

A Mythic Reading of the Materialist Epiphany in Femi Osofisan's *Another Raft*

Kingsley Iyayi Ehiemua

Department of Theatre and Media Arts,
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria
Email: ehiemuakingsley@aauekpoma.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper is a mythic reading of *Another Raft* written and published in 1988 by the Nigerian playwright, Femi Osofisan. The paper gives a materialist interpretation of the play and its mythic resources to illustrate Osofisan's drama as a dispassionate critique of society. It observes that the playwright's deployment of mythology in the play, and the play's intertextual connection to an earlier one, *The Raft* (published 1964), by J. P. Clark, is revelatory. One problem any reader familiar with the two plays may find with understanding Osofisan's version is the prominent use of supernatural beings as characters mingling with humans, which is non-existent in the older play. This paper's interpretation, therefore, reveals and affirms that the supernatural figures in the play are only creative metaphors deployed by the playwright to comment on the mundane social reality of the world outside the text. It also reveals that Osofisan's response in *Another Raft* to Clark's *The Raft* is to differ ideologically from the older play on the root causes of the decadence and sterility in Nigeria's social and political space. Osofisan's response demystifies the seemingly elusive solution to the cankerworms destroying the fabric of the nation. The paper concludes that Osofisan's recourse to mythic and traditional elements is very helpful to his creative imagination and his effort to provide a panacea, through the theatre, to the obstacles impeding economic and political progress in postcolonial Nigerian society.

Keywords: Drama, Myth, Femi Osofisan, Criticism, Postcolonial Nigeria.

Introduction

Femi Osofisan is a popular Nigerian playwright who has over thirty stage plays and thirty television plays to his credit. He is a retired university

teacher, poet, novelist, translator and essayist. Like some other older Nigerian playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, and Ola Rotimi, mythology has been a source of Osofisan's creative metaphors in a significant volume of his dramaturgy. He has had recourse to indigenous (including Yoruba's) and foreign myths in some of their drama to depict the conditions of human existence. Osofisan is also a myth-maker; he has often experimented with dramatic forms mixing indigenous Yoruba theatre and narrative technique with Bertolt Brecht's epic and other European theatrical traditions. Though many of his themes have universal connotations, the appalling socio-political conditions of Nigeria and Africa have also been the subjects of his artistic concern. Awodiya rightly observed this when he stated that "Osofisan's literary career has been large - indeed overwhelmingly - devoted to the expression of African tradition through the medium of English Language" (*The Drama of Femi Osofisan* 30). Osofisan has once said that his philosophy is to "free the people's minds from the warped perceptions of themselves and the possibilities; free their consciousness from the foreign dependency syndrome; and free their capacity to innovate and create" ("Of Alienation and Me" 6). His mythic and non-mythic creative works in drama, prose and poetry have encapsulated his political ideology and commitment to indigenous literary traditions.

This essay focuses on one of Osofisan's plays, *Another Raft*. It seeks to interpret what it finds to be a materialist epiphany in the play as a pathway to assessing some of its underlying meanings. What this essay refers to as a 'materialist epiphany' is the enlightenment that comes from the worldly, physical, mundane or secular connotations in Osofisan's use of mythology in the play, which also recurs in many of his other mythology-based plays. His style in this regard is phenomenal, revelatory and enlightening. It also accounts for why so much has been said about Osofisan's demythologising aesthetics, which any keen reader/audience would see in both the content and form of many of his myth-based plays including this one.

The Materialist Epiphany: Gods and their Saviour Attributes as Figments of Humanity

Osofisan's play, *Another Raft* (AR), is a response to, and a critique of, J. P. Clark's play entitled *The Raft*, published in 1964, just like Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* is to Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*. *Another Raft* (to also be referred to, subsequently, as AR) does not hide its level of inter-

textual connection to Clark's *The Raft*. This explains why one of the Yemosa goddesses in the play reads from the Program Notes meant for the reader/audience as the case may be, referring to Clark's play as symbolizing "the troubled situation of the newly independent" Nigerian nation in the 60s (AR 5). The note, therefore, explains the need for 'another raft' at the close of the 80s, in which Osofisan's *Another Raft* was written, since "as the decades drifted past, the storms have not ceased, nor have we been able to steer ourselves out of the fog of the initial errors" (AR 5).

