of these daughters can represent each of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria: Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba.

At one time or another, each of these groups have threatened to secede. Even now the clamour for secession and disintegration of the country by the Biafran apologists in the east and the Niger Delta Avengers in the southern part of Nigeria is more daring, strident and vociferous than ever before in the face of inequality, economic hardship and the lopsidedness in the structure of the nation as against true federalism. Just like Song and Drum and Dance need one another to bring a perfect harmony, these ethnic groups must co-exist and work together in peace if Felicity (Federal Republic of Nigeria) is to survive. This point is well made in the song rendered by Aperin and All (117–18):

My friends, so the lesson is clear
That if, Felicity must last,
Men must join hands, work as one,
As those sisters did before—

For Discord is our foe
It puts its wedges in our weft;
Let's learn from Song, Drum and Dance
How we need to live as one

For happiness is our goal,
Yungba-Yungba's the name of sweetness—
Let's all join hands and work as one
And sweetness will fill our lives!

In the epilogue of the play, we have the Dance Competition first, and whoever wins the Dance Competition becomes the Queen of the Dance of Maidens, which will come up later. The dance competition involves the selection of a new queen. The duties and responsibilities of the winner are highlighted. The judges have been carefully picked. The rules of the game have been spelt out. The competition is made open to all. The winner of the competition will succeed Iyeneri as priestess. This is Osofisan's idea of full democracy where the rules of the game are laid bare before all and the election is made open to all who are interested in participating. The idea of banning politicians who are considered "enemies" of government and allowing only those ones considered as "friends" of the state is hereby rejected. This, to Osofisan, will ensure stability for the political leadership in Africa. Such is the depth of his pan-Africanist ideal.

Osofisan thus achieves his vision as stated in his Programme Notes where he says: "There must be hope out of all this, there must be hope. A new generation, with a vibrant and restorative ideology, must step forth and take control" (xv). Only then can Africa have a hope. This wave of optimism has been summed up in the inaugural hymn of Africa by Agostinho Neto (1984). According to him (Neto 1984, 49), only the hymn can take us beyond decay towards redemption:

This distress at being human
When in the mudhole reptiles entrench
and worms make ready to consume a handsome
child in an obscene orgy of cruelty.

This delight at being human
when the dawn comes up, sweet and strong
over the resounding intoxication of the hymn
of the earth
dismaying worms and reptiles.

And between the distress and the delight
a great track from the Niger to the Cape
where marimbas and hands, drums and bands, voices
and hands raise in harmony in the inaugural hymns
of Africa to come.

The inaugural hymn of Neto is not the usual ecclesiastical and religious hymn. Rather, it is a deep and poetic hymn that encapsulates the agonies of black people and the need for harmony to give birth to a new Africa. It is a hymn of hope that will take Africa from the orgy of brutality to the land of redemption where there will be no more degeneration and disintegration. Even though it is an optimistic view, it is attainable.

Osofisan is optimistic that the redemption of the African continent is achievable if only we can unite to fight tyranny, dictatorship and oppressions and entrench true democracy in the continent.

This explains why in *No More the Wasted Breed* (1982) Osofisan rebukes the slave masters, the colonists and their African traitors for plundering Africans, thereby undermining their development. In the confrontation between Elusu, the symbol of the oppressors, and Biokun, the symbol of the oppressed, Biodun (1982, 108–109) says the following:

We fed you with the best of our seasons, praying for peace and abundance. But instead, you brought us the white slavers, who carried off our best men to the far plantations. To anguish and humiliation. You did not shake your head, and overturn their ships on the way. You did not ask your tides to lead them astray before they reached us. They rode on your shoulders and they brought the terror of guns, the corruption of cowries, they brought their venereal diseases. And now they have seized control of the mainland over there, have seized our richest lands, and are busy carting off to their brethren back at home the most precious of our natural resources ... Leaving us with our hands empty. Leaving us abject and wretched, except of course, for the few traitors among us who are prosperous because they agree to serve as the agents of the white predators.

Through Biodun, Osofisan indicts the colonialists who robbed Africa of its human and material capital. The playwright believes that the evils currently plaguing African society can only be wiped out through the collective responsibility of African people and not through a single individual who is destined to die for the societal ills. The people have to be determined to die for the societal ills. The people have to be determined and in addition break from the unnecessary romance with the ruling class, the state and the bourgeoisie who are the oppressors. The will to survive therefore belongs to humans and not the gods. No forces on earth can stop the movement of a people determined to fight against oppression and injustice. As Saluga in the play observes, “It’s a new world! The poor shall raise their heads! Men shall be free ... We need tongues to rouse our people up into action” (110). This is in tandem with the mantra of pan-Africanism.

Osofisan amply demonstrates in *Nkrumah-Ni ... Africa-Ni* (1999) that black people in Africa must abandon their colonial mentality and stop groaning about the pains and agonies inflicted upon them through imperialism and colonialism but come together and fight the imperial forces of neo-colonialism, inequality, oppression, injustice, suffering and exploitation. Also, the play is an attempt to openly recognise the impact and the

significant contributions of Kwame Nkrumah to the emergence of a distinctive African personality, black consciousness and pan-Africanism.

Kwame Nkrumah was the first leader of a black, independent African country, which the British colonialists had called the Gold Coast but which Nkrumah changed to Ghana. Nkrumah has been described as a fervid nationalist and a dogged apostle of pan-Africanism. Nkrumah welcomed to Ghana various liberation movements to the provocation of the Western powers. In the play, Osofisan presents Nkrumah's pan-Africanist ideology for the entire African continent (Ajidahun 2012). But he first of all addresses the various problems confronting the entire continent. Some of these problems are bad leadership, military intervention in politics, imperialism, betrayal, hatred, greed, disunity and poverty. These problems are responsible for the general instability in Africa. It is the belief of Nkrumah, as expressed in the play, that Africa needs unity, economic independence, security, self-reliance, the formation of an All-African People's Revolutionary Army and black nationalism to combat imperialism and other vices plaguing the entire continent in line with the tenets of blackism and pan-Africanism.

Conclusion

This article has established that pan-Africanism has been a recurring theme in the plays of Femi Osofisan in line with his ideological leaning. The playwright recognises that the current poverty and underdevelopment plaguing Africa are some of the direct consequences of the long decades of the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism in which Africa's resources were plundered, with the connivance of African collaborators who betrayed their people. The playwright is optimistic that black people will one day be free from the clutches of imperialism and neo-colonialism and their attendant consequences. Osofisan is confident that his vision for the black race is achievable through a revolution which will begin by arousing the consciousness of every African and by urging them to believe first in their identity as Africans and second in their ability and capacity to stand and become the masters of their own destinies. This is achievable if all black peoples in Africa and the diaspora can be united and eschew all forms of animosity, hostility, segregation, ethnic chauvinism, religious bigotry, and fanaticism.

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