The main dramatic action of Osofisan's play's, like the older Clark's *The Raft*, is set on a raft on the sea. The initial conflict of the older play's plot is also the first problem encountered in the raft of Osofisan's text – the human battle with the elements: after travelling some distance on the sea and deciding to anchor their raft at a bank at nightfall, the travellers on this play's raft suddenly find when they wake up in the morning, that the moorings with which the raft was fastened to some roots and trees have been mysteriously cut and the raft is adrift. From their complaints, the mission of the travellers is gradually known from their conversations. They believe that their totemic goddess of the sea, Yemosa, is angry and has flooded their Aiyedade community and other towns along the coast destroying houses and farmlands. The reason for the goddess's anger according to the community's Ifa priest is that the community has abandoned her old shrine and the former rituals done in her honour. The present travellers on the raft are, therefore, a delegation appointed by the community to appease the goddess with a ritual sacrifice. In part one of the play, Yemosa Three describes the members of the delegation to the audience/readers:

Yemosa Three (reading): There [was] ... no delay. The old priest of Yemosa, Omitoogun, was hastily rehabilitated. He alone could locate the shrine. Two boatmen, Waje and his assistant, Oge, received the commission. The traditional Carrier family was prevailed upon to supply its prettiest virgin. The expedition was then entrusted to Lanusen, a prince of the palace, as well as the current Chairman of the Local Government Council ... aided of course, by Chief Ekuroola, the native son who had become a successful Lagos tycoon, and who had been invested ... with the highly prestigious title of the ABORE, principal Priest of Rituals. He, Ekuroola, was the one who suggested that Reore, the reigning

Farmer King, be asked to come along. The cast was complete, the preparatory rites began (AR 6)

The only members of the entourage not listed in the read speech of Yemosa above are Orousi, the community's Ifa priest, and Gbebe, Omitoogun's educated son. The sacrifice is meant to make the water recede, forestall future floods and "restore cosmological harmony" (Ukaegbu 185). This ritual is, however, threatened by some unexpected turn of events. Firstly, Gbebe, the visionary, strange and apostate son of Omitoogun, the old priest of Yemosa, in a bitter argument with his father throws the latter into the sea to die. Secondly, the scapegoat - the virgin girl who is supposed to come from a designated family - was replaced by her soldier brother unknown to many members of the delegation and disguised as the virgin in the ritual dress traditionally worn by a scapegoat. One of the reasons for the swapping is the conspiracy initiated by the politician prince in connivance with Orousi, the Ifa Priest, to have his rival, Chief Ekuroola, killed. Another reason is that the soldier wants to exert his vengeance on the chief and Omitoogun, the old priest of Yemosa, who are custodians of the ritual for naming his sister for the supposed sacrifice. Furthermore, the entire ritual journey found by the others on the crew to be a fraud. It is a journey Yemosa never mandated, but a fabrication of the Ifa priest, Orousi, "who put false words in the mouth of Ifa" (AR 59) at the behest of Prince Lanusen because of the latter's desire to kill Chief Ekuroola. The sleazy plot is also to divert the minds of the people from the corrupt practices at the Local Government Council chaired by the Prince as questions are being asked, for instance, "about the flood canals that were paid for but never built" (AR 58).

However, they are attacked by a violent storm which tears the raft into two with one half ferrying the Prince and Chief Ekuroola away. Waje (the Chief Boatman) and Agunrin (the soldier) who jumped into the water to rescue them are attacked by fierce sharks along with the other two; all four are killed in the water. Gbebe commits suicide by throwing himself into the water. The broken raft is left with the three: Orousi, Oge (the assistant boatman) and Reore, the award-winning farmer; to navigate under extremely difficult currents and persistent storms in which the remaining crew lose the raft's moorings and paddles. With Oge's newly improvised paddles, the task of rowing the raft alone to a faintly distant shore, after seven days at sea proves impossible with the threat of a powerful current that seems to be drifting them away again. In this

difficult circumstance, the correct answer to the riddle from the goddesses in the play is the only solution that would make them overcome the challenges and row to safety.

What stands out very prominent in *Another Raft* more than in any of Osofisan's other plays which use mythological resources is the underlying motif that nothing exists beyond the physical and that the gods are human fantasies, which mankind has found convenient to invoke and manipulate and interpret to suit its whims either for negative or positive purposes. It is a materialist enlightenment or epiphany which explains the basic socio-political and human conflicts central to the play. Judging by the reading of the programme note in the play by Yemosa Three and its interpretation of Clark's *The Raft* as symbolizing the newly independent Nigeria in the 1960s (AR 5), it is obvious that contemporary Nigerian society is the world alluded to in *Another Raft*. In the society of the play, events and realities indicate that the resolution of modern social, political, economic and environmental problems may not lie in metaphysical interpretation but in the creative endeavours of the collective expressed only in the physical. It is a reinforcement of Osofisan's artistic and Ideological vision of society which is "revolutionary and optimistic" (Awodiya, *The Drama of Femi Osofisan* 81), and which contrasts the fatalistic contemplation and pessimistic stance of the Older Clark's play, *The Raft*.

Olaniyan interprets *The Raft* as a political allegory representing "the problems of Nigeria in the four symbolic regional characters of Ogro, Ibobo, Kengide and Olotu" (the four lumbermen who are the only characters in Clark's play) in the 1960s. She implies the four regions had leaders like the play's four lumbermen who were impotent, incompetent and visionless and whose greedy and selfish visions were going to propel Nigeria to inevitable anarchy (495). And using the image of the sea and its destructive elements, Clark portrayed this pessimistic political vision in the play through an absurdist realization of "[an] uncomfortable and uncertain world ... full of strains and stresses" in which "[m]an is therefore doomed from the onset and is ... left to drift to an inevitable destruction" (Olaniyan 495). Dunton also explains that Clark's "vision is one of social disorder as the outcome of inherited destiny: of ... contemporary woes [being predicated] on some original sin of our forefathers" (88). However, in Osofisan's *Another Raft*, the basic problems of society are man-made and since it is so, it is not beyond humanity to solve them pragmatically without transcendental connotations. This

materialist interpretation of humanity from optimistic and revolutionary viewpoints is the play's reply to Clark's *The Raft*. Dunton succinctly clarifies the points of divergence between the two plays which illustrate their different ideological and aesthetic concerns in the portrayal of the Nigerian situation:

Osofisan's play challenges *The Raft*, in three respects. First, in place of Clark's four crew members, all lumbermen, all from the same social grouping, in *Another Raft* there is a wide range of class differentiation between the crew and their passengers. Second, Osofisan's play is geared towards breaking free from any notion of the 'static condition' and towards the projection of a new kind of social order. Third, while Clark's play does touch on the idea of correct [interpretation] as opposed to illusory readings of reality ... Osofisan's play is foremost, a play about historical consciousness. (88)

Another Raft, however, adopts a mythic dimension in critiquing Nigeria's human and societal problems as well as those raised in *The Raft*, while at the same time debunks or ridiculing its mystification through the dramatic revelation of characters' scheming, indictments and other unfolding incidents of human weaknesses. For instance, in *Another Raft*, the problems which necessitate the ritual journey on the sea by the crew to appease Yemosa, the fictional community's totemic goddess and the Yoruba traditional goddess of the sea, are known from Orousi's conversation with Chief Ekuroola and one of the quarrels between Lanusen and Ekuroola. These problems are wrongly and clandestinely attributed by Orousi and Lanusen to the anger of the sea goddess over her neglect and some other transgressions committed by the people of Aiyedade:

Orousi: ... we have had such troubled times! Accidents on the highway. Fires in the market. A cholera outbreak, followed by yellow fever! And now even before we have fully recovered from those disasters, the flood. Ah, the goddess, how her stomach rumbles!

Ekuroola: And that's why we are here now, isn't it? To calm that raging stomach of your goddess?

Lanusen: You hear! Our goddess!

Orousi: So that we can have peace at last. So the fruit trees can shed the cramp in their waist, the barren earth takes seed

again, and the forlorn farms quicken with the laughter of fresh crops. Yes, so that our people can resume their history, without the terror of flood or fire (AR 13)

Ekuroola's response to Lanusen impliedly locates the root causes of these problems mystified by Orousi and Lanusen in official corruption, leadership insensitivity and lack of resourcefulness. An instance of such leadership failure is the non-existing drainage that was supposed to be built but was not executed by the Council that Lanusen heads. It was supposed to help check the menace of flood and for which, according to Ekuroola, "money was voted, the plan approved" and "records also show that the money was spent" (AR 24). When Lanusen defends himself and his Council by asking, "what about the canals we built?" Ekuroola counters reproachfully: "According to the plan approved, or according to the size of your pockets?" (AR 24). So, instead of doing the right thing pragmatically, the community embarks on a ritual journey on the sea to a long abandoned shrine of a powerless and non-existent goddess. The goddesses repeatedly inform the audience and readers in the play that they do not exist but are only figments of human imagination.

Yemosa Three : Greetings. I am Yemosa, the Sea
goddess.

Yemosa Two : And I too.

Yemosa One : And all of us.

Chorus : The rest of us are her maidens.

Yemosa Three : Or maybe you've guessed already.

Yemosa One : We're like this, as you can see because
we do not exist.

Yemosa Two : We're merely figures of fantasy.

... : And in all the minds.

Where such things as goddesses still
exist

Yemosa Three: Minds such as yours, perhaps?
[referring to the audience/readers]. (AR 35)

The goddesses' declarations are more clearly understood with the revelation later in the play that the entire journey was clandestinely put together by Prince Lanusen, with the help of the Ifa priest, who after receiving a bribe from the politician, put words in the mouth of Ifa and lied that Yemosa demanded a ritual sacrifice of cleansing with a virgin girl

from a traditional carrier family (AR 58-9). This is not the first time the Ifa priest has been used by the state to capitalize on the masses' weakness to issue a religious command to deceive them. Lanusen cites one such situation:

... And what about the peasant's uprising, only a year ago? When you and I, when set the police and the army against the farmers? Were you not there, on television, on the radio, in the newspapers even? Divining for them, telling them Ifa was against their struggle? Asking them to surrender, encourage the government troops to shoot them! (AR 47)

The priests have made religion an unsafe place to run to because it has become a useful tool in the hands of the affluent and powerful to deceive and exploit the masses and perpetuate leadership irresponsibility. Orousi's attitude and antecedents as revealed in the play help to discredit the existence of deities. Omitoogun, the old priest of Yemosa, is blinded by age-long ancestral belief in the powers of the sea goddess that he cannot decipher that Orousi lied to put them on the journey for personal and political vendetta. His moribund belief in such traditional religion has destroyed the relationship between his son, Gbebe, and himself. Gbebe's education provides him with a new enlightenment that has estranged the young man from his father. It is impossible for the old man to love his son as a result of this. A belief in a religion that inspires hatred for those (including blood relatives) who do not share the same religious views with you is unproductive; it cannot guarantee a peaceful co-existence which is the key to an egalitarian society as well as scientific and technological development. A traditional belief that does not accept diversity of opinions, ideas and personalities in the modern democratic dispensation is not relevant in the search for social, political and economic progress. Synergy is an effective tool of development in any progressive society when there is a diversity of viewpoints and talents. The conflict between the Old man and his son on the raft reaches a climax when the son stabs him to death and the old man's body rolls over into the sea (AR 31-32). Later in the play, the young man dives into the sea to die because he realizes, remorsefully, that he is as guilty as his father and that he too has nurtured a destructive seed of hate which limits freedom and insights (AR 70).

With the death of Lanusen, Ekuroola and their rescuers, Waje and Agunrin all eaten up by the sea sharks (AR 67-8), the journey turns out to

be a waste of time, material and human resources. Eventually, six, of the nine-member-delegation, die in the sea and the remaining three survive only by sheer luck, not because they are better than their fallen compatriots. In the play, the sea and its agents namely, the sharks, the current, the storm, and Olobiripo – the chief of the whirlpool (AR 78) – symbolically represent forces of retribution which also manifest as repercussions for lack of indiscretion and deliberately or ignorantly not seeking a realistic vision for social reconstruction (either way – ‘deliberately or ignorantly’ – society is doomed). The ‘sea’ in Osofisan’s *Another Raft* also signifies that it is possible to attain social reconstruction and liberation from the regressive and reactionary elements. This can only come from a materialist approach to identifying and solving problems confronting society, not recourse to deities or mythology that did not, in Africa for instance, prevent slavery, colonial subjugation and imperialist exploitations. The sea in the play also signifies history as intimated by Gbebe (AR 69) because it has provided a platform for reckoning; it elicits from the characters’ confessions of past mistakes, present failings and an ambivalent future depending on the choice that is made in the present. The sea’s verdict is unpredictable. But Gbebe is too dogmatic and self-opinionated like his father, Lanusen, Ekuroola and Agunrin to understand the sea’s ambivalent nature, which apart from its punitive image as understood by Gbebe, also offers hope to those who are relentless and resourceful. Through a flashback/playback commanded by Agunrin, in which Gbebe, Lanusen, Ekuroola and Orousi repeated an earlier unforgiving spirit and oppressive tendencies, the sea as a symbol of history reveals how man’s actions in history are repetitive (AR 52-3).

Curiously, the assembly of the cast on Osofisan’s raft has every part of the society represented. For instance, Lanusen and Ekuroola represent the upper class including the politicians and the affluent who are corrupt, always self-seeking and exploitative. Orousi and Omitoogun represent the religious personages and traditional institutions that the upper class manipulate to deceive and emasculate the underprivileged; Gbebe represents the educated elite or a class of intellectuals steeped in unrealistic dogma, always playing the blame game and constantly exonerating itself from any blame for societal failings. Agunrin, the army officer, represents forces of coercion deployed by the privileged class to serve their bidding but who sometimes turn against the upper class and pretend to be friends of the poor when they are not benefitting. Roere, the award-winning farmer incarnates the hard-working and gullible middle

class who undermine their great powers to transform society but are permanently seeking endorsements from the upper class and also waiting to step into the upper class at any available opportunity. Waje and Reore depict the always harassed, also gullible and underprivileged class populated by docile artisans and the uninformed who are afraid of taking initiatives that will liberate them from the oppression of the upper class.

In Osofisan's *Another Raft*, all have sinned, intoned by Gbebe's rhetorical question: "... We are all tainted, aren't we?" (AR 49). If most members of the delegation could be exonerated because they do not know that the entire journey is a subterfuge initiated by a few of them to physically cause harm to one of them, but they agree to a barbaric practice of the past to use a human being – a virgin girl – for sacrifice to the goddess for the sake of preserving a tradition. None of the members is willing to reject that barbaric aspect of the indigenous tradition. This revelation is an illustration of the cannibalism and inherent wickedness that dominate the subconscious of man, which Gbebe realizes when he says "we are the only race of animals with an insatiable appetite for the children of our flesh" (AR, 54) and that all men are "human sharks" (AR 64). The artistic consciousness that puts representative members of society on the raft in Osofisan's *Another Raft* demands a dispassionate analysis of modern society from the audience and readers. The outcome of such analysis will hold everyone culpable for societal failings. It reinforces the knowledge that the task of nation-building is the responsibility of all, not the exclusive preserve of the rich and political class alone or the military.

The final events in the play indicate that mankind's only chance of survival, to liberate itself from the shackles of reactionary forces and its regressive social structures, and its power to transform society, lies in man's inner resources. These must be tapped individually and collectively for the greater and common good. It is the inner resources of man that are his gods. This view in the play is underscored by the significance of the riddle posed to the audience, which Reore, one of the three survivors of the journey, can answer, which is that none of the king's three sons in the Goddesses' last tale should be made a king. Their three talents are equally useful and they must cooperatively and pragmatically harness them for the good of society. This implies that the three survivors on the raft already sighting a distant shore should combine their strengths to roll the raft against the challenges posed by the powerful and debilitating storm, currents and whirlpool. They should row themselves to safety, instead of waiting for any non-existent deities to help, or giving in and lamenting as

the remaining two lumbermen do while facing an impending death on the sea at the end of Clark's *The Raft* (134).

When the three survivors in Osofisan's *Another Raft* pull their muscles together to row the raft to shore, they begin to see results and their hope is rekindled. They realize that they have talents such as those of the three princes in the goddesses' tale, which, when pulled together, would take them to safety. The harnessing of individual potentials in a cooperative endeavour to bring about a change to the status quo ante is a materialist approach to societal transformation. It is a winning spirit that is highly rewarding:

Yemosa Two: ...those who with determination... [to] harness their hyacinths with science, which is the supreme will of man

Yemosa Three: ... those who do not put a raft out on the waters and wait for the will of a goddess or the cleansing of fate

Yemosa One: ... [those] who commanded the winds and the currents by the force of their insights and the music of their muscles.

Yemosa Three: ... [and] those who do not waste their energy away in endless conflicts and recriminations fighting their brothers and sisters. (AR 84)

The above epiphany, according to Orousi, "is a hard lesson". He admits: "I am the first to learn". To which Yemosa Three replies: "Not as long as you are willing to struggle" (AR 84). The goddesses in the play represent the inner potential, gifts/talents and the reasonable part of the mental faculty of mankind waiting for a man to identify and use for the good of humanity. This symbolic meaning of the goddesses in the play is reinforced when upon invitation from Roere and Oge, "Will you row with us?" / "Make una come join us" (AR 84), the three goddesses and their maidens join the three to push the raft to safety. Everyone (the critics and their objects of criticism) in the society of the play, no doubt, is implicated in societal decay and sterility and the lack of significant social and political progress. The collaborative effort here for providing a solution to a common problem through recourse to individual inner resources (the gods in everyone), instead of endlessly engaging in a blame game or defeatist syndrome, is undoubtedly the play's panacea to the problems and seeming logjam plaguing the present Nigerian/ African society.

Fusing Intertextuality with Folklore and Storytelling

Commenting on the structure of *Another Raft* and its theatrical elements, Götrick rightly affirms that in this play, Osofisan “employs some of the devices in other plays too” but that, he “excels in the use of storytelling, flashback, play-within-the-play, reenactment, and the idiom of traditional theatre” (301). He also rightly observes that *Another Raft* is a “paraphrase of *The Raft* since the former follows the story and plot of the latter very closely” (Götrick 301). Götrick’s analysis of the play’s theatrical devices is very relevant to the aim of this article. But what this paper wants to add and stress here is how Osofisan’s creative impulse in the play fuses the elements of intertextuality, folklore and storytelling. These elements are indeed very prominent in the play’s structure. They are used subversively so much so that it demystifies both the dramatic medium and its content because they provide a constant reminder to the reader/audience that this is all a theatre - a make-believe - in which nothing is real. This theatrical approach helps the playwright to communicate to the reader/audience the materialist (not spiritual or transcendental) connotations inherent in his use of the supernatural elements in the play. This style is what Awodiya also describes as a “revolution in form and in content in the plays of Osofisan” (*The Drama of Femi Osofisan* 80), which manifests differently in the playwright’s plays.

In the play, Osofisan adopts the traditional storytelling technique differently. He names his storytellers/narrators of the entire story as goddesses who assume a split image of the goddess Yemosa that the delegation on the raft is going to appease. Truly, in an African traditional storytelling performance, the narrator is a creator or an inventor. If it is a popular tale he is going to tell, he, like a god, can manipulate or manoeuvre it in any direction or in any manner that suits him and gives the story his peculiar style and signature. So the goddesses in the play are the playwright’s stand-in images - his representatives or extensions of him - as the real narrator. The play opens with this reminder:

Yemosa Three: Good evening, I shall be your pilot for this evening’s show.

Yemosa Two : And I. I shall be your narrator.

Yemosa One : And I shall be the goddess writing the story, singing the songs. (AR 1)

The tale probably was considered too long for one narrator to tell during the play’s creative process. So, to eliminate likely boredom and add

some spice for greater appeal, the playwright splits the narrator into three characters not as three different people but as a three-in-one character because sometimes their lines are 'run-on' sentences with one starting a sentence without a coordinating conjunction or a period or comma and the other finishing it: an instance will suffice here:

Yemosa Two: And that we'll soon be leaving

Yemosa Three: To resume our different lives

Yemosa One: And our different ways of dying

Yemosa Two: Just as soon as the goddess ends her story

Yemosa Three: Yes, just as I end my story. (AR 36)

The utterances of the supernatural beings above are significant because they speak like they are controlled and motivated by one 'mind' as a philosophical construct or coordinated by a single brain centre:

Yemosa One: (starting a story)

Once, a hunter was walking in the bush

When he stumbled suddenly, and looked down,

Found he had hit his foot against a skull!

Yemosa Two: A Skull! Naturally, he was surprised:

"What is this?" he asked, talking out loud

"What is a skull doing out in the bush?"

Yemosa Three: He had hardly finished or turned away – are you listening? –

... When he heard the skull reply:

Yemosa One : "I'll tell you,

If you wish to know, my mouth brought me here!" (AR 36)

This three-in-one narrator is part of the play's technique which subverts even the narrative medium of the message the reader/audience is expecting. Another such subversion is the attempt by the three-in-one narrator to make members of the audience or readers keep their disbelief (and not suspend it) so that they could become active and critical participants in the narrative. These are instances where the three-in-one narrator speaks directly to members of the audience and reminds them that they are in a playhouse, or, that the reader is reading a fictional story, and informs the audience/reader of the tricks of improvisation and other effects that will be performed in the course of the production; about the purpose of the director of the play and the aim of the costume designers in designing his 'god character' costume (AR 1-4 and 34-6). Also, he

informs the audience of the aim of his creator, the playwright, and the message he hopes to convey with his story and its technique of presentation. He reminds the audience of the production's programme note which he has earlier read to the audience and in which he alludes to another play with a similar title as the motivator of the present story (AR 5-6).

He creates interludes as the other actors enact his story on the raft. In the interludes, he entertains the audience with a dance and comments on the incidents and experiences of the actors on the raft. He also interjects the story on the raft with folktales to foreground his/author's didactic inclinations such as the riddle after the last tale of the king and his three sons which he expected any member of the audience to answer but is answered by Reore, one of the survivors on the raft. Thereafter, he begins to communicate with the surviving actors on the raft and with the audience and joins them with his crew of maidens, who are fairies, in helping to row the raft to safety (AR 83-6). According to Götrick, "[p]articipants on both sides of the footlights [actors on stage and in the orchestra on one side, and the audience on the other], now see that Yemosa, like all gods, is man-made" (313). Judging by the peculiar characteristics of the play's narrator, storytelling art as it is commonly known in traditional Africa is modified. It is used to serve the ends of a dramaturgy that is determined to demythologize traditional belief in the power of deities, discredit some regressive aspects of folklore, subvert known theatrical conventions, comment on the nature of societal failings and also subvert the previously held modern beliefs of the root causes of class conflicts and underdevelopment in Africa.

Also, folktales as positive aspects of folklore retain their pedagogical aims but become subsumed elements serving complimentary roles which help to delineate character and comment on dramatic action. The only two folktales in the play come up during the interludes in parts 4 and 6; the latter overlaps into the main dramatic action on the raft in part seven. They are structurally and thematically significant. They serve as comic relief in the interludes and ease or check the likelihood of rising tension in the audience's/readers' emotional reception of the tragedy or travails being encountered by the travellers on the raft. It also serves as a reminder to the audience that they are in a theatre and should not suspend their disbelief so that they can keep their critical mental faculty intact. The first tale can be identified by the reader or audience as the story of 'The Hunter and the Skull'. It is the story of a hunter who sees a human skull

and in fear dares to ask what a human skull is doing in the forest. As he turns away, the skull answers that it is his mouth that put him in that condition. The hunter runs to town to announce his findings to the king and the people who follow him down to the forest to find out for themselves. In the forest, the skull refuses to speak. The king angrily commands his soldiers to quickly behead the hunter for lying and wasting his time. After his death, his decapitated head lies close to the skull who is amused by the hunter's head lying beside it (AR 36-9). It is in death the hunter realizes the lesson of indiscretion and lack of self-control, which is the moral of the tale.

The interlude bearing this tale comes immediately after Gbebe has killed his father. At the superficial level, the tale relieves the audience/readers of the tension arising from the tragic development in the play; and it is a message from the storyteller/narrator/goddess of the need for modesty. At a deeper level of meaning, the tale is symbolic: it points to the latent cannibalistic trait of mankind, which Gbebe speaks of in the re-enactment on the raft discussed earlier. The second tale can be titled: 'The King and His Three Sons'. It is one in which the confused king does not know who among his three sons is most eligible to be named his heir apparent. He sends them on a mission to get proof of whose love and devotion surpasses the others and the one most deserving shall be his heir. After a long journey in search of the proof, the eldest acquires the talent of "See-Far", the second son's talent is "Fly-Fast" and the third found the talent of "Heal-At-Once". When the brothers converge far from their kingdom to compare their gifts, See-Far finds that their father is very ill and on the verge of dying, Fly-Fast transports the rest home so fast but meets their already dead father being lowered into the grave. Heal-At-Once resurrects the king. The king reviewing their various gifts which are all very useful and their display of love, loyalty and devotion, becomes even more confused as to who should be named his successor. The narrator/Yemosa throws it to the audience as a riddle to decide the most deserving of the sons to wear their father's crown according to the gifts they acquired (AR 71-4). The answer is provided by Reore, one of the likely survivors on the raft, still battling with the raging currents on the sea. His answers that none should be named the heir. Rather, all should be told to work together and rule their father's kingdom jointly.

The moral of the tale is the benefit of team spirit and cooperation of all in working to change the material conditions of society. However, the tale's structural significance is as prominent as its moral value: it serves

as the means of resolving the play's major conflicts, namely: man against his fellows, man against his society, and man against nature. Ironically, the resolution in *Another Raft* is achieved by *deus ex machina* through the goddess' riddle which provides the already hopeless human characters on the raft with a practical safety solution. Intertextually, the allusion to Clark's *The Raft* by Yemosa/narrator at the beginning of Osofisan's *Another Raft* becomes clearer. This is visibly so due to the panacea to national problems found in the latter play's denouement since its artistic objective as the goddess/narrator intimates to the audience is to present 'another raft' as "the '80s roll to a close" (AR 5); and subject the Nigerian society to another analysis. The reference at the beginning of the play informs the audience that the 'raft, in Osofisan's *Another Raft* is a symbolic reference to Nigeria. That reference, which should guide the audience/readers through the play, provides a background to understanding *Another Raft*'s antithetical ending to Clark's *The Raft*. The inter-text reference of *Another Raft* is the basis of its dramatic action, creative allusions and thematic thrust. This is more prominently realized in the play through the subversion of the indigenous storytelling technique and targeted aspects of folklore.

Conclusion

Osofisan's theatre does not only educate but "attempts to empower the audience to bring about socially and politically responsible change in the society" through awareness creation (Awodiya, "Celebrating Osofisan at Sixty" 50). His dramaturgy is a metatheatre that draws attention to its theatrical devices which he deploys to reveal the rotten underbelly of society. Osofisan's recourse to mythology is not only for aesthetic and ideological purposes, it is also subversive in the sense that the society, its history, belief systems, institutions and the dramatic medium itself are demythologised and subjected to deep scrutiny to account for reasons for failed humanity. Osofisan's *Another Raft* with its mythological resources, subversive tropes and theatrical devices exemplify the playwright's metadramatic artistic leanings.

As discussed earlier in this essay, Osofisan's *Another Raft* is a response to some social and political issues raised in Clark's earlier play, *The Raft*. Clark's play metaphorically represents Nigeria of the 1960s - portraying why the Nigerian postcolonial society is continuously bedevilled with sterility and lack of meaningful progress. On the one hand, the resolution of the conflicts in Clark's play is tragic and pessimistic

as major characters failed to collaboratively avert the death that was looming over them at the sea despite their enormous talents. On the other hand, Osofisan's *Another Raft* depicts Nigeria of the 1980s on the same metaphoric raft and turbulent sea as its inter-textual referent. But Osofisan anchors his play's panacea to averting death on the sea, and by extension, the destructive human and socio-political forces plaguing society, on collaborative efforts and a conscious individual initiative which is man's inner 'godly' attribute.

Through its dramatic action and extensive sea imageries, Osofisan's play communicates an enlightenment that rejects the 'blame game' syndrome which it identifies as part of the retrogressive forces hindering social progress. Comparing the conflict resolutions of the two plays, *The Raft* and *Another Raft*, Osofisan's oeuvre conveys a positive collaborative approach to seeking answers to the sea of socio-political problems confronting the Nigerian society of the 1980s and afterwards. There is no doubt that Osofisan's dramaturgy in *Another Raft* is a materialist portrayal of Nigerian society conveying the kind of enlightenment that rejects mythological or metaphysical solutions to socio-political problems and failed humanity.

Works Cited

- Awodiya, Muyiwa P. *The Drama of Femi Osofisan: A Critical Perspective*. Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1995. Print.
- . "Celebrating Osofisan at Sixty." *Portraits for an Eagle – A Festschrift in Honour of Femi Osofisan*. Ed. Sola Adeyemi. Germany: Bayreuth African Studies, 2006. 49-52. Print.
- Clark, J. P. *The Raft. Three Plays*. Oxford: University Press, 1964.
- Dunton, Chris. *Make Man Talk True: Nigerian Drama in English since 1970*. London: Hans Zell, 1992. Print.
- Olaniyan, Modupe Elizabeth. "Symbolism in the Drama of J. P. Clark and Femi Osofisan." *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development* 3.4 (April 2014): 493-98. Print.
- Osofisan, Femi. *Another Raft*. Lagos: Malthouse, 1988. Print.
- . "Of Alienation and Me." *The Guardian Newspaper* 5 Jan. 1986: 6. Print.
- Götrick, Kacke. "Figures of Fantasy: Theatricalizing Devices in Femi Osofisan's *Another Raft*." *Emerging Perspectives on Femi Osofisan*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2009. 301-319. Print.
- Ukaegbu, Victor. "Mythological and Patriarchal Constraints: the Tale of Osofisan's Revolutionary Women." *Portraits of an Eagle - A Festschrift in Honour of Femi Osofisan*. Ed. Sola Adeyemi. Germany: Bayreuth African Studies, 2006. 179-192. Print.